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**Beyond the contest: how Masculinity Culture shapes workplace dynamics and
whistleblowing**

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the intricate relationship between organizational culture, specifically Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC), and whistleblowing behaviour. By examining how a competitive, masculine work environment influences employees' perceptions and reactions to misconduct, this research project aims to fill a significant gap in the existing literature. While whistleblowing has been extensively studied in terms of its ethical implications, the impact of surrounding culture—particularly those characterized by competition, dominance, and toughness—has received comparatively less attention. The studies presented herein focus on the role of MCC in shaping moral and emotional responses to whistleblowers. Previous studies have suggested that the perception of whistleblowers can vary significantly based on the organizational context; for instance, individuals who report serious misconduct may be viewed more favourably than those who report less severe infractions. However, recent findings indicate that these perceptions are highly context-dependent, with whistleblowers being seen as either moral champions or disruptive troublemakers depending on the prevailing workplace culture.

The research project comprises several empirical investigations, including correlational and experimental methodologies. The first study establishes a link between perceptions of a masculine work environment and the propensity for counterproductive work behaviours. Subsequent studies delve deeper into how this cultural context affects the evaluation of whistleblowers, focusing on the mediating roles of moral emotions and cognitive judgments.

The findings from the studies provide compelling insights into the evaluation of whistleblowers within the context of masculinity contest culture, revealing a consistent pattern that challenges initial hypotheses. Findings indicate that participants exhibited fewer negative emotions towards individuals who reported misconduct compared to those who did not report. This led to a more favourable overall impression of the whistleblower and a reduced tendency to avoid them. These results align with previous research, confirming that reporting unethical behaviour is generally viewed positively in

organizational settings. However, the last study revealed more complex dynamics, highlighting the significant role of masculinity contest culture in shaping these evaluations. While participants in a masculinity contest environment still viewed whistleblowers more favourably, the degree of this positive perception was moderated by the perceived competitive nature of the workplace. Specifically, in workplaces characterized by high Masculinity Contest Culture, the positive effect of reporting misconduct on reducing avoidance tendencies was weakened. This suggests that in such environments, the favorable perception of whistleblowing is diminished, leading to a less pronounced reduction in avoidance behaviors.

These studies underscore the importance of fostering an organizational culture that encourages ethical reporting. They indicate that, regardless of the masculinity contest culture, whistleblowers are often seen more favourably, which can mitigate the potential negative consequences associated with reporting misconduct. This understanding is crucial for developing strategies that promote ethical behaviour and support whistleblowers in various workplace environments. By fostering an environment that encourages ethical reporting and actively addressing the negative aspects of MCC, organizations can enhance the perception of whistleblowers and promote a culture of integrity.

This dissertation ultimately aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how MCC interacts with whistleblowing behavior, emphasizing the critical role of moral emotions and cognitive judgments and providing insights that can help organizations navigate the complexities of ethical reporting in diverse cultural contexts.

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General Introduction

Whistleblowing, defined as the act of reporting unethical or illegal conduct within an organization (Near and Miceli, 1984), has been the subject of considerable scholarly investigation, especially regarding the moral and ethical challenges it entails. Despite this, there has been comparatively less focus on how organizational culture (Miceli & Near, 1985) —particularly one characterized by masculine values such as competition, dominance, and toughness (Berdahl et al., 2018) —affects the whistleblowing process. This dissertation aims to fill this gap by examining how such a culture shapes both the perception of whistleblowing itself and the evaluation of those who choose to engage in it.

The research presented in this thesis focuses on the role of *Masculinity Contest Culture* (Berdahl, 2018) in influencing the moral and emotional responses to whistleblowers. Previous studies (Near *et al.*, 2004) have shown that individuals who report serious misconduct, such as sexual harassment, are often perceived more favourably than those who report less severe infractions like theft or waste. However, recent research by Pacilli and colleagues (2022) has highlighted that these perceptions are highly context-dependent, with whistleblowers being viewed either as moral champions or as disruptive troublemakers, depending on the organizational environment.

This dissertation explores how these perceptions are shaped by moral emotions (Giner-Sorolla, 2019; Gausel, 2011) and cognitive evaluations, which are critical in determining whether a whistleblower is seen as a courageous ethical actor or as a source of conflict. Understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending the broader implications of whistleblowing in a competitive, masculine organizational culture.

Chapter 1 will offer a detailed review of the literature on Masculinity Contest Culture and the phenomenon of whistleblowing. The review will begin with a focus on the well-known Uber

case, which serves as a prominent example of masculinity culture and provides a concrete illustration of the construct as examined in existing literature. Following this, the chapter will explore the concept of masculinity and its implications in workplace masculinity contests, examining the adverse consequences of such an environment, particularly considering some unethical behaviour within organizations, such as for instance harassment cases. In addition, the chapter will address the concept of whistleblowing, encompassing its definition, the motivations behind the decision to blow the whistle or refrain from doing so, and the reactions to whistleblowing acts.

The research conducted for this dissertation includes both correlational and experimental studies, each designed to examine different aspects of this complex relationship. The first study investigates the connection between the perception of a masculine work environment and the propensity to engage in counterproductive work behaviours. Subsequent studies explore how this environment influences the evaluation of whistleblowers, with a particular focus on the mediating role of moral emotions and cognitive judgments.

In chapter 2, I will present the first study of the present dissertation. *Study 1* ($N = 336$) investigates the relationship between the perception of a masculine work environment and the propensity to engage in counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs). This study explores whether self-perception as an instrument within the company mediates this relationship, providing initial insights into how masculinity contest culture might influence workplace behaviour.

In chapter 3, I will present *Study 2* ($N = 212$). Building on the findings from *Study 1*, this second study takes a preliminary step in exploring how the perception of the workplace as a masculinity contest influences the evaluation of whistleblowers. Specifically, it investigates whether such a cultural environment is linked to more negative judgments, heightened negative moral emotions, and an increased tendency to avoid whistleblowers. This study serves as an initial

exploration into the potential connections between masculinity contest culture and the social perceptions surrounding whistleblowing.

In chapter 3, I will present *Study 3* ($N = 256$). In this study, I sought to build on prior work by creating an experimental manipulation to examine the effects of a target's decision to report (or not report) misconduct on participants' perceptions, evaluations and behavioural tendencies, particularly in terms of avoidance of the target. Additionally, I also investigated the role of perceived workplace masculinity, and the interaction between these variables. This study attempts to manipulate the work environment by contrasting a masculinity contest culture with a non-masculine culture that emphasizes collaboration, vulnerability, and work-life balance.

In Chapter 4, I will present two studies (*Study 4* and *Study 5*) designed to compare different facets of whistleblower evaluation within a masculinity contest culture. These studies aim to juxtapose individual evaluations of whistleblowers with perceptions of how colleagues might assess whistleblowers, providing a nuanced view of the underlying dynamics. This comparative approach not only enhances our understanding of the evaluation process but also addresses potential biases arising from social desirability, thereby offering a more comprehensive analysis of whistleblowing in such cultural contexts. In *Study 4* ($N = 273$), I measured participants' perceptions of the workplace environment and manipulated only the target's behaviour—whether they chose to report or not report misconduct. The study investigates how the target's behaviour influences participants' perceptions of the individuals' morality, their emotional responses to the target, and ultimately their willingness to avoid the target themselves. Additionally, it examines the mediating role of moral emotions and moral evaluation in shaping participants' behavioral intentions. In *Study 5* ($N = 276$), I shifted the focus from participants' own reactions to their perceptions of how their colleagues might respond to whistleblowing. Specifically, this study investigates whether participants anticipate more negative evaluations of whistleblowers compared to non-reporters within a masculinity contest culture. In doing so, the study aims to explore the complex dynamics between

masculinity and whistleblowing, while also attempting to overcome the bias of social desirability in participants' responses.

In *chapter 5*, I will provide a summary of the main findings, practical implications and limitations of the present dissertation. Overall, this dissertation seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how a masculinity contest culture within organizations affects the complex interplay between emotional responses the evaluation of whistleblowers and the tendency to avoid the target. By doing so, it aims to contribute to both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies for managing whistleblowing in diverse organizational contexts.

Chapter 1

Masculinity contest culture

Inside Uber's toxic culture: breaking the silence on harassment

In 2017, Susan Fowler, a former software engineer at Uber, published a blog post detailing her experiences of sexual harassment within the company. She described how her manager persistently made sexual advances and sexist remarks, exploiting institutional channels to facilitate this behaviour. Susan Fowler revealed that her manager justified his actions by claiming he was in an open relationship, thereby feeling entitled to send her inappropriate messages, which she meticulously documented through screenshots. Initially, she expected that reporting these incidents would prompt appropriate remedial action (Fowler, 2017). However, Uber's Human Resources department indicated that they were hesitant to reprimand the manager due to his status as a top performer and the fact that this was his first reported offense, despite the clear evidence of sexual harassment. As a result, Fowler was presented with two untenable options: either switch teams, which would necessitate abandoning her ongoing projects, or remain with her current team, risking bad performance evaluations. Through discussions with her female colleagues, Fowler discovered that she was not alone; several other colleagues had experienced similar misconduct from the same manager. Despite numerous complaints, no disciplinary measures were implemented. Fowler ultimately decided to resign from the company. Scholars and analysts have extensively examined Fowler's case, highlighting critical issues such as Uber's management failure to take necessary actions in response to employee grievances (Rivas, 2021).

The fundamental issue, however, lays not only with the toxic leadership but also with the company's pervasive toxic culture. Despite acknowledging the severity of the situation, the leadership chose not to act, largely because the problematic employees were deemed "top performers" (Rivas, 2021). This suggests that the problem was not with the complaint mechanisms

or the employees' willingness to report misconduct but rather with the company's norms and structural deficiencies, which led to the dismissal of serious whistleblowing incidents.

Moreover, Susan Fowler depicted Uber as an organization marked by intense competition and a profoundly dysfunctional culture. Employees operated in a state of constant and intense fear that the teams they belonged to might be dissolved, or that individuals could engage in counterproductive behaviours, such as withholding or hoarding information, in order to gain an advantage over their colleagues or secure a better position. The dominant culture emphasized sabotaging colleagues rather than fostering constructive contributions to the company. This toxic environment contributed to a high turnover rate among female employees (Glick et al., 2021). Subsequent reports by the New York Times described Uber as a "hobbesian environment" where employees constantly had to watch their backs, and misconduct by top performers was routinely overlooked (Isaac, 2017). These reports underscore the broader issue of how toxic leadership and organizational culture can permeate an organization. The study of organizational climate is a well-researched area; however, the perspective of this dissertation seeks to interpret it through a gendered lens, emphasizing the concept of *masculinity*. Within this framework, employees often conform to prevailing masculine norms within the organization (Berdahl et al., 2018), which fosters a continual exhibition of power and dominance over peers, thereby overshadowing the organization's core mission.

Uber is not an isolated example but rather part of a broader trend of organizations fostering what is referred to as a *masculinity contest culture* (Berdahl, 2018). In fact, many companies, particularly in Silicon Valley, exhibit similar toxic cultures characterized by prevalent bullying, harassment, and behaviours detrimental to organizational health (Glick et al., 2021). This highlighted phenomenon underscores a significant and deeply concerning pattern that has characterized corporate environments in recent years, where the masculine drive for dominance and competition appears to overshadow the core values of organizations.

What we talk about when we talk about masculinity

In contemporary society, the expectations for how individuals should behave are linked to the norms and standards established by their social environment (Turner, 1991). These societal norms delineate appropriate behaviours based on gender, beginning at birth (Bigler, 1995). Consequently, gender roles impose significant constraints on individuals' potential, limiting their life experiences to those deemed suitable for their gender category (Sanchez et al., 2005). While men and women may not always consciously recognize these gender norms, there is a pervasive implicit pressure to conform. This conformity is influenced not only by biological sex but also by the social construction of gender, which shapes societal definitions of femininity and masculinity (Sanchez et al., 2005). Deviations from these established gender norms can result in significant psychological repercussions (Rudman, 1998).

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all individuals strictly adhere to these gendered expectations. In fact, in modern contexts, many men are actively engaged into domestic responsibilities (Bianchi et al., 2000), and women are increasingly entering professions traditionally dominated by men (Women Breaking Through Male-Dominated Fields, 2001). The degree of conformity to gender norms varies among individuals, reflecting personal and societal dynamics. Despite potential sanctions for non-conformity, many individuals adhere to gender norms to gain social acceptance. This adherence, however, comes at a psychological cost, as it restricts personal behaviours and influences outcomes such as self-esteem. In fact, self-esteem is often heavily reliant on external validation, including societal approval (Sanchez & Crocker, 2005). Adherence to gender norms can have significant ramifications, especially in educational contexts where gendered expectations may undermine, for example, academic performance and perceptions of competence (Spencer et al., 1999; Kessel et al., 2013). These norms not only constrain women's perceived power and capabilities but also pose challenges for men, highlighting the problematic nature of rigid gender roles. These norms do not only manifest in adulthood but often take root during

childhood (Rhodes et al., 2014). From an early age, boys and girls receive guidance on how to behave according to societal expectations, with girls being directed towards standards of femininity and boys towards masculine ideals (Farkas & Leaper, 2016). This pattern is reinforced by various inputs and messages from family, peers, and societal institutions as individuals mature, pushing them to conform to traditional gender roles (Egan & Perry, 2001). These directives aim to secure social status, for example by promoting power and leadership roles (Levant & Richmond, 2016).

One of the gender norms that demands particular attention, especially in this context, is that concerning masculinity. Men, in particular, appear to be under continuous pressure to demonstrate their masculinity, striving to prove themselves as "real men" (Bosson et al., 2021). Despite the numerous cultural variations in what is considered masculine, the common denominator across cultures is the relentless concern for men to prove their masculinity, which involves assuming roles, enacting behaviours, and engaging in practices associated with being male (Bosson et al., 2008; Kimmel, 2012). The essence of masculinity must be earned by men through adherence to various norms, and it can equally be lost through perceived threats to their masculinity (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). The theory of precarious manhood posits that masculinity is a social status that must be proven through action (Vandello & Cohen, 2008).

In fact, in Western countries, men are constantly pushed to prove their masculinity to others, unlike women, who do not face specific demands to maintain their status as "women". This is because the transition to womanhood is seen as occurring naturally through biological changes, whereas for men, it is more about earning their masculinity (Gilmore, 1990; Vandello & Cohen, 2008). The concept of precarious manhood is often explained through an evolutionary lens, suggesting that men's dispositions originate from the need to compete for social status to gain access to women (Buss, 1998). However, various social role theories provide a compelling explanation for this precariousness. These theories suggest that fundamental physical differences between men and women have historically led to a division of labor, with men typically assuming roles that are

considered more demanding and physically risky but that also offer greater monetary rewards. This division of labor has shaped societal beliefs about masculinity, whereby those who take significant risks can achieve higher status, while those who contribute less are consequently perceived as less manly. This dynamic can make the pursuit and maintenance of the "real man" status an inherently unstable and uncertain endeavour for men (Bosson & Cohen, 2008) and, the precariousness of this status leads to higher levels of social anxiety among men and often results in compensatory behaviours, which can be aggressive or risky (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). The absence of a biological marker for the transition to adult masculinity makes the status associated with being a man particularly problematic. This issue is further compounded by the fact that the mandate of masculinity is intrinsically linked to power and privilege, as masculine directives aim to secure a certain social status by promoting power and leadership roles (Levant & Richmond, 2016). However, the methods by which power is achieved vary across cultural contexts. A ubiquitous aspect of achieving masculinity is the avoidance of femininity, which is stereotypically associated with weakness (Levant & Richmond, 2016).

Brannon (1976) identified four key masculine rules that prescribe the achievement of masculine status: "*No sissy stuff*," which mandates the avoidance of anything associated with femininity, such as soft emotions (e.g., crying, showing doubt) or feminine interests; "*Be a big wheel*" an idiomatic expression denoting the climb up the status ladder to attain power and leadership; "*Be a sturdy oak*" which implies an unrealistic standard of invulnerability and strength, symbolized by the resilience and independence of an oak tree; and "*Give 'em hell*" which denotes the mandate of domination, suggesting that men should do whatever it takes to overcome rivals. This reflects the incessant competition for resources and dominance inherent in traditional conceptions of masculinity.

The continuous pressure to demonstrate power and dominance extends into the workplace, a setting that facilitates the attainment of positions, acquisition of resources, and exertion of control over others (Britton & Logan, 2008). Researchers, such as Berdahl et al. (2018), suggest that this

environment fosters "*masculinity contests*", where the norms identified by Brannon (1976) infiltrate organizational culture. This creates a competitive atmosphere characterized by an emphasis on masculinity and dominance, similar to the culture prevalent in Silicon Valley. Such a climate is highly dysfunctional and can lead to aggressive behaviours such as bullying and violence (Glick et al., 2019).

Work as Masculinity Contest

Traditional gender roles have long dictated distinct societal expectations for both men and women. Historically, men have been seen as the primary breadwinners, while women have been associated with caregiving responsibilities within the household (Nosek, Banaji & Greenwald, 2002). Despite increasing diversity in gender roles, societal norms still often foster the perception of men as providers and women as caregivers. As men age, the arena for masculine competition has shifted to the workplace. In fact, work has become central to men's lives, shaping their identity and intertwining career success with familial obligations (Cooper, 2000). Men often justify their professional commitments by emphasizing their roles as providers, and this has become evident through behaviours such as working long hours and prioritizing career advancement over personal life. Consequently, workplaces are increasingly seen as spaces where individuals, especially men, assert and validate their masculinity (Rudman & Glick, 2021). Since work represents an environment where men can acquire prestige, it becomes a place where workers strive to be recognized as manly (Britton & Logan, 2008) through competition or by prioritizing work above all else.

This transition from societal norms to workplace dynamics explains why workplaces often evolve into environments characterized by masculinity. Many companies are predominantly led by men raised with values of dominance linked to personal success. Most of these men (but not all men) bring their ideals of masculinity into the professional sphere, where such values become integral to their identity (Rudman & Glick, 2021). This results in a masculine context where success

is not merely about achieving specific career goals but aligning with masculine norms within the company. When the pressure to conform to these standards permeates the work environment, it becomes a battleground for asserting one's manhood.

Companies with such cultures foster high levels of competitiveness, creating an atmosphere where trust among colleagues is scarce, winners strive to defeat those who fail, and every worker must watch their back. Employees often feel pressured to compete with their peers to embody the ideal of a 'real man'. Success in these environments is gauged by outperforming others, engaging in cutthroat competition, relentlessly pursuing higher earnings and taking significant risks for career advancement. These implicit masculine norms shape the work environment, impacting both men and women, and often become deeply embedded within standard workplace practices (Berdahl et al., 2018).

Drawing on experiences from Silicon Valley companies, it has become evident in recent years that many organizations encourage employees to work long hours or compete with one another for bonuses, better positions, or favourable recognition within the company. The workplace thus becomes a venue for masculine competition, where values such as competitiveness, dominance, and risk-taking are predominantly emphasized. Berdahl, Cooper, et al. (2018) significantly expanded the study of toxic and dysfunctional organizations and they coined the term *Masculinity Contest Culture* (MCC) to describe this set of organizational norms, practices, and values that drive endless competition for power, strength, and status. They proposed that when organizations prioritize masculine norms over their fundamental mission, shifting their focus from the company's objectives to power struggles, the work environment transforms into a masculinity contest culture. In this culture, employees are driven by adherence to specific masculine norms, derived from earlier theoretical frameworks developed by Connell (1987) and Kimmel (1987) regarding hegemonic masculinity. These norms emphasize traits such as competitiveness, dominance, and risk-taking, shifting the focus from organizational goals to individual power

struggles. Berdahl and colleagues (2018) research highlights how this shift can create an environment where employees are more concerned with outperforming each other and asserting dominance than with collaborative efforts or the organization's overall success. This focus on masculinity over mission can lead to a host of negative outcomes, including increased workplace toxicity, reduced cooperation, and impaired organizational functioning.

This concept of workplace masculinity is multidimensional, encompassing various forms of hegemonic masculinity within organizations (Berdahl et al., 2018). It includes four key dimensions, similar to those already prescribed by Brannon (1976). Firstly, "*show no weakness*" suggests that employees should avoid displaying emotions, doubts, or uncertainties at work. Secondly, "*strength and stamina*" values athleticism and physical endurance. Thirdly, "*put work first*" mandates prioritizing work above personal life, often leading to excessive working hours. For instance, Sang's (2014) study highlights how many workplaces promote a damaging culture that demands long working hours, often at the expense of personal life and family time. This prioritization of work above all else not only undermines employee well-being but also reinforces a toxic culture of overwork.

Lastly, "*dog-eat-dog competition*" characterizes the workplace as a highly competitive environment where trust among colleagues is scarce, and one must always be vigilant. The "dog-eat-dog" competition dimension represents a ruthless and fiercely competitive environment where intense rivalry dominates. This dynamic is particularly crucial within work groups, as it naturally cultivates competition between teams, resulting in a sharp division between ingroups and outgroups. The concept implies a binary relationship: once an individual is accepted into the group, they are firmly within it; however, once excluded, re-entry becomes nearly impossible. This environment is marked by pervasive mistrust, compelling individuals to remain constantly vigilant of their colleagues (Matos et al., 2018). Although not all men conform to or embody this model of masculinity, it is known that they can benefit from such a culture. However, masculine norms in the

workplace do not advantage all men rather certain categories of men (Berdahl et al., 2018). This is because there is not just one concept of masculinity, rather masculinity can manifest in different aspects depending on the culture, emphasizing some characteristics over others or privileging certain categories.

Consequently, both women and some men suffer the repercussions of a masculine workplace culture (e.g., Alonso, 2018; Glick et al., 2018). In fact, a masculine workplace culture, which typically aims to increase power and thus performance, often harms employees, reducing well-being within organizations (Glick et al., 2018).

The study of masculinity within organizational settings, though relatively recent, has become increasingly important due to its connection with various harmful outcomes. The costs to companies are substantial, particularly in terms of turnover and absenteeism, as well as other indicators of employee well-being. This includes both organizational behaviours, such as increased bullying, and individual factors, such as work-related stress, psychosocial stress, work engagement, and decreased job satisfaction (Glick et al., 2018; Matos et al., 2018; Rawski & Workman-Stark, 2018). Understanding this focus on dominance and competition is then crucial as it not only shapes professional dynamics but also fosters environments where toxic behaviours, including sexual harassment, can thrive unchecked, further entrenching power imbalances and gender inequities within the workplace (Berdahl et al., 2018; Glick et al., 2018).

Silence in the Workplace: The Impact of Culture in Workplace Dynamics

Research on sexual harassment has received substantial attention from psychologists, especially in recent years. This field of study aims not only to examine and define the phenomenon itself but also to focus on the causes of harassment, the elements involved in the phenomenon, the consequences for the victims, and the reactions of bystanders (e.g., Exposito et al., 2022; Fiske & Glick, 1995; Pagliaro et al., 2020; Willness, et al., 2007). Sexual harassment has often been defined in psychological terms as “unwanted sexual behaviour that harms well-being and may be perceived

as excessive or offensive” (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997, p. 15) and its complexity can only be fully understood by considering both legal and psychological perspectives. A pivotal definition that guides much of the research on harassment is provided by Berdahl (2007), who defines sexual harassment as behaviours that humiliate or demean people based on sex or gender. As indicated in the aforementioned definition, there are various nuances of sexual harassment, including for example advances, requests for sexual favours, verbal or physical conduct, misogynistic comments, games that are more cruel than funny, and sextortion (Alemi et al., 2024; Pagliaro et al., 2020; Gartner & Sterzing, 2016). However, a taxonomy has categorized sexual harassment into three types: sexual coercion—such as threatening to obtain sexual favors— unwanted sexual attention—such as unwanted behaviours and comments—, and gender harassment—such as hostile attitudes towards women (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Unwanted sexual attention encompasses verbal and non-verbal incidents where women are sometimes treated as sexual objects, including comments, leering or lascivious looks, sending lewd materials, and persistent requests for dates (Gelfand et al., 1995). Tolerance of aggressive behaviours or acts of harassment in the workplace is a clear indicator of unprofessionalism. Beyond the formal implications, such behaviours constitute explicitly unfair or disrespectful treatment of colleagues, as these pressures ranging from severe to more subtle forms can restrict individual freedom at work and have psychological repercussions (Rudman & Glick, 2021). Such behaviours are present to varying extents across different organizations, although they are more prevalent in certain fields than in others. This can be attributed to the organizational climate, which seems to be one of the variables that explain the varying occurrence of these unpleasant events in the workplace (Hulin et al., 1996). It is thus recognized that sexual harassment behaviours predominantly occur in the presence of a permissive climate regarding harassment. A meta-analysis by Willness et al. (2007) highlighted that sexual harassment is often influenced by two situational factors. One of these, particularly relevant to our discussion, is the organizational context to which I am referring. This organizational context is defined as "those aspects of

organizational climate having to do with tolerance of sexual harassment as well as the presence, accessibility, and effectiveness of harassment remedies" (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995, p. 62).

Reflecting on the workplace, it is essential to acknowledge that employees within organizations occupy varying hierarchical levels, and it is evident that those at the top have the ability to determine or influence organizational norms that can either facilitate or restrict harassment (Rudman & Glick, 2021). Generally, men are overrepresented in these high-ranking positions compared to women, and the possession of power often leads to impulsive behaviours (Galinsky et al., 2003), posing significant risks to organizations and instances of harassment. Moreover, it appears that individuals, particularly women, are increasingly less inclined to report such harassment behaviours, especially if they perceive that these behaviours are encouraged or tolerated by their own organization (Pryor et al., 1993). Experiencing workplace harassment is inherently detrimental, as it undermines job satisfaction, leads to high levels of stress, and can lead individuals to leave their jobs (Deery et al., 2011). It is clear that even when women encounter subtle forms of harassment, such as colorful banter or sly games, they may not always recognize these instances as harassment, nor may those around them. Nevertheless, such experiences significantly impact women's well-being (Magley et al., 1999). The reluctance to report such behaviours remains prevalent in organizations due to the persistent threat of backlash, despite the inconsistency of this reluctance with legal standards. It is well-documented that many female workers endure reprisals from managers or authorities (Cortina & Magley, 2003). Although many women choose not to report their experiences (Rosenthal et al., 2016), reporting such behaviours is essential for addressing the issue of harassment and implementing corrective measures. Silence may seem like a safer option in the short term compared to the uncertainty of potential retaliation. However, this silence does not resolve the problem either in the short or long term, and it does not only envelop the victim of harassment; it can also permeate the members of the organization and those surrounding them. This phenomenon is known as *network silence*, which comprises three aspects:

being silent, silencing, and not hearing (Hershcovis et al., 2021). These three elements are distinct from one another. "Being silent" refers to behaviours that are socially learned and then adopted within the organization to suppress complaints. "Silencing" involves actively discouraging others from voicing their grievances. In contrast, "not hearing" pertains to the rejection of complaints after someone has attempted to express their concerns. Network silence shares many similarities with organizational silence, as theorized by Morrison and Milliken (2000), since it is a process that involves multiple actors within organizations. Organizational silence is, therefore, the act of concealing or withholding opinions due to fear of consequences or the belief that voicing concerns will not result in any significant change within the workplace (Hershcovis et al., 2021). In a workplace environment where individuals remain silent about acts of harassment, discourage others from reporting them, or even justify the harassment, it becomes evident that such behaviours are likely to be adopted by others. In fact, it is well established that individuals often conform to behaviours that align with group norms due to a perceived consensus surrounding those behaviours among group members (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Latané, 1981). Consequently, this dynamic perpetuates an implicit culture of silence (Hershcovis et al., 2021).

Unpacking Whistleblowing: Definitions, Intentions, and Responses to Reporting Misconduct

Defining Whistleblowing

In organizational contexts, breaches of established corporate norms or ethical standards often extend beyond the internal boundaries of the company, affecting not only the organization dynamics but also its reputation, public trust, and the well-being of the employees involved (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). These violations, ranging from fundamental moral transgressions to direct legal infractions, represent a complex spectrum of misconduct. Reporting such breaches to upper management is widely recognized as best practice. In fact, those who engage in whistleblowing are frequently motivated by a deep ethical awareness, with a primary focus on safeguarding the collective interests of society. This sense of moral duty often leads them to prioritize the common good over personal interests (Bjørkelo, 2013). In many cases, reporting a misconduct attests a commitment to ethical standards and public accountability, with the aim of protecting the broader community from potential harm. However, employees frequently avoid disclosing infractions due to a myriad of factors, such as distrust in reporting mechanisms, fear of retaliation, or uncertainty about appropriate actions (Anvari et al., 2019; Miceli et al., 2008).

Furthermore, other factors, such as organizational culture and employee relationships, can also influence the tendency to report certain events (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). This reluctance to report misconduct undoubtedly has consequences for organizations, as unaddressed behaviours can erode trust among employees, compromise organizational integrity, and harm the company's reputation (Miceli et al., 2008). As a result, the concept of *whistleblowing* has attracted increasing attention from researchers, highlighting its growing significance in addressing corruption and unethical practices within organizations (Anvari et al., 2019; Dungan et al., 2015; Miceli et al., 2008; Baucus & Near, 1991). Whistleblowing is therefore regarded as a critical phenomenon for maintaining ethical standards within a company, and it is closely tied to specific organizational dynamics, as well as to policies designed to address misconduct within the organization. The

definition of whistleblowing remains nuanced and complex. The term "whistleblower" has its roots in Anglo-American culture and, originally, between the late 1800s and early 1900s, it referred to policemen using whistles to signal wrongdoing and to referees in sports (Olesen, 2020). It was only from the 1960s onwards that the metaphor came to represent individuals exposing hidden misconduct. This shift in metaphor was influenced by the works of Peters and Branch (1972) and Nader et al. (1972), which framed whistleblowing as a “crucial practice for upholding democratic values”, for example, transparency, justice, and accountability within society or organizations (Mueller, 2019). Near and Miceli (1984; 1996) defined whistleblowing as “the disclosure by organization members (past or present) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to individuals or entities capable of taking action” (p. 4). This definition highlights several key aspects: the occurrence of unethical or illegal activities, the decision-making process of those who witness the misconduct, and the presence of certain channels for reporting, which may be internal or external. In this sense, the whistleblowing process involves an individual choosing to report irregularities or misconduct observed within an organization. Here, the term "whistleblower" refers to the individual making such disclosures, while the "wrongdoer" denotes the person committing the illicit act. The "recipient" is the entity—such as organizational management—that receives and addresses the report. Even today, the definition of whistleblowing remains complex and context-specific, reflecting the continuously evolving nature of organizational ethics. Whistleblowing is often categorized into two types: internal and external, depending on the channel through which the misconduct is reported (Near & Miceli, 1995). Whistleblowing is considered *internal* when the act of reporting unethical behavior or illegal activity is directed to someone within the organization, typically management or a designated department. This approach is often initially preferred as it allows the organization to address the issue internally and potentially rectify the problem without external intervention. However, internal whistleblowing can be accompanied by various risks, including potential retaliation against employees or the possibility that the report will be ignored, which may discourage employees from coming forward to report

incidents. When internal reporting mechanisms fail to resolve the issue, or when the whistleblower believes that internal reporting would be ineffective or dangerous, the matter can only be addressed through an external channel. *External* whistleblowing involves disclosing unethical practices to entities outside the organization, such as governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, or the general public, often through media outlets (Miceli et al., 2008). The transition from internal to external whistleblowing carries significant implications for both the whistleblower and the organization (Grant, 2002). For the whistleblower, this step may serve as a protective measure to ensure that their concerns are taken seriously, but it also entails greater visibility and, potentially, higher personal risks. For the organization, external whistleblowing can lead to increased media attention and a damaged reputation, as the issues are brought to public attention and subjected to broader scrutiny (Berry, 2004). While internal whistleblowing offers a chance for quiet resolution, external whistleblowing can serve as a crucial check when organizations fail to act, ensuring accountability and protecting public interest (Grant, 2002). Researchers have delved into the phenomenon of whistleblowing for various reasons, specifically to understand its implications for organizations and society, as it seeks to uphold ethical standards within organizations and counter unethical practices (Brown, Mazurski & Olsen, 2008; Miceli & Near, 1988). Effective whistleblowing can address significant violations; although it may entail short-term costs for the organization, it often reduces long-term expenses by directly confronting misconduct (Ellemers & De Gilder, 2023; Miceli & Near, 1985; 1988). The likelihood of whistleblowing is rarely entirely random. In fact, whistleblowing is more likely to occur in supportive, non-toxic work environments where individuals do not fear retaliation for their actions (Zakaria, 2015; Miceli et al., 2009; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005).

Navigating Whistleblowing: Individual Choices and Workplace Climate

One of the motivations that drives people to report wrongdoing, especially in companies, is the prevention of potential harm for the broader group or community. When employees witness unethical practices within an organization, they often perceive these actions as morally

unacceptable and feel a responsibility to expose them. This sense of duty emerges from a careful evaluation of the circumstances, leading to decisions grounded in ethical principles (Syed Modh, 2009). However, there exists a paradox: while whistleblowing is frequently regarded as an act of civic virtue, individuals who report misconduct are often perceived as traitors within their workplace (e.g., Pacilli et al., 2023). Despite its acknowledged importance, whistleblowing remains a complex and often avoided behaviour within organizations (Miceli & Near, 1992). This negative aspect of this phenomenon can cause employees to remain silent or to refrain from reporting unethical behaviour due to fear of adverse consequences (Morrison, 2014). The core challenge, therefore, lies in identifying the factors that impact whether an individual chooses to blow the whistle or to remain silent.

Research has consistently highlighted the impact of individual and demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and level of education, on the likelihood of engaging in whistleblowing (Chen, 2019; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). However, the decision to blow the whistle is not only determined by individual attributes but it is also shaped by the broader organizational climate and specific contextual characteristics (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Near & Miceli, 1996). In fact, recent evidence suggests that contextual factors—such as peer support, organizational climate, and perceived threats of retaliation (Near & Jensen, 1983; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005)—play a significant role in influencing an individual's decision to report misconduct than personal characteristics. Whistleblowing is deeply embedded in workplace dynamics, where group norms and collective meanings significantly impact individual choices (Ellemers & De Gilder, 2023). Membership in a particular work group or the nature of one's employment can profoundly affect both the propensity to report wrongdoing (Heger, 2014) and the responses to such reports.

For instance, employees may be more inclined to report misconduct if they perceive strong organizational support, whereas a lack of support can foster a culture of silence due to fears of retaliation (Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The perceived threat of

retaliation acts as a major deterrent to potential whistleblowers, as the fear of negative consequences can significantly influence their decision-making process (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). These situational factors collectively shape the context in which whistleblowing decisions are made and are essential for understanding the broader dynamics of reporting misconduct within organizational settings. Such an environment not only encourages the reporting of unethical behaviour but also helps prevent and mitigate harmful activities that may affect third parties (Near & Miceli, 1985).

In light of this, it is crucial to expand our understanding beyond individual characteristics and consider how organizational contexts influence whistleblowing behaviour. While earlier research has focused on specific organizational contexts (Miceli et al., 1991), a broader perspective necessitates examining situational factors such as implicit norms and workplace climate to determine how different work environments impact the likelihood of reporting misconduct (Zhang et al., 2009; Trevino, 2006). Key situational factors include the organizational culture and climate, which encompass the prevailing values, norms, and practices within the institution (Kaptein, 2011). A robust ethical culture instils in employees a strong sense of moral obligation to protect the organization's integrity, which can motivate them to report unethical actions (Fang, 2006). Consistent evidence suggests that the ethical environment within a workplace significantly influences employees' intentions to engage in whistleblowing, making it a crucial precursor to such actions (for a review, Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007). Despite its role in protecting public interest, whistleblowers frequently face significant challenges, including retaliation, victimization, and workplace bullying, as a consequence of their actions. These consequences will be further examined to understand their impact on individuals who choose to report misconduct.

Heroes or traitors?

Whistleblowing is a complex phenomenon that often involves dual interpretations. Indeed, although whistleblowing is conceptualized as an act of reporting misconduct within an organization (Near & Miceli, 1984), this behaviour can conflict with behavioural expectations in the workplace,

particularly because reporting may harm other employees. The controversies surrounding whistleblowing appear to stem from the numerous interpretations attributed to the phenomenon, which arise from attention to its nature related to civil responsibility of workers (Olesen, 2018). This line of reasoning raises doubts about the extent to which individuals retain the moral right and responsibility "to speak the truth" (Foucault, 2011). Such reflection prompts questions regarding how civic responsibility is positioned above the wrongdoing experienced by others and the breach of trust and loyalty within one's group or context (Olesen, 2018). In fact, on one hand, whistleblowing can be seen as an act of responsibility and integrity (Olesen, 2018). In such contexts, whistleblowers are celebrated as heroes for their courage in exposing wrongdoing and protecting the public interest. On the other hand, whistleblowing can also provoke hostility, with those who report misconduct sometimes being labelled as traitors or informers (Hersh, 2001; Pacilli et al., 2023). This led Pacilli and colleagues (2023) to examine the conditions under which they are perceived as *heroes or traitors*. Dungan et al. (2015) examined the moral dilemmas associated with whistleblowing, highlighting the conflict between loyalty and justice. The decision to blow the whistle often involves navigating a complex moral landscape, balancing the ethical imperative to reveal wrongdoing against the potential personal and professional consequences of betraying colleagues or the organization. In fact, whistleblowing has been defined as "a distinct form of dissent" (Elliston et al., 1985, p. 79) and is often regarded as an act of justice, reflecting a commitment to ethical standards and the protection of the public interest by exposing unethical behavior. This perspective considers whistleblowing necessary for maintaining accountability and integrity. Numerous studies have demonstrated that whistleblowing can be viewed as a prosocial behavior toward organizations (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; Dozier & Miceli, 1985). Staw (1983) noted that reporting misconduct, whether directed internally or externally, serves to benefit not only other employees but also the organizations themselves and, in some cases, society at large. Conversely, the same act can be perceived as a betrayal, especially when it involves disclosing misconduct within one's own group or workplace (Waytz et al., 2013). This can lead to negative

repercussions, such as damaging relationships or undermining the organization's reputation, which may be seen as disloyal. Research has shown that decisions to report misconduct are often driven by a strong sense of justice and the desire to correct unethical practices (Seifert, et al., 2010). In contrast, the decision to remain silent is frequently influenced by a sense of loyalty, where individuals may prioritize maintaining internal harmony and trust over exposing wrongdoing. This illustrates the dual nature of whistleblowing decisions, requiring individuals to navigate between upholding ethical principles and preserving loyalty to their peers (Waytz et al., 2013). Ultimately, whether whistleblowing is seen as a principled stand for justice, or an act of disloyalty depends on the individual's moral priorities and the specific context of the situation. This duality underscores the challenging nature of whistleblowing, where the line between right and wrong is not always clear-cut, but rather shaped by the interplay of justice and loyalty (Pacilli et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the way information about whistleblowing is communicated plays a crucial role in shaping public perception. Media portrayals and organizational narratives can either enhance the image of whistleblowers as brave and ethical or depict them negatively as disloyal and disruptive, often through the use of specific labels. Research indicates that the terms "whistleblower" and "leaker" can significantly impact how dissenters are perceived. Studies have shown that labeling someone as a "whistleblower" tends to lead to more positive perceptions of their motives and less severe judgments, even when the actions involved are identical. This suggests that the label "whistleblower" can frame the individual as acting out of moral and collective concern, making them appear less deserving of punishment compared to being labelled a "leaker" or not being labelled at all. These findings indicate that such labels can shape perceptions of dissenters across various contexts, beyond the specific terms studied (Rios & Ingraffia, 2016).

Additionally, research into organizational behaviour has further explored aspects of whistleblowing, including the decision-making process behind reporting misconduct. For example, Bjørkelo and Matthiesen (2011) found that reporting unethical behaviour in the workplace can lead to significant backlash, including severe negative consequences for the whistleblower within their

work environment. Pacilli and his colleagues (2023) have conducted in-depth research into the varied responses to whistleblowing, focusing on perceptions, emotional reactions, and the likelihood of retaliation through a series of three experiments. Their findings highlight that the perception of a whistleblower's actions can differ significantly depending on the context, often leading to a dichotomy in which whistleblowers are simultaneously viewed as both traitors and heroes (Hersh, 2001; Pacilli et al., 2023). When a whistleblower is perceived as a moral crusader, they are often seen as a courageous figure who upholds ethical standards and inspires others (Pacilli et al., 2023; Sekerka et al., 2009). This positive view typically leads to favourable moral evaluations, supportive emotional responses, and reduced likelihood of retaliatory actions compared to individuals who do not report misconduct. On the other hand, when a whistleblower is seen as a disruptive element or a source of conflict, their actions may evoke negative reactions (Monin, 2007) and create unfavourable impressions. This contrast highlights the significant role that moral emotions play in shaping how whistleblowers are perceived. These emotions arise in response to observed breaches of ethical norms and serve to motivate behaviour that aligns with one's moral principles (Pacilli et al., 2002).

The exploration of these moral emotions and their influence on the reception of whistleblowers will be a central theme in the present dissertation. By examining how these emotions affect perceptions and retaliatory tendencies, the thesis aims to enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between ethical decision-making and emotional responses in the context of whistleblowing. This investigation will build on the foundational work of Pacilli et al. (2023), contributing to a deeper insight into the dynamics of moral reaction and the consequences faced by those who challenge unethical behaviour.

Whistleblowing in the Face of Retaliation

Whistleblowing in organizational settings frequently encounters considerable resistance (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Despite its crucial role in uncovering corruption or fraud, it often attracts negative responses. In fact, whistleblowers may be viewed unfavourably by their

colleagues, reflecting the complex nature of their role within the organization (Banisar, 2011).

When confronted with allegations of misconduct, organizations can choose to either address the issues raised or ignore the whistleblower's claims, potentially leading to retaliation (Near & Miceli, 1986). Researchers (Rehg et al., 2004) have defined retaliation against whistle-blowers "to be undesirable action taken against a whistleblower—and in direct response to the whistleblowing (p.11)." According to this definition, undesirable actions include not only adverse actions taken against the whistleblower but also the withholding of positive actions, such as a promotion that would have otherwise been granted (Miceli et al., 2008; Regh, Miceli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008).

Unfortunately, many whistleblowers experience retaliation, discrimination, or social exclusion within their workplaces (Miceli & Near, 1985). This can occur because organizations tend to downplay such incidents to protect their corporate reputation or shield themselves from potential legal risks, thereby creating an environment that discourages anyone from reporting misconduct. Indeed, those who take the bold step of reporting unethical or illegal activities, particularly in cases where anonymity is not guaranteed or full transparency is involved, may face severe repercussions. These negative effects can manifest in various forms, ranging from mere intimidation to persistent psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal distrust (Van der Velden et al., 2019). Furthermore, whistleblowers may be forced to resign from their positions or even face abrupt termination due to their actions (Bjørkelo, 2013). The fear of such reactions or repercussions — capable of severely compromising a worker's personal well-being and professional stability — likely plays a significant role in determining whether individuals choose to remain silent rather than report illicit behaviours. The pervasive fear of retaliation and the potential for long-lasting emotional consequences serve as powerful deterrents to whistleblowing (Miceli & Near, 1994; Parmerlee et al., 1982). Although it is commonly believed that retaliation primarily originates from senior management, it is essential to acknowledge that such measures can also be enacted by supervisors or colleagues. These individuals may engage in retaliatory behaviours for various reasons, often driven by fears that the whistleblower's disclosure could expose their own

deficiencies or threaten their job security (Miceli & Near, 1994). Specifically, retaliation encompasses a spectrum of both positive and negative outcomes directly linked to the act of whistleblowing (Erkmen et al., 2014). Such retaliation often manifests in harmful forms, including social ostracism, defamation, and discriminatory practices that can severely impact the whistleblower's personal and professional life. Individuals may face dire consequences, such as forced early retirement, challenges in securing future employment, verbal harassment, and false allegations aimed at damaging their reputation (Kennett et al., 2011). These retaliatory actions are not merely punitive; they aim to discredit the whistleblower and suppress the exposure of organizational misconduct, creating a chilling effect that discourages others from speaking out by instilling fear of similar repercussions (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). As a result, a *culture of silence* may arise, where the potential risks associated with whistleblowing overshadow the imperative of ethical accountability, ultimately undermining organizational integrity and the well-being of its members.

Research has also highlighted the existence of an organizational state where employees intentionally avoid bringing attention to mistakes, contributing to what is termed a *climate of silence* (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Morrison and Milliken (2000) proposed that various characteristics of the workplace environment, including implicit norms and attitudes toward dissent, create a complex web of shared perceptions. These shared perceptions can lead employees to remain silent about workplace issues or problems. Such a climate can emerge when collective attitudes and unwritten rules discourage employees from voicing concerns or reporting misconduct. This silence may manifest in various ways; for instance, employees might hesitate to report issues out of fear of negative repercussions, concerns about harming relationships with colleagues, or doubts about whether reporting will lead to meaningful changes (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Furthermore, organizational practices that provide insufficient support for whistleblowers or that maintain ambiguous reporting procedures can perpetuate this climate of silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Miceli & Near, 1992).

In contrast, organizational environments that cultivate strong peer support and promote a culture of ethical behaviour are generally more conducive to encouraging whistleblowing (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). In such contexts, employees may feel more entitled and encouraged to report misconduct, as supportive colleagues can alleviate fears of retaliation and bolster perceptions of organizational integrity. This dynamic underscores the critical role of an ethical organizational climate in shaping employees' willingness to disclose wrongdoing.

Despite considerable scholar interest in the factors influencing employees' decisions to report misconduct or their reluctance to do so, a significant gap exists in the literature regarding the relationship between organizational culture—particularly through the lens of gender dynamics, such as masculinity contest culture—and whistleblowing. Specifically, to the best of my knowledge, there is a lack of research examining how masculinity contest culture influences the perceptions and evaluations of both whistleblowers and those who choose to remain silent, ultimately impacting the broader organizational response to misconduct. Consequently, the studies presented here investigate how such organizational climates affect perceptions and evaluations of both whistleblowers and individuals who remain silent, thereby influencing the likelihood and nature of retaliatory behaviours. By examining these dimensions, the research aims to enhance our understanding of the intricate relationship between organizational context and the perception and evaluation of the whistleblowing phenomenon, elucidating how culture could shape responses to ethical accountability within the workplace.

Overview of the dissertation

This dissertation seeks to address two critical areas in organizational behaviour research: the well-established study of whistleblowing and the emerging concept of masculinity contest culture within workplaces. While much research has focused on factors predicting whistleblowing intentions, less attention has been given to how whistleblowers themselves are perceived, at least to my knowledge. By integrating these domains, the research aims to enhance our understanding of how a competitive, masculine work environment influences employees' perceptions of and reactions to misconduct, particularly concerning their decision to report unethical behaviour.

To comprehensively explore these issues, the dissertation is structured around several key studies, each designed to investigate different facets of the complex relationship between masculinity contest culture and whistleblowing (**see Table 1**).

The specific aims of this dissertation are as follows:

Aim A: To investigate the relationship between perceptions of a masculine work environment and the likelihood of engaging in counterproductive work behaviours.

Aim B: To examine how perceptions of masculinity contest culture affect evaluations of whistleblowers in response to organizational misconduct. This includes analysing the roles of moral emotions and judgments in shaping these evaluations. Additionally, this aim involves assessing the impact of both measuring existing perceptions of masculinity contest culture and attempting to manipulate this context experimentally.

Aim C: To determine the impact of masculinity contest culture on employees' evaluations of whistleblowers and to explore how these evaluations compare with perceptions of how colleagues might assess whistleblowers. This analysis aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the underlying dynamics and to address potential biases related to social desirability in these evaluations.

The first study examines the link between perceptions of a masculine work environment and the proclivity to engage in counterproductive work behaviours. Subsequent studies build upon this foundation by exploring how such an environment impacts the evaluation of whistleblowers, with particular attention to the mediating roles of moral emotions and cognitive judgments. All studies presented in this dissertation adhere to the Declaration of Helsinki and comply with APA ethical guidelines.

Table 1. *Overview of the studies.*

STUDY	DATA	RESEARCH DESIGN	AIM
STUDY 1	<i>N</i> = 336 real employees	<i>Correlational study</i>	Aim A
STUDY 2	<i>N</i> = 212 real employees	<i>Correlational study</i>	Aim B
STUDY 3	<i>N</i> = 256 laypeople	2 (<i>Work context:</i> masculinity framed vs. control condition) x 2(<i>target's behavior:</i> report vs. not report) between participant's design.	Aim B
STUDY 4	<i>N</i> = 273 real employees	2 conditions (<i>target's behavior:</i> report vs. not report) between participant's design	Aim C
STUDY 5	<i>N</i> = 276 real employees	2 conditions (<i>target's behavior:</i> report vs. not report) between participant's design	Aim C

CHAPTER 2

STUDY 1

Navigating Counterproductive Behaviours in the Masculinity Contest Culture: Understanding the Impact of Masculine Norms on Employee Reactions

Introduction

In recent years, scholars have been devoting attention to the influence of organizational culture and gender norms on employee behavior, particularly on how patriarchal framework might influence workplace dynamics (Berdahl et al., 2018; Glick et al., 2018; Matos et al., 2018; Rudman & Glick, 2021). *Masculinity Contest Culture* (MCC; Berdahl et al., 2018), conceptualized as a context characterized by male dominance and competitive behaviours, has been identified as a significant driver of organizational dysfunction, often leading to maladaptive work outcomes. The continuous pressure to conform to traditional masculine ideals—such as demonstrating dominance, competitiveness, and endurance—can foster organizational environments marked by excessive work hours, increased rivalry, competition, and assertive displays of power (Cooper, 2014; Williams, 1999). These dynamics, deeply rooted in hegemonic masculinity, may contribute to an increase in counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) – that is, “volitional acts that harm or intend to harm organizations and their stakeholders” (Spector & Fox, 2005, pp. 151–152) – and a deterioration in employee well-being, particularly in recent years (Berdahl et al., 2018). Research has consistently suggested that such climates can negatively affect ethical behaviour within organizations, influencing key organizational outcomes (Koc et al., 2021; Matos et al., 2018; Workman-Stark, 2021). Thus, in highly competitive, male-dominated environments, employees may be more inclined to prioritize self-interest and individualism, undermining collaborative efforts and ethical standards. As a result, understanding how MCC relates to work outcomes such as self-objectification, work tension, and CWBs has become increasingly relevant for organizations aiming to enhance employee well-being and performance.

Building on this literature, the present study focuses on the banking and insurance sectors, which are recognized as potential hubs of masculine competition, providing an ideal context for exploring the impact of MCC (Blomberg, 2009; McDowell 1997; Kerfoot et al., 1996). Consequently, this study seeks to determine whether employees in these sectors are more prone to engage in counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs), and experience declines in well-being as reflected in heightened self-objectification and increased work tension. By examining these dynamics, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how emerging Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) can shape employee experiences and impact overall employee well-being.

Counterproductive work behaviours as a potential outcome of a masculinity contest culture

One of the significant challenges organizations faces is managing counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs). As stressed above, CWBs are characterized by their intentional nature, involving deliberate violations of organizational norms aimed at inflicting damage. These behaviours encompass direct aggression, such as physical and verbal abuse, deliberate errors, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal behaviours like absenteeism and tardiness. A key aspect of counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) is their *intentionality*: for an action to be considered a CWB, the employee must consciously choose to do something harmful. For example, sabotage or theft clearly falls under this category, whereas mistakes due to lack of skill or accidents do not (Spector & Fox, 2005). Motivations behind CWBs can vary, including personal grievances or dissatisfaction with organizational practices. Spector and Fox (2005) advanced the understanding of CWBs by categorizing these actions into two groups: those negatively affecting the organization as a whole and those impacting individuals within the workplace. Examples of CWBs that impact organizations include taking extended breaks, engaging in personal tasks during work hours, and deliberately working at a reduced pace, leading to productivity gaps. Individual directed work behaviours include verbal abuse, spreading false rumors, and withholding important information from colleagues (Barbaranelli et al., 2013). A well-known case that exemplifies these behaviours is

the legal dispute between Waymo and Uber, which gained public attention in 2017. In fact, Waymo, which is a self-driving car technology company, alleged that Uber, the famous car ride-sharing technology company, had stolen confidential information related to self-driving car technology. This case focused on Anthony Levandowski, a former Waymo engineer who founded a company later acquired by Uber. The dispute highlighted issues of intellectual property theft, illustrating how certain types of CWBs, such as sabotage and theft, can have significant consequences for organizations involved (Minor, 2017). In light of the facts and the nature of such counterproductive behaviours, a comprehensive understanding of CWBs and their underlying motivations is essential for organizations aiming to mitigate the detrimental effects these behaviours can have on both performance and employee well-being.

Self-objectification and work tension as potential underlying mechanisms

In the present study, I advance that the effect of MCC on employee's tendencies to act CWB may be driven by the consideration that they are instruments-like (that is, their self-objectification) and by the intrusiveness of the work-related issue in the personal life (that is, work tension). Objectification, a specific form of dehumanization, consists of perceiving individuals less than fully human and reducing them to mere instruments for utilitarian purposes (Volpato & Andrighetto, 2015; Nussbaum, 1995). The phenomenon has been extensively examined within the context of gender relations, particularly in relation to the sexual objectification of women (Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014), as well as its contribution to reinforcing violent power hierarchies (Pacilli et al., 2017). In recent years, objectification has emerged as a salient issue in organizational settings, where its role in worker dehumanization and well-being is increasingly acknowledged (Baldissarri et al., 2022; 2023). In systems where utility and efficiency are prioritized—such as capitalist economies—individuals are often reduced to their functional value, with minimal consideration for their inherent human worth. This dehumanizing process, wherein people are perceived as either useful or expendable tools within an organization, has become pervasive in many work environments (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2017; Rochford et al., 2017). Consequently, the focus

shifts from recognizing individuals as persons to viewing them solely in terms of their capacity to meet organizational objectives. At the core of objectification lies a process that strips individuals of the qualities that define their humanity, a phenomenon articulated through several dimensions (Nussbaum, 1995; Holland & Haslam, 2013). One such dimension consists of reducing people to instruments, thus considering them to interchangeable entities valued solely for their utility, while another dimension relates to the denial of core human traits such as agency, emotional capacity, and subjectivity.

In organizational settings, objectification often manifests through hierarchical dynamics, where power imbalances enable those in higher-status positions to dehumanize subordinates, treating them as mere tools to achieve personal or organizational goals (Landau et al., 2012). Such behavior erodes workers' dignity and confines their contributions to narrowly defined tasks. This is especially evident in job roles that foster objectification through repetitive, fragmented tasks with little autonomy or creative input. As Andrighetto, Baldissarri, and Volpato (2017) pointed out, job characterized by monotony and external control, such as factory jobs, often reduces employees to mechanical instruments rather than autonomous individuals. Objectification, distinct from mechanistic dehumanization—which portrays individuals as cold or emotionally detached without denying their rational abilities (Haslam, 2006)—goes further by stripping individuals of both human nature and human traits, leaving them devoid of self-determination (Baldissarri et al., 2017). Recent studies have highlighted the importance of contextual elements, such as organizational culture, in influencing employees' tendency to self-objectify (Auzoult & Personnez, 2016). Specifically, organizational environments that emphasize certain values and norms can either exacerbate or mitigate this tendency. Teresi et al. (2022) examined ethical climate as a key factor shaping organizational outcomes, defined as the shared perception of how ethical issues are handled within an organization (Victor & Cullen, 1987). Their study found that a friendship ethical climate enhanced organizational identification and reduced self-objectification, whereas a self-interest

climate had the opposite effect, weakening identification and increasing self-objectification among employees.

However, in this study, I also hypothesized that the effect of Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) on employees' counterproductive work behaviours (CWB) may depend on the intrusiveness of work-related issues into personal life, specifically *work tension*. Work tension is defined as the “psychological reaction of employees to disturbances in the perceived work environment” (Chisholm et al., 1983, p. 387). Furthermore, Lazarus (1996) demonstrated that the experience of work tension tends to coexist with the stress employees feel in the workplace. Undoubtedly, work can be a highly stressful experience, and this stress often stems from “job demands” that negatively impact employees' work-life balance (Schermerhorn et al., 2011). Reflecting on the concept of job demands, Schermerhorn et al. (2011) identified a range of workplace stressors, including role ambiguities, interpersonal problems, and notably, task demands, where employees feel overwhelmed by excessive responsibilities or, conversely, underutilized due to insufficient demands. Indeed, work tension is also described by researchers as a “pressure experienced by employees in response to work demands” (House & Rizzo, 1972a), which can lead to high levels of stress or even workplace anxiety. It has been shown that work tension affects not only psychological well-being but also includes certain psychosomatic symptoms associated with work-related strain, which can, therefore, impact physical health, resulting, for example, in increased fatigue (see also Fields, 2002; House & Rizzo, 1972b). This work tension also encompasses the extent to which thoughts about work keep employees awake at night and it is negatively correlated with organizational indicators, such as job satisfaction and commitment (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

The present research

Building on the above premises, this research aims to investigate the impact of organizational culture, that is Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) on various work outcomes,

including self-objectification work tension and counterproductive work behaviours.¹ I aimed to investigate the direct relationship between Masculinity Contest Culture and work outcomes, focusing on how perceptions of a workplace embodying Masculinity Contest Culture might be associated with increased self-objectification (*Hp1*) and heightened work tension (*Hp2*). Furthermore, this study aims to delve deeper into the relationship between the perception of the workplace as embodying a Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs), hypothesizing that MCC is associated with a greater propensity for CWBs (*Hp3*). Given that environments characterized by a competitive and male-dominated culture may exacerbate feelings of objectification and work tension, this research aims to elucidate the extent to which these factors mediate the association between MCC and CWBs. In light of these premises, I also hypothesized that the perception of work as a MCC will be associated with an increased tendency to engage in counterproductive work behaviours, with self-objectification serving as a parallel mediator. Additionally, work tension is hypothesized to further mediate this relationship as a parallel mediator (*Hp4*). By examining these mediating mechanisms, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how a masculinity-oriented work culture influences employees' engagement in counterproductive behaviours. To test these hypotheses, a correlational study was conducted with employees from the banking and insurance sectors, both of which are identified as environments potentially characterized by high Masculinity Contest Culture dynamics.

Method

Participants and Design

In January 2023, three hundred thirty-six employees in the banking and insurance sector in Italy voluntarily completed a survey distributed via Qualtrics using the snowball technique (161 females, 164 males, 1 non-binary, 10 unknown; $M = 38.93$; $SD = 10.58$). Seven participants had a

¹ This study is part of a broader data collection in which additional variables were considered. For the sake of clarity, the supplementary materials include the additional measures not considered for the purposes of this research, along with the analyses conducted and their results.

middle school diploma, 119 had a high-school degree, 162 graduated, 43 had a post-lauream degree, and 5 did not report their education. Regarding the job contract, 25 individuals had a fixed-term contract with the company, 276 had a permanent contract, 9 had a collaboration contract, 4 were in internships, 15 indicated "other" as their type of contract and 7 did not provide data. Participants were made aware of any sensitive aspects of the study before participating in the experiment, in accordance with the ethical principles of the Helsinki Declaration of 1964 (e.g., procedure, affiliations of the scholars). They were also aware of their right to withdraw from the study or withdraw their consent to participate at any moment during the investigation. They then demonstrated that they correctly understood the guidelines, agreed to take part, and began completing the survey.

Measures

First of all, I measured the perception of masculinity in the work context making use of nine items selected from *Masculinity Contest Culture Scale* (Glick et al., 2018; “In my work environment”: e.g., “Admitting you don’t know the answer looks weak”; “To succeed you can’t let family interfere with work”; $\alpha = .78$). The answers were rated on a scale of 1 to 5 (ranging from 1 = Not at all true of my work environment) to 7 = Entirely true of my work environment).

After that, I assessed *Counterproductive Work behaviours* using an adaptation of the Italian version (Barbaranelli et al., 2013) of the original checklist by Spector et al. (2006). For the scope of the present research, I selected 18 of the original items. Participants were asked to indicate how often they had done each of the behaviours in their job (e.g., ‘I deliberately performed my work incorrectly’, or ‘I left work earlier than scheduled without authorization’). Response choices were presented in a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = “never” to 7 = “frequently”; $\alpha = .90$).

Participants were then asked to complete a measure of *self-objectification* by adopting an eight-item scale developed by Baldissarri et al. (2017) on self-perception as being instrument like

(vs. human like). Participants were asked to rate how similar they thought they were to four instrument-related items (e.g., instrument, tool) and four human-related items (1 = not at all; 7 = greatly; e.g. “a person”, “human being”). The human related items were reversed in order to combine them into a single self-objectification measure ($\alpha = .85$).

Then I assessed a measure of *work tension* that is a strain reaction to working pressures. I asked participants to fill out the seven-items Work Tension Scale by House and Rizzo (1972; e.g. “I work under a great deal of tension”; “I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job”; $\alpha = .86$). Participants have provided their answers on a 7-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = never to 7 = always).

Results

Table 2 shows the correlations among the main variables of the study.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, correlations.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1.Masculinity	3.54	1.12	--			
2. Self-objectification	3.09	1.31	.378***	--		
3. Work Tension	4.05	1.33	.383***	.424***	--	
4. CWB	1.79	.80	.229***	.250***	.181**	--

Note. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

As shown in **Table 2**, the hypotheses regarding the relationship between the main variables were supported by the correlation analysis. Specifically, MCC was positively associated with self-objectification (*Hp1*) and greater work tension (*Hp2*). This pattern suggests that a greater perception of masculinity context is related to a more negative overall employee experience. Interestingly, the perception of masculinity context was also positively associated with the tendency to engage in counterproductive work behaviours (*Hp3*). This finding suggests that environments emphasizing competition and dominance may foster conditions that increase the likelihood of counterproductive behaviours among employees.

Mediation model

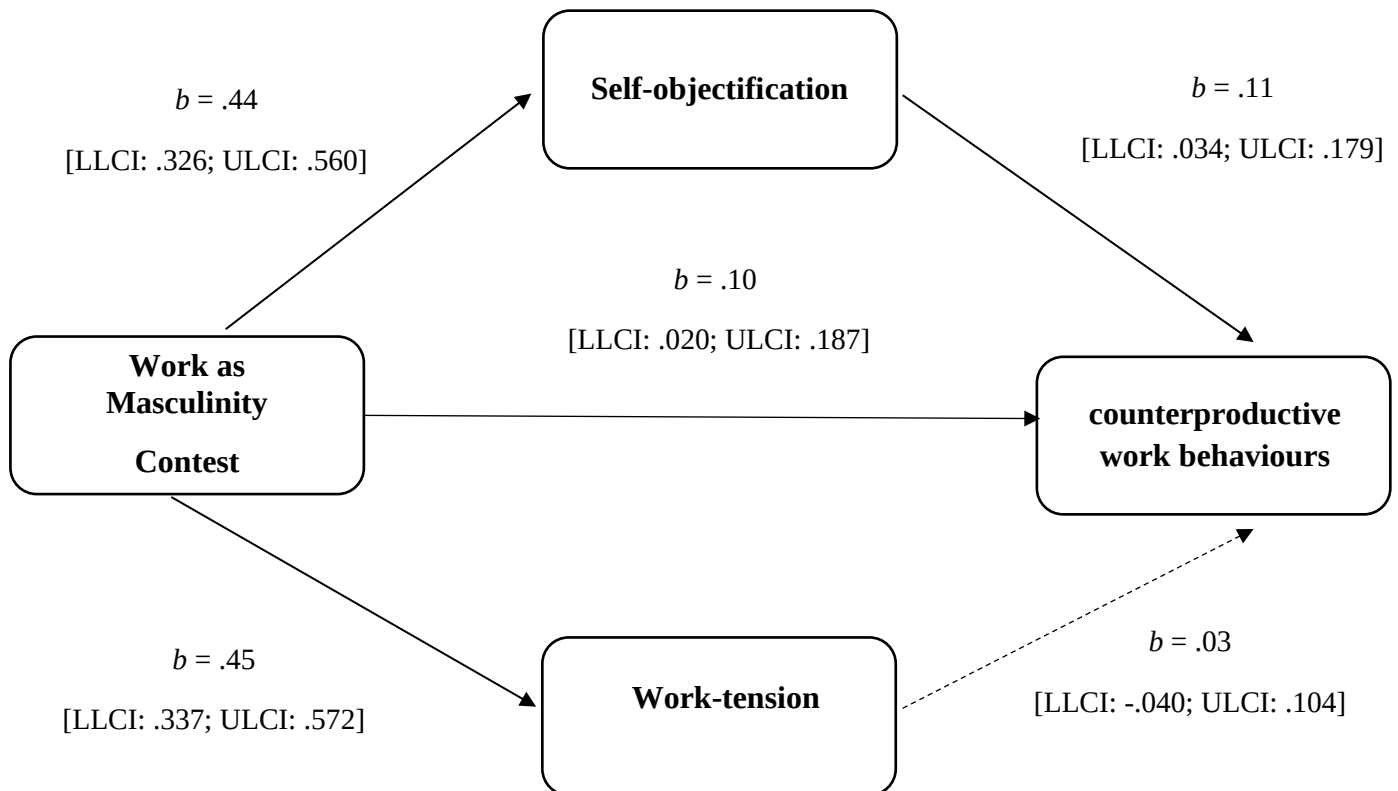
In order to test the mediation hypothesis (*Hp4*), we ran a parallel mediation model, by using the PROCESS method in SPSS by Hayes (2013). We employed Model 4 that allow us to examine multiple mediators in the parallel mediation model. We modelled the perception of work as masculinity contest (MCC) as a predictor, self-objectification as a first order mediator, work tension as a second-order mediator parallel mediator and the tendency to display counterproductive work

behaviours as a criterion (See **Figure 1**). The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .08$; $F(3,332) = 10.40$, $p < .001$. Results showed that the perception of work as masculinity contest was associated with self-objectification ($b = .44$, $t(7.46)$; LLCI = .326; ULCI = .560) and with the work tension ($b = .45$; $t(7.58)$; LLCI = .337; ULCI = .572). Furthermore, self-objectification was associated with the tendency of display counterproductive work behaviours ($b = .11$; $t(2.90)$; LLCI = .034; ULCI = .179). However, the work tension was not associated with the tendency to display counterproductive work behaviours ($b = .03$; $t(.876)$; LLCI = -.040; ULCI = .104). When considering the mediators, the direct effect appears significant ($b = .10$; SE = .04; $t(2.44)$; LLCI = .020; ULCI = .187).

Related to the indirect effects, we observed that the perception of work as masculinity contest increased the tendency to display counterproductive work behaviours (*Indirect effect* = .05, SE = .02; LLCI = .015; ULCI = .084) considering self-objectification as a parallel mediator. When considering the work tension as a parallel mediator, the indirect effect was not significant (*Indirect effect* = .01; SE = .02; LLCI = -.018; ULCI = .051). This highlights how the effect of the perception of work as masculinity contest on the tendency to display counterproductive work behaviours can be explained through the perception of self as an object, rather than the perception of work tension.

Figure 1.

Mediation model in which the effects of work as masculinity contest tendency to display counterproductive work behaviours are mediated by self-objectification and (not by) work tension.



Indirect effect _{self-objectification} = .05, SE = .02; LLCI = .015; ULCI = .084

Indirect effect _{Work-tension} = .01; SE = .02; LLCI = -.018; ULCI = .051

Discussion

In this study, I examined how perceiving the work environment as a "masculinity contest"—characterized by competition and dominance—impacts various organizational and individual outcomes among employees in the banking and insurance sectors. Specifically, the study aimed to investigate how this climate perception is linked to adverse effects, such as increased self-objectification at work and heightened work tension, both of which contribute to a greater propensity for counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs).

A key finding reveals that Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) is linked to two important outcomes: increased self-objectification—where individuals begin to view themselves primarily as objects valued for their productivity—and heightened work tension, which reflects employees' reactions to stressors in a competitive work environment. These results align with a growing body of research linking hegemonic masculine norms in organizational contexts to negative employee experiences. Studies have shown that workplaces shaped by masculine ideals lead to declines in psychological well-being, including reduced work-life balance, lack of psychological safety within teams, elevated stress levels, and increased intentions to leave the job (Berdahl et al., 2018; Glick et al., 2018; Matos et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the association highlighted by the relationship between Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) underscores a crucial consideration for organizations aiming to foster a healthy work environment that supports employee well-being. Given that MCC is linked to aggressive behaviours and competition rooted in masculine norms, such an environment may contribute to an increase in CWBs, as the findings suggest. In fact, employees may engage in actions that not only undermine the organization but also harm the well-being of their colleagues.

A deeper analysis of the relationship between MCC and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs), using mediation analysis, suggests that perceiving the work environment as a Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) leads to greater self-objectification, which in turn increases the likelihood of engaging in CWBs. Central to this dynamic is the role of self-objectification, which can be understood by considering the masculine characteristics embodied by masculinity contest organizations. In such work environments, employees, driven by the need to compete against one another, often start to objectify themselves, prioritizing performance and productivity at the expense of their personal attributes. As noted by Andrighetto et al. (2017), objectification reduces workers to mere functions, stripping them of their intrinsic humanity. Moreover, when companies view employees solely as tools for achieving objectives, they anchor their work motivations in competitiveness, ultimately negatively affecting the overall work environment. Furthermore, the research aimed to further explore the role of work tension in the relationship between Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs). However, while the connection between MCC and work tension is significant, the relationship between work tension and CWBs does not appear to be significant. Consequently, work tension does not significantly mediate the relationship between MCC and CWBs. Indeed, the observed relationship can be explained by reflecting on work tension and the pressures exerted on workers who operate within this context of embodied masculinity. These continuous pressures can manifest as stress, evolving into work tension, as individuals are constantly faced with the necessity to meet demanding expectations and demonstrate their worth, thereby validating their productivity. Early evidence in the study of Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) suggests that the pressure to avoid showing weakness, to exhibit strength, and to prioritize work—alongside the inherent competitiveness—can exacerbate the negative aspects and harmful consequences of such climates, potentially leading to burnout and heightened stress levels (Glick et al., 2018). However, the exploration of the relationship between work tension and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) reveals that work tension does not have a significant impact on CWBs. This may be explained by the fact that

not all forms of stress, including the work tension we examined, necessarily lead to counterproductive behaviours in the workplace. In fact, work tension is more closely associated with the physical and psychological strain related to job demands and the intrusion of work into personal life. This type of strain may not necessarily lead to counterproductive behaviours; in fact, it could even motivate employees to work harder in such environments, potentially driving them to increase their efforts as they respond to heightened demands.

These findings underscore the necessity of reflecting on the complexity of workplace variables and dynamics, particularly concerning the type of organizational climate in play, which can influence worker responses. Ultimately, it is essential to examine organizational culture, as the behavioural models exhibited by employees and the subtle implicit norms can significantly influence employee well-being, which, as demonstrated, can impact organizational outcomes and increase the costs associated with counterproductive behaviours.

Practical Implications. This study provides important insights for practitioners aiming to improve workplace dynamics. It highlights the urgent need for organizations to recognize and address the presence of Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) and its harmful effects. By understanding how this climate affects key aspects of workplace interactions, organizations can implement targeted strategies to address its potential negative impacts on various dimensions of working life, including perceived work tension and self-objectification, while also seeking to mitigate the likelihood of counterproductive work behaviours. From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the urgency for organizations to address the dynamics associated with Masculinity Contest Culture in their workplaces. In fact, it is crucial to foster an environment that prioritizes cooperation over competition, as well as the expression of doubts and a better work-life balance. This would not only reduce the burden of work at home but also alleviate work tension. Companies should implement training programs aimed at raising awareness among employees about the negative effects of competitive culture, particularly after recognizing the presence of such

an atmosphere within the organization and the detrimental effects of living in a zero-sum competition mindset that constantly seeks success.

In a similar vein, when examining the various forms of counterproductive work behaviours, it is essential to develop policies that also promote prosocial behaviours among employees. By investing in initiatives that encourage employees to engage in prosocial behaviours, build trust among colleagues, and alleviate the need to constantly demonstrate strength or outshine others, organizations can foster positive outcomes reflected in improved employee well-being indicators. Such efforts can help reduce feelings of self-objectification, alleviate stress, and ultimately prevent counterproductive work behaviours that not only harm individual colleagues but also negatively impact the organization as a whole.

Limitations and Future Directions. This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged and addressed in future research. First, the correlational design does not allow for causal inferences regarding the relationship we highlighted. To build upon the findings of this research, future studies should explore the proposed causal links using other methodological approaches. Additionally, moving beyond correlational designs to employ longitudinal or experimental methods would provide deeper insights into the relationships between organizational culture and workplace behaviours. For instance, researchers could develop experimental scenarios involving workplace misconduct—beginning with less severe infractions, such as counterproductive behaviours—and examine how organizational culture influences the perception and evaluation of these specific infractions. Another significant limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported data. Self-administered questionnaires can introduce biases, such as social desirability. To overcome these challenges, future research could incorporate multiple perspectives by collecting data from both supervisors and employees, thus gaining a more comprehensive view of the organizational climate. Furthermore, the findings may lack generalizability beyond the banking and insurance sectors. While these industries certainly embody masculine norms, the influence of

organizational culture on behaviour and perceptions may vary across different sectors. Future studies should investigate these dynamics in a broader range of organizational contexts and sectors. It would also be beneficial to examine specific aspects of masculinity as they relate to the type of work performed in various industries and how these aspects reflect on organizational outcomes. Overall, this research emphasizes the importance of understanding workplace dynamics through the lens of Masculinity Contest Culture, particularly in relation to managing employee attitudes and behaviours, including counterproductive work behaviours.

Chapter 3

Study 2

Exploring whistleblowing in a masculine landscape: a first look at moral emotions towards whistleblowers and their global impressions

Introduction

In recent years, the relationship between workplace environments and patriarchal culture has garnered significant attention from researchers (Berdahl et al., 2018; Cooper, 2014; Glick et al., 2018). In fact, recent research suggests that ideals such as toughness and strength have become increasingly the driving force behind corporate cultures (O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). These ideals represent only a fraction of masculinity-based values and can often evolve into what are known as *Masculinity Contest Cultures* (MCC; Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018). As stressed in the introduction, such cultures are characterized by norms, attitudes, and behaviours that valorize social dominance, emphasize the primacy of work over all other life aspects, and celebrate displays of strength and invulnerability, ultimately promoting a *toxic* culture of competition among colleagues. Thus, organizations may legitimate these behaviours by aligning their management practices with traditional masculine standards, often without explicitly mentioning masculinity (Berdahl, 2018). A variety of negative consequences have been identified that affect employee perceptions as well as organizational behaviours. In fact, these cultures contribute to elevated stress levels and a greater likelihood of employees considering leaving the organization, alongside an increase in bullying and harassment incidents within workplaces (Glick, Berdahl, & Alonso, 2018; Rawski & Workman-Stark, 2018). *Study 1* indicates that employees in the banking and insurance sectors who view their work environment as embodying masculinity contest culture (MCC) are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviours, exhibit worse indicators of organizational and individual wellbeing (e.g. higher self-objectification and work tension). Additionally, pertinent to the discussion, research by Pacilli et al. (2023) explored the complex

dynamics surrounding whistleblowing, investigating perceptions of whistleblowers and demonstrating how social context significantly influences evaluations of those who report or refrain from reporting unethical behaviour. Their findings revealed that in situations marked by high personal relevance, whistleblowing tends to carry a negative connotation, with whistleblowers often receiving unfavourable assessments. This leads to a reduction in positive moral emotions and an increased likelihood of retaliation against them. Conversely, in contexts perceived as less personally relevant, participants' reactions—both in terms of moral emotions and avoidance tendencies—were generally more favourable toward whistleblowers. Building on these insights, the present study aims to explore the intersection between masculinity contest culture (MCC) and perceptions of whistleblowing within organizational contexts. Specifically, it will investigate how workplace environments featured by masculine norms—such as competition and dominance—shape perceptions of whistleblowers and the moral evaluations of individuals who choose to report misconduct. By examining the emotional and cognitive factors at play, this research seeks to shed light on the crucial role these elements have in shaping judgments of whistleblowers, particularly within competitive or masculinity-oriented workplace cultures.

Moral emotions and target's evaluations

This study seeks to provide a first examination of the complex interplay between organizational culture (MCC) and the evaluation and perception of the whistleblowing phenomenon. A pivotal role in this study is assigned to moral emotions and the overarching moral evaluation of individuals who either engage in, or abstain from, whistleblowing in response to ethical transgressions. Building upon the findings of Pacilli et al. (2023), this research supports the idea that moral emotions and global evaluation, in terms of perceived morality and competence, function as mediators in the relationship between whistleblowing and retaliatory actions against the whistleblowers. Moral emotions play a key role in guiding individuals towards ethical behaviour (Tangney et al., 2007) and are fundamental as they arise in response to conformity with or

violations of moral norms (Haidt, 2003). Haidt (2003) defines moral emotions as those "linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (p. 276), underscoring their importance as drivers of prosocial behaviour and deterrents against unethical actions (Kroll & Egan, 2004). Individual differences in the experience of moral emotions are likely to significantly influence actual moral behaviour in real-world contexts. To sum up, in this study, I focused on moral emotions and evaluations of the target as key mediators of the hypothesized behavioural patterns.

Tendency to avoid the target

In this study, I also examined whether the moral emotions and the evaluations of a whistleblower can further spill over the individual's tendency to keep them at a distance. That is, I examined whether individual's reactions to whistleblowing go over and beyond the cognitive and affective reactions towards them, and also determine the behavioural tendencies to avoid them. This would be in line with established research showing the tendency to avoid a target as a form of indirect retaliation (Brambilla et al., 2013; Pacilli et al., 2023; Pagliaro et al., 2013). In particular, these studies showed that avoidance tendencies are particularly related to moral reactions toward a target. Retaliation typically arises in response to perceived organizational unfairness and aims to punish those believed responsible for the injustice (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Unlike general aggression, which involves intentional harm, retaliation is driven by a distinct motive: the intention to restore equity. The form of retaliation we considered is based on individuals' tendencies to (approach or) avoid the target.

The present research

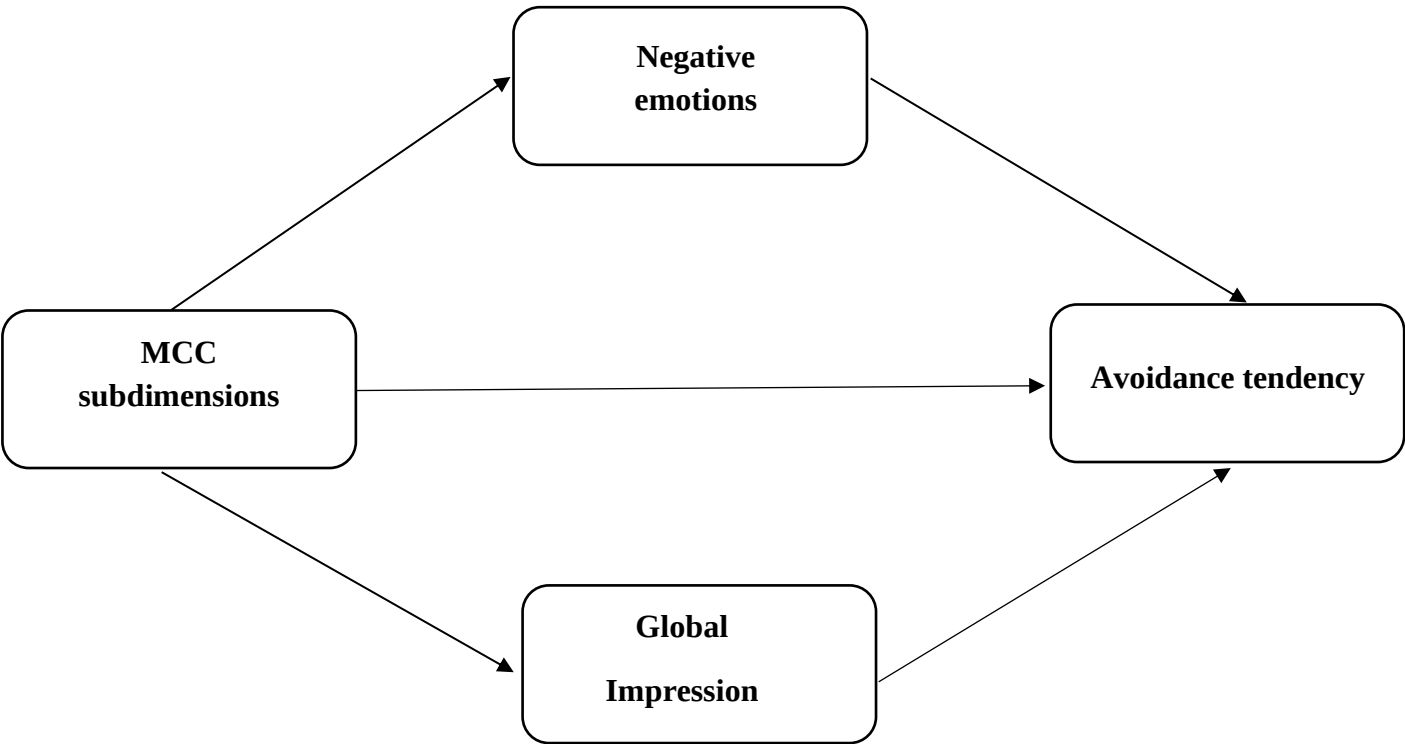
In this study, I sought to explore the relationship between organizational culture—specifically, Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC)—and the whistleblowing phenomenon within

organizational settings.² My primary focus was to investigate social perceptions, including overall impressions and emotional responses, in relation to a case of whistleblowing alongside the resulting individuals' behavioural tendencies. Moreover, I sought to explore whether moral emotions would play a mediating role in shaping the relationship between the decision to report misconduct and subsequent behavioural intentions toward the target, that is retaliation against the target. Based on this reasoning and the preliminary results from *Study 1*, I expected that perceiving the workplace as a masculinity contest would be related to a worse evaluation of a whistleblower—resulting in stronger negative emotions toward the target, a more negative impression of the target, and a greater tendency to avoid the target. In this regard, considering the masculinity contest culture within the work context, I cautiously explored its subdimensions, focusing on the potential relationships between the different subdimensions and the evaluation of the whistleblower (*Hp1*). I also expected that negative moral emotions elicited by the target would be negative related to moral impressions of the target and positive related to intentions of indirect retaliation (*Hp2*). In light of this rationale and previous research (e.g., Pacilli et al., 2023; Brambilla et al., 2013; Pagliaro et al., 2013), I hypothesized a mediational model in which the subdimensions of the MCC would be related to the tendency to avoid a whistleblower (as the dependent variable) via cognitive (i.e., impressions) and affective (i.e., emotions) reactions as parallel mediators toward the target (see **Figure 2**). This model would allow us to disentangle whether the hypothesized effect of the perception of the workplace as a Masculinity Contest on the tendency to avoid a whistleblower is driven by emotional or cognitive reactions, or both (*Hp3*).

² This study is part of a broader data collection in which additional variables were considered. For the sake of clarity, the supplementary materials include the additional measures not considered for the purposes of this research, along with the analyses conducted and their results.

Figure 2.

Mediation model in which the effects of MCC subdimensions on avoidance tendency are mediated by the negative emotions towards the target and the global impression of the target.



Method

Participants and Design

In Italy in 2023, two hundred and twelve participants voluntarily answered to a survey disseminated via Qualtrics using the snowball method (146 females, 58 males, 8 unknowns; $M = 39.75$; $SD = 13.10$). Among these, 5 have a middle school diploma, 55 have a high school diploma, 124 a bachelor's degree, and 28 a post-bachelor's degree. Considering the employment contract, 59

people had a fixed-term contract with the organization, 118 had a permanent one, 14 had a collaboration contract, 10 were in internships, and 11 did not provide any information about their employment status. According to the ethical guidelines of the Helsinki Declaration of 1964, participants were informed of any sensitive parts of the study (such as the procedure and affiliations of the researchers) before taking part in the experiment. They were also informed about their right to revoke consent at any time during the procedure or to stop participating altogether. They next confirmed that they had a clear understanding of the rules, indicated their willingness to participate, and started filling out the survey.

Procedure. Participants were asked to think about their workplace and complete the *Masculinity Contest Culture Scale* (Glick et al., 2018; “In my work environment”: e.g., “Admitting you don’t know the answer looks weak”; “To get ahead you need to be able to work long hours”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$). This allowed us to assess their global perception of masculinity in their own workplace. Beside the global index, the scale is formed by 4 dimensions: show no weakness (e.g. avoiding the conveying of hesitations; 5 item, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$), strength and stamina (e.g. emphasizing physical strength and endurance; 5 items; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$), put work first (e.g. work long hours; 5 items; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$), dog-eat dog competition (e.g. highly competitive climate; 5 items; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$). Responses were scored from 1 (= Not at all true of my work environment) to 7 (= Entirely true of my work environment).

At this stage, participants were instructed to read a scenario and imagine themselves going through a regular workday when they learn that someone in the organization has violated one of its regulations. After this event, Andrea, a coworker in their organization who disapproves the wrongdoing, decided to blow the whistle and to inform management right away, and they took immediate action.

After reading the scenario, participants were required to indicate whether Andrea decided to report the misconduct or not, or if they could not recall. Two hundred and twelve participants

remembered the scenario's details accurately. I deleted those who failed the manipulation check from the subsequent analyses: nevertheless, we also performed the analyses on the whole sample, and we didn't find any significant differences in the patterns.

I then assessed *moral emotions* towards the target by asking participants to indicate the degree to which Andrea's behaviour, who disapproved of the conduct depicted in the scenario, elicited nine moral emotions (admiration, respect, sympathy, trust, disgust, disapproval, anger, outrage, and annoyance (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017 and Cuddy et al., 2007; Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$) on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). After reversing, when necessary, higher scores indicated more negative moral emotions.

Then, I assessed the *impression* about the target. I asked participants to evaluate Andrea's morality and competence by reporting how much they thought Andrea was trustworthy, honest, sincere (morality: Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), competent, intelligent, capable (competence: Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1= not at all so to 7= very much so (Leach et al., 2007). Since the preliminary analysis showed a strong correlation between the two evaluations, making it useless to consider them as distinct in this study, we decided to aggregate these evaluations in a single index of global evaluation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

Intention to avoid the target was measured with nine items adapted from Brambilla et al. (2013; e.g., "I would avoid Andrea," "I would try to stay away from Andrea"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). After reversing, when necessary, higher scores indicated higher intention to avoid the whistleblower.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Show no weakness	2.87	1.32	--									
2.Strenght and stamina	3.03	1.34	.507***	--								
3.Put work first	3.88	1.31	.616***	.545***	--							
4.Dog eat dog	3.86	1.47	.596***	.478***	.620***	--						
5.MCC	3.41	1.11	.827***	.769***	.845***	.833***	--					
6. Moral emotions	3.28	1.39	.074	.186**	-.016	.059	.093	--				
7.Moral evaluation	4.83	1.43	-.107	-.067	.027	.033	-.033	-.578***	--			
8.Competence	4.10	1.25	-.001	.039	.136*	.090	.081	-.496***	.668***	--		

9.Global impression	4.47	1.22	-.063	-.019	.085	.065	.022	-.591***	.925***	.901***	--	
10.Tendency to avoid	2.77	1.29	.111	.170*	.007	.043	.100	.702***	-.633***	-.531***	-.641***	--

Note. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Results

Table 3 presents the correlations among the main variables of the study. The study hypothesized that perceiving the workplace as a masculinity contest would correlate with more negative evaluations of whistleblowers—manifesting as stronger negative emotions toward them, a more negative overall impression, and a greater tendency to avoid them. We observed correlations both with competence and morality evaluations, but as previously noted, given the strong correlation between these dimensions, we are considering a single index of global evaluation, referred to as global impression. Results indicated no significant relationships between overall MCC and negative moral emotions, global impressions of the whistleblower, or the tendency to avoid them. However, analysis of the MCC subdimensions revealed a positive association between the strength and stamina dimension and both negative moral emotions elicited by the whistleblower and indirect retaliation intentions, specifically in the form of avoidance tendency. Notably, this subdimension was not related to the global impression of the target (*Hp1*). Additionally, it was hypothesized that negative moral emotions toward the whistleblower would correlate negatively with global impressions of the whistleblower and positively with avoidance tendency. The results supported this hypothesis, showing significant correlations between negative moral emotions and both a more negative global impression of the whistleblower and a greater likelihood of avoiding them (*Hp2*).

Mediation analysis

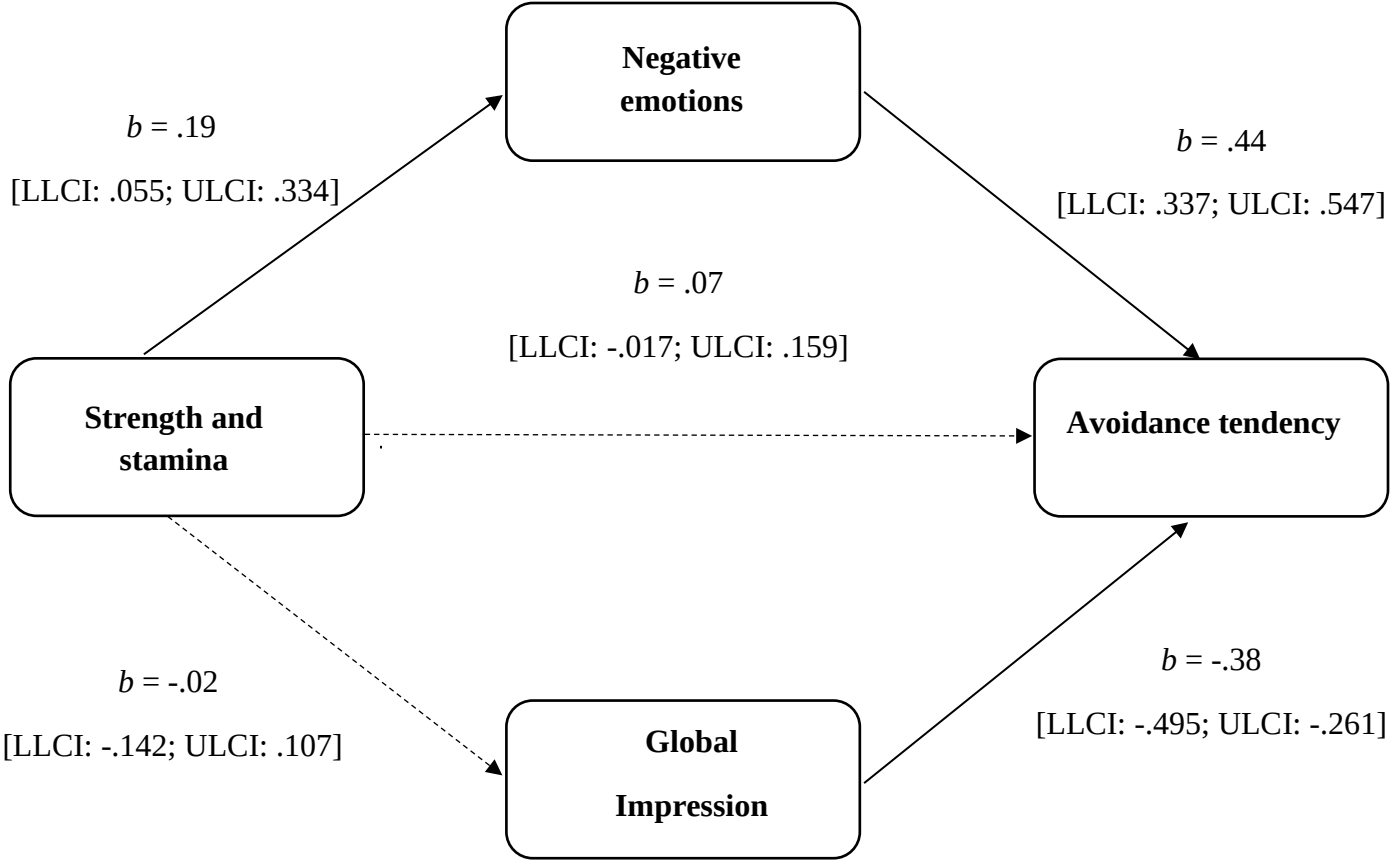
Since the correlation analysis showed that the *strength and stamina* sub-dimension was the only dimension significantly associated with the proposed mediators and the dependent variable, I ran a mediation model using this dimension as predictor (see **Figure 2**, *Hp3*). I proceeded to test our mediation hypothesis using the PROCESS method in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). Specifically, I employed Model 4 to explore multiple mediators within a parallel mediation. In this model, I modelled *strength and stamina* subdimension of the Masculinity Contest Culture as the predictor, moral

emotions acted as a first mediator, the global impression of the target as a second parallel mediator, tendency to avoid the target was modelled as the criterion variable (see **Figure 3**). In considering the potential effect of gender on our variables, we included gender as a covariate in our models; however, it did not exert a significant effect.

The overall equation was significant ($R^2 = .58$; $F(3,208) = 94.34$, $p < .001$). Results showed that the strength and stamina subdimension was associated with negative moral emotions elicited by the target ($b = .19$, $t(2.75)$; LLCI = .055, ULCI = .334). The relationship between strength and stamina subdimension and the global impression of the target ($b = -.02$; $t(-.279)$ LLCI = -.142; ULCI = .107) appears not significant. Furthermore, moral emotions towards the target was associated with higher tendency of avoidance of the target ($b = .44$, $t(8.32)$, LLCI = .337; ULCI = .547), and the impression of the target was associated with higher tendency of avoidance of the target ($b = -.38$; $t(-6.36)$, LLCI = -.495; ULCI = -.261). When considering the mediators, the direct effect appears not significant ($b = .07$; $t(1.59)$; LLCI = -.017; ULCI = .159). Related to the indirect effects, we observed that the strength and stamina dimension increased the avoidance of the target (*Indirect effect* = .08, SE = .04; LLCI = .021; ULCI = .164) considering moral emotions as a parallel mediator. When considering the global impression as a parallel mediator, the indirect effect was not significant (*Indirect effect* = .01; SE = .026; LLCI = -.050; ULCI = .053). This highlights how the effect of strength and stamina on tendency of avoidance can be explained through emotional aspects, that is the mediation of moral emotions.

Figure 3.

Mediation model in which the effects of strength and stamina on avoidance tendency are mediated by the negative emotions towards the target and (not by) global impression of the target.



Indirect effect $_{moral\ emotions} = .08$, SE = .04; LLCI = .021; ULCI = .164]

Indirect effect $_{global\ impression} = .01$; SE = .02; LLCI = -.050; ULCI = .053]

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between masculinity contest culture (MCC) and the perception of whistleblowing in organizational contexts. Specifically, it aimed to explore whether work environments characterized by masculine norms—such as competition, dominance, and strength (Berdahl et al., 2018)—is related to worse perception and evaluation of individuals who choose to report unethical behaviour. By examining both emotional and cognitive factors, the research sheds light on the critical role these elements play in shaping judgments of whistleblowers, particularly in workplace cultures oriented toward masculinity.

One of the primary aims of this research was to demonstrate a potential link between perceiving the workplace as a masculinity contest and the evaluations of whistleblowers, specifically in terms of stronger negative moral emotions, a less favourable overall impression, and a greater tendency to avoid them. However, no significant associations were found between overall MCC and negative emotions, moral impression, or the tendency to avoid whistleblowers. Interestingly, the exploratory analyses of the MCC subdimensions revealed that the *strength and stamina* dimension was strongly correlated with negative moral emotions and the tendency to avoid the target, but not with the overall impression of the target.

To further investigate this relationship, the study specifically examined moral emotions and global impressions as mediators between MCC and avoidance behaviour toward the target. As hypothesized, the findings suggest that moral emotions play a crucial mediating role in the relationship between MCC and the tendency to avoid whistleblowers, particularly concerning the *strength and stamina* subdimension of MCC. This indicates that individuals who perceive their work environment as a masculinity contest, especially one that emphasizes physical strength and endurance, are more likely to experience negative emotions toward whistleblowers and to avoid them. This result can be interpreted by recognizing that whistleblowers may be perceived not as moral agents, but as threats to the established workplace hierarchy. Employees who view their work

environment as embodying masculinity—particularly those who adhere to an ideology that emphasizes physical strength and endurance—may be more inclined to experience negative moral emotions towards whistleblowers. Such emotional responses could diminish their capacity of understanding those who report unethical behaviour, leading to hostility, expressed through more negative evaluations and a higher likelihood of retaliatory avoidance against those who choose to speak out. These dynamics are concerning, as they could foster a culture of silence within the organization, where potential whistleblowers may hesitate to report unethical conduct in the future due to fears of retaliation or social exclusion.

The 'dog-eat-dog' dimension of MCC did not emerge as a key factor, unlike strength and stamina subdimension, which form the core of the construct. This is noteworthy, given its focus on ruthless competition and constant vigilance among colleagues. One possible explanation for the findings could be the normalization of highly competitive behaviours in environments characterized by intense competition. In such contexts, this dimension may not be particularly distinctive in shaping reactions to whistleblowing, as employees might perceive competitiveness as a standard part of workplace dynamics. Additionally, the expectation to prioritize individual success may have overshadowed broader organizational and ethical concerns. This focus on personal achievement could lead employees to view whistleblowing as less relevant or even disruptive to their own goals, thereby diminishing its perceived importance within the workplace.

However, upon further examination of the mediation model, it appears that the relationship between masculinity contest culture (MCC) and avoidance behaviour is not mediated by global moral impressions of the whistleblower. Instead, emotional reactions seem to be the primary driver of this effect. This may be because moral emotions often act as an immediate filter in emotionally charged situations, triggering quick behavioural responses like avoidance. Cognitive evaluations, on the other hand, may take longer to develop and solidify compared to these more immediate emotional reactions. Furthermore, strength and stamina sub-dimension play a crucial role in shaping how people perceive and evaluate whistleblowers. This raises the question of how physical strength

is often associated with power. In fact, the act of whistleblowing, by challenging the status quo, is seen as a threat to established hierarchies and power structures. This perception may lead to negative evaluations and stigmatization of whistleblowers within organizations.

A critical factor in interpreting these findings relates to the nature of the scenario used in the study. Because the scenario depicted organizational misconduct without specifying the exact infraction, participants may have envisioned a wide range of illicit activities, leading to varying interpretations of the severity and nature of the transgression. A violation perceived as severe, especially one with direct consequences for employees, might elicit stronger negative emotions toward the perpetrator and a more favourable view of the whistleblower. Conversely, a less serious violation could lessen the emotional response and perceived gravity of the act, thereby influencing the evaluation of whistleblowing. Moreover, the organizational environment, particularly its degree of masculinity, may further shape how such misconduct is interpreted. In highly competitive contexts, certain behaviors, even if technically violations, might be viewed as necessary for professional survival, altering perceptions of the whistleblowing act itself.

In conclusion, this study enhances the existing literature on organizational culture and gender norms by highlighting the negative impact of masculinity contest culture (MCC) on perceptions of whistleblowing. It further demonstrates that emotional reactions frequently serve as a critical element of this relationship.

Practical Implications. Recent studies have underscored the pivotal role of organizational culture in shaping workplace dynamics (Teresi et al., 2019; Willis et al., 2019). This culture significantly influences various organizational variables, including key indicators of employee well-being such as job satisfaction, stress levels, turnover intentions, self-objectification, and counterproductive behaviours (Auzoult & Personnaz, 2016; San Park & Hyun Kim, 2009; Teresi et al., 2024). Moreover, organizational culture acts as a foundational element that affects the interpretation of specific phenomena, such as whistleblowing. Whistleblowing is acknowledged as a complex issue where both individual and contextual factors can vary in their impact on the

evaluations made by those who decide to report misconduct (Chen, 2019). In many environments, particularly toxic ones, a culture of silence may prevail, leading to whistleblowing—often seen as a virtuous act—being viewed negatively when certain masculine traits, such as strength and stamina, dominate the workplace. Consequently, understanding how social pressures to conform to masculine ideals, combined with environments that reinforce these norms, can lead to detrimental outcomes for both employees and organizations is crucial for enhancing organizational dynamics. By focusing on climate, organizations can proactively prevent and manage critical issues like counterproductive behaviours. *Study 1* has noted that masculine environments is associated to unethical behaviour, especially counterproductive work behaviours. This climate may be a fertile ground where employees frequently hesitate to report misconduct due to fears of retaliation or social exclusion. From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study highlight the importance of challenging the influence of masculinity contest culture (MCC), in order to promote ethical behaviour and cultivate supportive environments where whistleblowing is encouraged rather than stigmatized. Creating a non-toxic environment is a primary aim for organizations seeking to empower their employees and establish an egalitarian framework in which individuals feel comfortable reporting misconduct. Such an environment not only positively influences employee experiences but also mitigates long-term costs associated with addressing illicit behaviours, including harassment and fraudulent activities.

In addition to monitoring workplace behaviours, human resource management can implement practices aimed at enhancing the organizational climate and managing whistleblowing processes transparently. This includes ensuring that employee complaints are heard and addressed while effectively disseminating a code of ethics throughout the organization (Heard & Miller, 2006). Additionally, managers should provide feedback on problem resolution, sharing it with employees across the company to foster a culture that values integrity and open expression of concerns and doubts (Miceli et al., 2009). This approach aims to overcome a toxic culture that encourages the constant display of strength and power. Indeed, cultivating an environment that

supports whistleblowers and combats the stigma associated with this practice could enhance and uphold the ethical standards of organizations, thereby protecting those who choose to report misconduct

Limitations and future directions.

Study 2 is not without its limitations. One limitation of this study includes the self-report nature of the measures. Also, a notable limitation is that participants were asked to imagine a fictitious scenario of reporting misconduct, rather than responding to a real-life situation. However, the use of vignettes or hypothetical scenarios is a well-established and increasingly common approach in whistleblowing research, as it offers a straightforward and controlled method to examine responses to complex social situations. This method has become a standard in the study of whistleblowing, with many studies either drawing on scenarios inspired by real-life events or utilizing fictional scenarios specifically designed to align with the study's objectives (Fischer & Gollwitzer, 2023). Moreover, this study exclusively examined scenarios in which individuals opted to report misconduct, thereby restricting participants' evaluations to whistleblowing cases. Future research should seek to manipulate the target's behaviour, investigating how organizational culture and the subdimensions of masculinity contest culture (MCC) influence perceptions and evaluations of individuals who either choose to report or refrain from reporting misconduct.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the discussion, the lack of specificity in the scenario—particularly regarding the type and severity of the organizational infraction considered illicit—may have influenced the moral emotions elicited and the evaluation. In particular, the absence of a precise definition of the misconduct represents a potential limitation of this study, as it introduces variability in the evaluation of whistleblowing and the associated moral emotions.

Furthermore, we did not manipulate any variables in this study, limiting our ability to draw causal inferences between the variables examined. In the next studies reported in this dissertation I aim to investigate these causal relationships more thoroughly by implementing an experimental design. Additionally, while I found a pattern linking masculinity contest culture (MCC), particularly

the *strength and stamina* dimension, to avoidance tendencies through both emotional and cognitive pathways, this study did not show evidence of cognitive mediation, specifically through the global evaluation of the target. Future research should further investigate these cognitive mechanisms, as understanding how specific subdimensions of MCC impact whistleblowing perceptions could offer more nuanced insights into the broader dynamics at play. Finally, this study represents an important first step in advancing our understanding of the interaction between masculinity contest culture and whistleblowing, specifically enhancing knowledge about how organizational culture shapes perceptions and behaviours related to reporting misconduct.

Chapter 4

Study 3

The Impact of Masculinity Contest Culture on Whistleblowing Evaluations: An Experimental Approach

Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, researchers have extensively focused on the dynamics related to whistleblowing, particularly exploring the underlying mechanisms that influence the evaluation and perception of the act, including moral emotions and moral evaluation of an individual who decided to report an illicit (see, for example, Brambilla, 2013; Pacilli et al., 2023). Furthermore, as shown in the literature, the decision to report misconduct is shaped by specific contextual factors (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Near & Miceli, 1996), such as peer support, organizational climate, and the threat of retaliation (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). This reinforces the idea that whistleblowing is deeply embedded in organizational dynamics and it is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the group, especially within workplace settings (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Near and Miceli, 1996). In fact, groups hold specific meanings and norms that shape individual decisions (Turner, 1991; see also Ellemers, Pagliaro, & van Nunspeet, 2023), affecting both the likelihood of reporting misconduct and the responses to such actions (Heger, 2014). As a result, scholars have increasingly recognized the need to study key situational factors, such as for instance the organizational climate, to better understand how an organizational culture can foster a sense of moral duty to safeguard its integrity (Miceli et al., 2008; Near & Miceli, 1996). In particular, the results of the exploratory analyses from Study 2 revealed an association between one subdimension of Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC)—specifically, the strength and stamina subdimension—and both moral emotions and the tendency to avoid the whistleblower. Further analysis showed that moral emotions play a crucial mediating role in the relationship between MCC—considering the *strength and stamina* subdimension of MCC— and the

avoidance of whistleblowers. However, the overall evaluation of the target did not mediate the relationship between MCC and avoidance tendencies, although the direct relationship between evaluation of the target and avoidance tendency was significant. Nonetheless, the hypothesis that MCC may influence whistleblowing evaluations is grounded in the notion that a masculine organizational climate—characterized by hyper-competitive dynamics among employees—could directly impact how the phenomenon of whistleblowing itself is perceived. This perception may, in turn, shape the subsequent behaviours, reactions, and evaluations it elicits, as these responses are ultimately rooted in this particular framing of whistleblowing within the organizational context.

Indeed, such MCC climate could significantly influence employees' reactions to whistleblowing, highlighting the importance for organizations to understand the potential consequences of masculine environments. Neglecting whistleblower reports or mishandling their evaluations can lead to long-term costs for organizations, including the persistence of counterproductive behaviours (Miceli et al., 2008). Moreover, cultivating a supportive and ethical climate is essential for effectively handling incidents of financial fraud, harassment, or bullying (Murphy & Dacin, 2011; Robotham & Cortina, 2021; Rubino et al., 2018). Building on my *Study 2*, which first identified relationships between perceived masculinity and reactions to whistleblowing, this chapter employs an experimental approach to further examine the potential causal impact of a masculine climate on whistleblowing evaluations. Specifically, this study investigates how moral emotions and moral evaluations of the target influence participants' reactions, with particular attention to their tendency to avoid both individuals who report misconduct and those who refrain from doing so. This approach extends beyond the previous study, which focused solely on responses to those who reported misconduct. Additionally, in this study, we sought to further explore the effect of an organizational culture marked by MCC on perceptions of whistleblowing. To this end, we compared the effects of an MCC environment with those of a non-masculine

context—created specifically for the study—to assess how each context shapes whistleblowing evaluations.

I anticipate that participants in a non-masculine context which promotes values such as collaboration, and work-life balance, will evaluate whistleblowers more favourably than those in a masculine context. In contrast, I expect that masculine norms—such as emotional suppression, the prioritization of work over personal life, and an emphasis on physical dominance (Glick, 2018)—may contribute to an environment that values competition over ethical considerations, potentially making unethical behaviour more acceptable.

The present research

Based on this reasoning and on previous research (e.g., Brambilla et al., 2013; Pacilli et al., 2023), in this study I hypothesized that negative moral emotions will be negatively associated with the overall impression of the target and positively related to the target's avoidance tendencies. I also hypothesized that a more negative impression of the target will lead to a greater tendency to avoid the target (*Hp1*). Moreover, I hypothesized that participants would evaluate the target's behaviour more negatively in the report condition, rather than the non-report condition. Specifically, participants in the report (vs non report) condition are expected to exhibit higher levels of negative emotions, a worse global impression of the target and behavioural intentions towards the target (*Hp2*). I also aimed to explore whether the masculinity framed condition (vs. non-masculine condition) influences how participants evaluated the target's behaviour (*Hp3*). Further, I hypothesized that the relationship between the target's behaviour and the tendency to avoid the target is mediated by global impression of the target and the negative emotions toward them (*Hp4*).

Method

Participants and design

I adopted a 2 (*Work context*: masculinity framed vs. non-masculine condition) x 2(*target's behavior*: report vs. not report) between participants experimental design. I recruited 256 participants (male=91; female=162; unknown=3; M= 37.29; SD= 14.53) who voluntarily took part in the research answered to a survey disseminated via Qualtrics using the snowball method. Among these, 1 has a middle school diploma, 70 have a high school diploma, 149 a bachelor's degree, and 35 a post-bachelor's degree and 1 did not answer the question. This research study was conducted in line with the ethical standards of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. participants were informed of any sensitive parts of the study (such as the procedure and affiliations of the researchers) before taking part in the experiment. They were also informed about their right to revoke consent at any time during the procedure or to stop participating altogether. They next confirmed that they had a clear understanding of the rules, indicated their willingness to participate, and started filling out the survey.

Experimental Manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. First, they were asked to imagine themselves working within a hypothetical organization called "YouGroup & Co." Then, participants read a fictitious scenario that outlined some characteristics of the company and were instructed to identify with one of the company's employees as much as possible. We described a workplace environment characterized by a masculine framework (vs. non-masculine condition), aligning the masculine description with the concept of masculinity contest culture in the workplace, as proposed by Berdahl et al. (2018). This included the four dimensions of the scale: *show no weakness* (e.g., avoiding the expression of hesitations), *strength and stamina* (e.g., emphasizing physical strength and endurance), *put work first* (e.g., working long hours), and *dog-eat-dog competition* (e.g., fostering a highly competitive climate).

In the masculinity-framed condition, participants read a description of the company in which employees prioritize their work above all else, competition is highly valued, and expressing doubts

or hesitations is not appreciated. In the non-masculine condition, participants were asked to identify with a company where work-life balance is encouraged, cooperation is key to achieving goals, and flexibility and collaboration are the foundations for recognition in the workplace. After this description, participants were instructed to read a conversation between corporate employees, in which they learned that someone in the organization had violated one of its regulations. Two different conditions were presented regarding the *target's behaviour*: according to condition, employee decided to report (vs. not report) the wrongdoing to management, without specifying details about the infraction.

Procedure

Following the reading of the scenario, participants were guided through two separate sections of the survey, each corresponding to the different scenarios (report vs. not report condition). To reinforce the conditions, participants were reminded to focus on the wrongdoing and the coworker who either reported (or did not report) the misconduct. The same scales were used in both sections of the survey.

We then assessed *moral emotions* towards the target by asking participants to indicate the degree to which the co-worker's behaviour, who reported (vs. did not report) the misconduct, elicited nine moral emotions (admiration, respect, sympathy, trust, disgust, disapproval, anger, outrage, and annoyance; Ashburn-Nardo, 2017 and Cuddy et al., 2007; Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$) on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). After reversing, when necessary, higher scores indicated more negative moral emotions.

Then, we assessed the *impression* of the target. We asked participants to evaluate the co-worker's morality and competence by reporting how much they thought the co-workers was trustworthy, honest, sincere (morality: Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$), competent, intelligent, capable (competence: Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1= not at all to 7= very much,

(Leach et al., 2007). Since the preliminary analysis showed a strong correlation between the two evaluations, making it useless to consider them as distinct in this study, we decided to aggregate these evaluations in a single index of global evaluation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Intention to avoid the target was measured with nine items adapted from Brambilla et al. (2013; e.g., I would avoid the coworker; I would try to stay away from the coworker; Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). After reversing, when necessary, higher scores indicated higher intention to avoid the whistleblower.

Results

We conducted data analysis with IBM-SPSS. **Table 4** reports the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the variables of the study.

Table 4. Means, standard deviations, correlations.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Negative emotions	3.67	1.56	--			
2. Moral evaluation	3.85	1.73	-.642***			
3. Competence evaluation	3.93	1.39	-.487***	.806***		
4. Global impression	3.89	1.48	-.603***	.961***	.938***	
5. Tendency to avoid	2.93	1.40	.705***	-.695***	-.566***	-.670***

Note. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Correlation analysis

The correlation analysis provides preliminary support for our hypotheses concerning the relationships among the main variables (**Table 4**). As predicted, the results indicate that moral emotions are negatively related with the overall impression of the target. Additionally, negative moral emotions are positively correlated with the target's avoidance tendencies. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that the overall impression of the target is negatively associated with their avoidance tendencies (*Hp1*).

Mean comparisons

To test *Hypotheses 2* and *3*, we performed 2 (*Work context*: masculinity-framed vs. non-masculine condition) x 2 (*target's behavior*: report vs. not report) ANOVA for each dependent variable. The analyses aimed to verify the hypothesis that participants would evaluate the target's behaviour more negatively in the report condition compared to the non-report condition (*Hp2*) and, to explore whether the masculinity-framed condition (vs. non-masculine condition) influences how participants evaluated the target's behaviour (*Hp3*).

Emotion towards the target. The results showed a significant main effect of the target's behaviour, $F(1,252) = 102.332, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .289$. Specifically, participants showed more negative emotions towards the target when the target did not report the wrongdoing ($M = 4.49; SD = 1.21$) rather than when the target reported the wrongdoing ($M = 2.82; SD = 1.42$). Furthermore, findings revealed no significant main effect for the masculinity-framed context (vs. non-masculine) condition, $F(1,252) = .018, p = .894, \eta_p^2 = .000$. The two-way interaction was not reliable, $F(1,252) = 1.01, p = .317, \eta_p^2 = .004$.

Global impression of the target. The results showed a significant main effect of the whistleblower's behaviour on the global impression of the target, $F(1,252) = 90.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .264$. Specifically, participants revealed a worst impression of the target when the target did not

report the wrongdoing ($M = 3.14$; $SD = 1.18$) rather than when the target reported the wrongdoing ($M = 4.66$; $SD = 1.36$). Furthermore, findings revealed no significant main effect for the masculinity-framed context (vs. non-masculine) condition, $F(1,252) = 1.34$, $p = .248$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$. The two-way interaction was not reliable, $F(1,252) = .006$, $p = .939$, $\eta_p^2 = .000$.

Tendency to avoid the target. The results showed a significant main effect of the target's behaviour, $F(1,252) = 38.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .132$. Specifically, participants showed more tendency to avoid the target when the target did not report the wrongdoing ($M = 3.44$; $SD = 1.29$) rather than when the target reported the wrongdoing ($M = 2.41$; $SD = 1.33$). Furthermore, findings revealed no significant main effect for the masculinity-framed context (vs. non masculine) condition, $F(1,252) = .657$, $p = .419$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$. The two-way interaction was not reliable, $F(1,252) = .752$, $p = .387$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$.

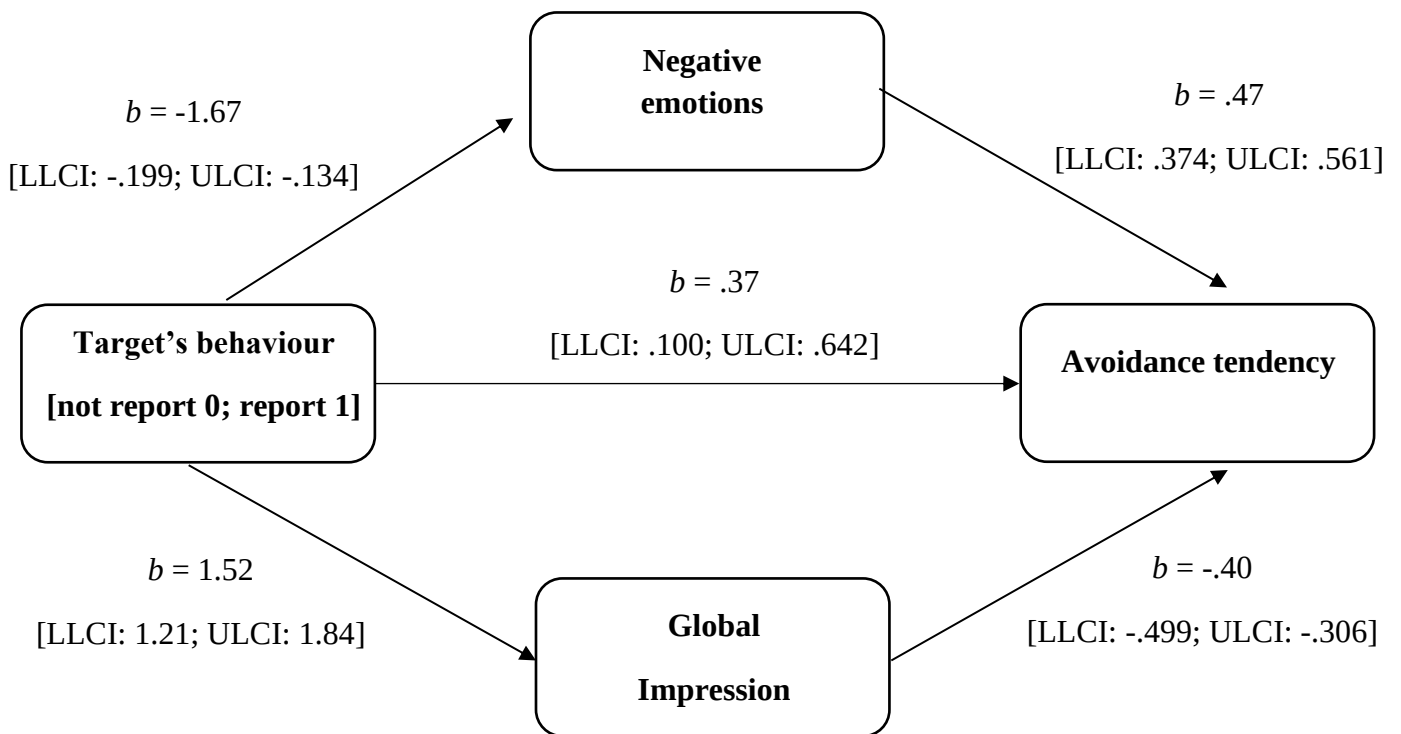
Mediation analysis

Mediation analysis was performed through the regression approach and the bootstrap estimation through the adoption of PROCESS, the SPSS macro developed by Hayes and Preacher (2014). In order to test our mediation hypothesis (*H_{p4}*), we ran a parallel mediation model, by using the PROCESS method in SPSS by Hayes (2013). We employed Model 4 that allow us to examine multiple mediators in the parallel mediation model. We modelled the target's behaviour as a predictor, moral emotions and global impression of the target as mediators and, the tendency of avoidance of the target as criterion (**Figure 4**). The overall equation was significant ($R^2 = .60$; $F(3,252) = 127.47$, $p < .001$). Results showed that the target's behaviour was associated with negative moral emotions towards the target ($b = -1.67$, $t(-10.12)$; LLCI = $-.199$; ULCI = $-.134$) and with the global impression of the target ($b = 1.52$; $t(9.58)$ LLCI = 1.21 ; ULCI = 1.84). Furthermore, moral emotions towards the target were associated with higher tendency of avoidance of the target ($b = .47$, $t(9.85)$, LLCI = $.374$; ULCI = $.561$). Also, the impression of the target was associated with higher tendency of avoidance of the target ($b = -.40$; $t(-8.20)$, LLCI = $-.499$; ULCI = $-.306$). When

considering the mediators, the direct effect appears significant ($b = .37$; $t(2.70)$; LLCI = .100; ULCI = .642). Related to the indirect effects, we observed that the target's behaviour increased the avoidance of the target (*Indirect effect* = $-.78$, $SE = .15$; LLCI = -1.10 ; ULCI = $-.520$) considering moral emotions as a parallel mediator. When considering the global impression as a parallel mediator, the indirect effect was also significant (*Indirect effect* = $-.61$; $SE = .13$; LLCI = $-.859$; ULCI = $-.362$). This highlights how the effect the target's behaviour on tendency of avoidance can be explained through emotional aspects, that is the mediation of moral emotions and the global impression of the target.

Figure 4.

Mediation model in which the effects of target's behaviour on avoidance tendency are mediated by the negative emotions towards the target and the global impression of the target.



Indirect effect moral emotions = $-.78$, $SE = .15$; LLCI = -1.10 ; ULCI = $-.520$

Indirect effect global impression = $-.61$; $SE = .13$; LLCI = $-.859$; ULCI = $-.362$

Discussion

Whistleblowing is a critical aspect of organizational life, influenced by both dispositional traits and situational characteristics of the workplace (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). While much research has focused on factors predicting whistleblowing intentions, less attention has been given to how whistleblowers themselves are perceived. Previous research has shown that whistleblowing can be perceived either positively or negatively depending on factors such as the self-relevance of the situation or identification with the ingroup. In fact, Pacilli et al. (2023) found that whistleblowers are evaluated more negatively when the context is personally relevant and when they are members of the same group. In this study, I sought to build on prior work by creating an experimental manipulation to examine the effects of a target's decision to report (or not report) misconduct on participants' perceptions, evaluations and behavioural tendencies. Additionally, I investigated the role of perceived workplace masculinity and the interaction between these variables. In particular, in this study, I designed ad hoc fictional scenarios to compare two types of work settings representing different organizational contexts. Additionally, I manipulated the target's response to misconduct—either reporting the wrongdoing or remaining silent. This approach allowed for an examination of how the target's decision to report (or not) and perceptions of workplace masculinity impact participants' reactions.

The results revealed a main effect of the target's behaviour: participants reported more negative emotions towards the target when they chose not to report the misconduct compared to when they did. Moreover, participants formed a worse overall impression of the target when they did not report the wrongdoing, along with a greater tendency to avoid the target. However, the results did not show any significant main effect nor interaction with the Masculinity Contest Culture framework. Moreover, the mediation analysis revealed that the effect of the target's behaviour on avoidance tendencies was mediated by both emotional and cognitive factors, further confirming that the behavioural impact of the target's actions can be interpreted through these

dimensions. One potential reason the manipulated Masculinity Contest Culture framework didn't produce the effects I anticipated might be how we described those workplaces to participants. The emphasis on competition, prioritizing work, and discouraging doubt might have been interpreted as a generally negative work environment rather than specifically reflecting Masculinity Contest Culture. Participants may have reacted more to the undesirability of the workplace than to its masculine qualities. Conversely, the non-masculine scenario highlighted positive aspects like collaboration and work-life balance, making it inherently more appealing. In future studies, rather than depicting them solely in a negative light, it may be beneficial to present both the potential advantages (e.g., enhanced productivity or innovation) and the disadvantages (e.g., elevated stress or risk of burnout). This more nuanced portrayal would enable participants to develop a more balanced perspective.

This study highlights that whistleblowers were perceived positively in this context, particularly as no specific information about the nature of the misconduct was provided. Even though the sample included both individuals not directly embedded in the corporate world— who were asked to imagine a typical workday— and employees already immersed in organizational settings, whistleblowing was still viewed favourably. These findings, despite not demonstrating a significant role of masculinity culture, offer a novel contribution to the literature by providing a new lens through which to interpret whistleblowing perceptions.

Practical Implications. Recent cases, particularly those from Silicon Valley organizations (Berdahl et al., 2018), have underscored the critical importance of effective whistleblowing mechanisms within organizations. The failure to report or adequately address complaints related to issues such as harassment, financial fraud, or counterproductive workplace behaviours can have significant repercussions, not only on the professional and personal lives of employees but also on the overall functionality of the organization (Miceli & Near, 1985). Managing whistleblowing effectively has

become a vital area of investment for organizations to ensure both their own well-being and that of their employees and to prevent potential damages to the organization (Miceli & Near, 1992)

Given the recognition of whistleblowing's importance, organizations must be vigilant and implement strategies that align with this mechanism to ensure greater transparency. It is not enough to formally establish a whistleblowing procedure; organizations must ensure that such procedures are actively followed, transparent, and, when necessary, anonymous. Furthermore, they must take appropriate action in response to reported cases. Reporting misconduct within an organization, whether it be harassment, fraud, bullying, or other forms of wrongdoing, can have a substantial impact not only on the organization itself but also on broader society. In fact, addressing unethical behaviour through whistleblowing helps to optimize the functioning of the organization and can predict and prevent future negative events. As such, whistleblowing contributes to improving the organization as well as society at large by providing an ethical lens through which to understand the phenomenon. This helps to move away from the negative connotation often associated with whistleblowing, where whistleblowers are seen as 'informants' or 'snitches,' and instead frames the act as a valuable ethical contribution (Matthiesen et al., 2011).

Limitation and future directions.

This study is not without limitations. A primary limitation is the reliance on self-reported measures, which allowed participants to provide their own subjective evaluations and perceptions. Moreover, as in many other studies, the scenarios used were fictitious, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to real-world settings. However, the use of such scenarios is a common practice in whistleblowing research (Fischer & Gollwitzer, 2023). Despite this challenge, I aimed to create realistic and relatable situations to examine the dynamics of workplace behaviours. Thus, I sought to manipulate not only the target's behaviour by comparing whistleblowing with non-whistleblowing scenarios but also the workplace climate by creating two types of climates, one marked by elements of masculinity (MCC) and the other serving as a non-masculine condition. One

limitation of this design, however, is that the non-masculine climate may lean towards a more collaborative and harmonious environment, which could be somewhat idealistic. To address this issue, future research could benefit from including three distinct workplace climates: one dominated by masculinity, one that is truly neutral, and one that is cooperative, characterized by contrasting elements such as a focus on collaboration over competition and a healthy work-life balance.

Future studies should also prioritize directly asking participants how positive or negative they perceive each scenario to be. Moreover, the effectiveness of our manipulation might have been limited by participants' pre-existing employment experiences, as they may have been anchored by their current workplace climates. Nevertheless, this is a limitation that can impact every experimental procedure, and it is not relative only to the present study.

Another limitation concerns the nature of the whistleblowing scenarios, which may have been too detached from participants' personal experiences, potentially eliciting positive reactions toward whistleblowing. To this end, future studies should consider incorporating more specific, relatable scenarios that align with participants' own work experiences or closely reflect those of students. This approach could enhance the relevance of the dynamics under investigation and foster greater participant engagement. Finally, future studies should seek to examine actual organizational contexts, comparing those with low and high levels of masculinity to draw more comprehensive conclusions about the impact of organizational culture on workplace behaviour.

CHAPTER 5

Better speak up than keep quiet: the impact of masculinity culture on the perception and evaluation of whistleblowing behaviours

Introduction

Whistleblowing has been described as "a distinct form of dissent" (Elliston et al., 1985, p. 79) precisely because it represents a response to a fundamentally ethical dilemma. Nonetheless, within organizational contexts, the act of reporting unethical or illegal behaviour committed by an employee often appears to constitute an accusation directed at a colleague (Elliston et al., 1985). It is important to consider that, despite the dual perception of whistleblowers as either *heroes* or *traitors* (Pacilli et al., 2023; Hersh, 2001), whistleblowing is widely regarded as a prosocial behaviour (Miceli & Near, 1992; Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). This makes whistleblowing a controversial phenomenon, though its purpose is well-recognized across organizations, particularly given the financial and legal interests involved in preventing counterproductive behaviour (Kaptein, 2011). Several studies have shown that many instances of misconduct go unreported by employees who believe they have witnessed unethical behaviour, which poses a significant cost to organizations as it becomes difficult to address and rectify such conduct (Miceli et al., 2012; Keil et al., 2004). However, the literature also highlights notable exceptions. For instance, Skivenes and Trygstad (2010) found that among public officials in Norway, around 76% of employees who witnessed misconduct, chose to report it. In these cases, whistleblowing was met with positive reactions, leading to significant behavioural changes within the organization (Skivenes & Trygstad, 2010). In this context, employees portrayed whistleblowing in a positive light, allowing them to have a favourable experience when reporting misconduct. However, such cases are exceptions, as many studies have produced inconsistent findings (Miceli et al., 2008; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). These inconsistencies may be due, in part, to methodological challenges in measuring retaliation or misconduct (Miceli et al., 2008), but in many instances, research has shown

that whistleblowing is perceived as a highly risky behaviour, often leading to retaliation and adverse consequences for the whistleblower's career and personal life (Johnson, 2003). As previously discussed in the dissertation, the decision to engage in whistleblowing, and its subsequent interpretation, is influenced by various factors, both individual and contextual, such as organizational culture, threat of retaliation, and peer support (for a review, see Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Therefore, in this dissertation my aim is to focus not only on reactions to whistleblowing itself but also on exploring the broader cultural context in which it occurs. To achieve this, I sought to connect the whistleblowing phenomenon with the concept of the MCC in the workplace (Berdahl et al., 2018), to investigate how this perception may interact with whistleblowing in shaping participants' perceptions, evaluations, and behaviours towards the target. The concept of masculinity within organizations seeks to interpret these entities as cultures shaped by specific actions that embody masculinity. In fact, in masculine organizations, employees are encouraged to focus primarily on their professional lives, resulting in fierce competition among colleagues, where any sign of weakness is discouraged, and ideals of physical strength are emphasized. Once these behaviours are internalized within the organization, they dictate the operational norms, establishing standards for work performance, attitudes, and behaviours that are considered acceptable for employees within that environment (Berdahl et al., 2018). Building on the findings from both *Studies 2* and *3*, in this last set of studies the aim is twofold: on the one hand, examining how whistleblowing—or remaining silent in the face of misconduct—is perceived and evaluated by workers themselves (*Study 4*); on the other hand, to complement *Study 4*, which explored participants' personal reactions to the incident, *Study 5* shifted the perspective to investigate how participants anticipated their colleagues would respond. This adjustment aimed to provide a broader understanding of workplace dynamics and mitigate potential social desirability bias by examining perceptions of peer judgments toward individuals who either reported or refrained from reporting the misconduct.

STUDY 4

Study 2 and Study 3 shed light on the dynamics of whistleblowing, highlighting a generally positive perception of the phenomenon. In fact, whistleblowing was favourably evaluated in the context of reporting illicit behaviour, as whistleblowers were associated with fewer negative moral emotions, more positive overall impressions, and reduced retaliatory tendencies—even when the specifics of the wrongdoing were not disclosed. These findings align with the view of whistleblowing as an act of moral courage (Grant, 2002) and strength (Sekerka et al., 2009). Building on these results, the current study aimed to examine whether perceptions of workplace masculinity interact with the target's behaviour (reporting vs. not reporting misconduct), this time without manipulating the workplace as a masculinity contest. Unlike *Study 3*, which involved manipulations of both the target's behaviour and the workplace context, this study instead assessed participants' perceptions of workplace masculinity *within their actual organizational environments*. This shift addressed a limitation of context manipulation, as prior interpretations may not have fully aligned with the intended experimental conditions. To further investigate these dynamics, participants in this study were presented with a scenario involving whistleblowing or remaining silent, this time reframed around a case of sexual harassment in the form of unwanted advances. This adjustment enabled a more nuanced examination of how whistleblowing is perceived when dealing with sensitive and contextually relevant workplace issues. Based on this reasoning, I hypothesized that:

H_{p1}: participants in the non-report condition (vs. report) would evaluate the target's behaviour more negatively, exhibiting higher levels of negative moral emotions, providing a worse overall impression, and displaying a stronger behavioural tendency to avoid the target

Hp2: the relationship between the target's behaviour and the intention to avoid the target would be mediated by both the global impression of the target and the negative emotions directed towards the target.

Hp3: I also expected an interaction between the manipulation of the target's behaviour and the perceived masculinity contest within the organization. Specifically, I anticipated that the relationship between the target's behaviour and its evaluation would be moderated by the perceived masculinity contest within the organization. In line with this hypothesis, I expected participants to evaluate the target less positively when they reported misconduct to a greater extent if they perceived the organization as a masculinity contest. Conversely, I anticipated this relationship to be weaker or non-existent when they did not perceive the organization as a masculinity contest.

Hp4: I proposed that the indirect effect anticipated in *Hp2* would be further moderated by MCC. Specifically, I anticipated a stronger mediation effect for individuals who perceive a heightened masculine contest, wherein participants who perceive a higher masculine contest would evaluate the target more negatively when reporting misconduct, consequently enhancing their own tendency to avoid the target.

Method

Participants and design

I employed a between-subjects design with two conditions (*Target's behavior*: report vs. not report a misconduct). Initially, we recruited 385 participants, but after excluding those who did not complete the entire questionnaire or failed the manipulation check, our final sample consisted of 276 participants (male = 89; female = 183; unknown = 2; missing = 2; $M = 33.07$; $SD = 10.83$). We initially aimed to recruit approximately 274 participants, based on the estimated sample size, in anticipation that not all participants would respond correctly to the attention check, and that we would exclude those completing the questionnaire in under three minutes. Prior to conducting the

analyses, we performed a power analysis to determine the required sample size needed to achieve sufficient statistical power. A power level of 0.80 was estimated to ensure the ability to detect significant effects, if they exist. Accordingly, we anticipated a small overall effect size. Power calculations for an estimated effect size of 0.17 suggested a sample size of 274 for our primary analysis, taking into account the manipulated condition of reporting versus not reporting misconduct (for a power of $1-\beta=.80$, $\alpha=.05$).

Participants voluntarily joined the study by responding to a survey distributed through the researchers' social networks (e.g., Facebook groups, Reddit communities, WhatsApp, and Instagram accounts). I aimed to create a balanced sample with equal numbers of men and women who are currently employed in Italy. Within this sample, 8 participants had completed middle school, 84 had a high school diploma, 59 held a bachelor's degree, 123 had a post bachelor's degree, and 2 participants did not provide information about their education level. In terms of employment status, 67 participants were on fixed-term contracts, 125 had permanent contracts, 28 were employed part-time, 33 were self-employed, 17 were interns, and 6 did not disclose their employment status.

To ensure transparency in our decisions and hypotheses, I pre-registered this study, outlining the detailed hypotheses, methods, procedures, and a comprehensive data analysis plan (including exclusion criteria), using the Open Science Framework repository (https://osf.io/rpuk9?mode=&revisionId=&view_only=). The pre-registration was submitted prior to data collection and will be made publicly accessible. The same hypotheses, methods, and analyses outlined in the pre-registration plan are presented in this study.

This study followed the ethical guidelines set by the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were thoroughly informed about any potentially sensitive aspects of the study, including the procedures and the researchers' affiliations. They were made aware of their right to

withdraw from the study at any time or to stop participating entirely. After understanding the study's protocols, participants consented to participate and proceeded to complete the survey.

Procedure

First, participants were asked to think about their workplace and complete the Masculinity Contest Culture Scale (Glick et al., 2018). For instance, items included “In my work environment, admitting you don’t know the answer looks weak” and “To get ahead, you need to be able to work long hours” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$). This allowed us to assess their overall perception of masculinity within their workplace. In addition to the global index, the scale comprises four dimensions: show no weakness (e.g., avoiding the display of hesitations; 5 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$), strength and stamina (e.g., emphasizing physical strength and endurance; 5 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$), put work first (e.g., working long hours; 5 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$), and dog-eat-dog competition (e.g., a highly competitive climate; 5 items, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$). Responses were scored from 1 (Not at all true of my work environment) to 7 (Entirely true of my work environment).

Next, I manipulated the target's behaviour by presenting a scenario involving a workplace incident where a colleague made unwelcome advances towards another coworker. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (report vs. not report), with reporting coded as 1 and not reporting coded as 0. They were directed to one of two versions of the questionnaire corresponding to these conditions.

Specifically, the two conditions were created by instructing participants to read different scenarios that varied based on the target colleague's response to the incident. Half of the participants read a scenario where the colleague reported the inappropriate behavior to management (reporting condition). The other half read a scenario where the colleague chose not to report the incident (non-reporting condition), despite its inappropriate nature.

After the manipulation, participants were guided through two sections of the survey, each corresponding to a different scenario. Each time they were asked to respond to a scale, participants were reminded of their coworkers' actions—whether they reported or did not report the wrongdoing—to reinforce recall of the condition. The same scales were used in both sections of the survey.

Participants were asked to evaluate the *target's impression* regarding morality and competence. They rated how trustworthy, honest, and sincere they found the target (morality: Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$), as well as how competent, intelligent, and capable (competence: Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) the target appeared. These ratings were done on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) (Leach et al., 2007). These evaluations were combined into a single index representing the overall assessment of the target (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Subsequently, I assessed the *moral emotions* participants felt towards the target. They rated how much the target's behaviour, in reporting or not reporting the misconduct, elicited nine specific moral emotions: admiration, respect, sympathy, trust, disgust, disapproval, anger, outrage, and annoyance (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017; Cuddy et al., 2007). These emotions were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much), with the internal consistency reliability confirmed by Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .97$). After reversing necessary items, higher scores indicated a greater presence of negative moral emotions.

Additionally, participants indicated their *intention to avoid the target*. This was assessed using nine items adapted from Brambilla et al. (2013), which measured the tendency to avoid interactions with the coworker. Participants rated these items on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The internal consistency of this measure was also validated through Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$, with higher scores reflecting a stronger intention to distance themselves from the target.

Results

I conducted data analysis with IBM-SPSS. **Table 5** reports the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the variables of the study. Mediation analysis was performed through the regression approach and the bootstrap estimation through the adoption of PROCESS, the SPSS macro developed by Hayes and Preacher (2014).

Table 5. Means, standard deviations and correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.SHOW NO WEAKNESS	2.97	1.30	1									
2. STRENGTH AND STAMINA	3.05	1.37	.523***	1								
3. PUT WORK FIRST	4.05	1.30	.670***	.539***	1							
4. DOG EAT DOG	3.95	1.42	.590***	.569***	.665***	1						
5. MASCULINITY	3.51	1.12	.830***	.792***	.858***	.853***	1					
6. NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	3.96	2.11	.031	.079	.027	.016	.046	1				
7. MORALITY	3.80	2.15	-.045	-.086	-.093	-.006	-.068	-.879***	1			
8. COMPETENCE	3.87	1.48	-.017	-.076	-.087	-.013	-.058	-.632***	.772***	1		
9. GLOBAL IMPRESSION	3.84	1.71	-.036	-.087	-.096	-.010	-.068	-.825***	.962***	.917***	1	
10.AVOIDANCE	3.26	1.66	.093	.133*	.122*	.073	.126*	.849***	-.877***	-.704***	-.855***	1

Note: ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 6.

	COND	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	T
NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	REPORT	134	2.19	1.28	t (274) = 23.55
	NOT REPORT	142	5.63	1.15	
IMPRESSION OF THE TARGET	REPORT	134	5.19	1.13	t (274) = -19.67
	NOT REPORT	142	2.57	1.08	
TENDENCY TO AVOID	REPORT	134	1.95	.955	t (269,61) = 20.01
	NOT REPORT	142	4.49	1.15	

When participants were exposed to the report (vs non-report) condition, they evaluated the target in a better way, their emotions towards the target were more positive and they showed less avoidance tendency toward them (**see Table 6**). Although this finding is not in line with our initial hypotheses, it aligns with the previous studies (*study 2* and *study 3*). These findings suggest that the act of reporting misconduct is consistently perceived throughout the studies conducted here more positively within organizational contexts.

Mediation analysis

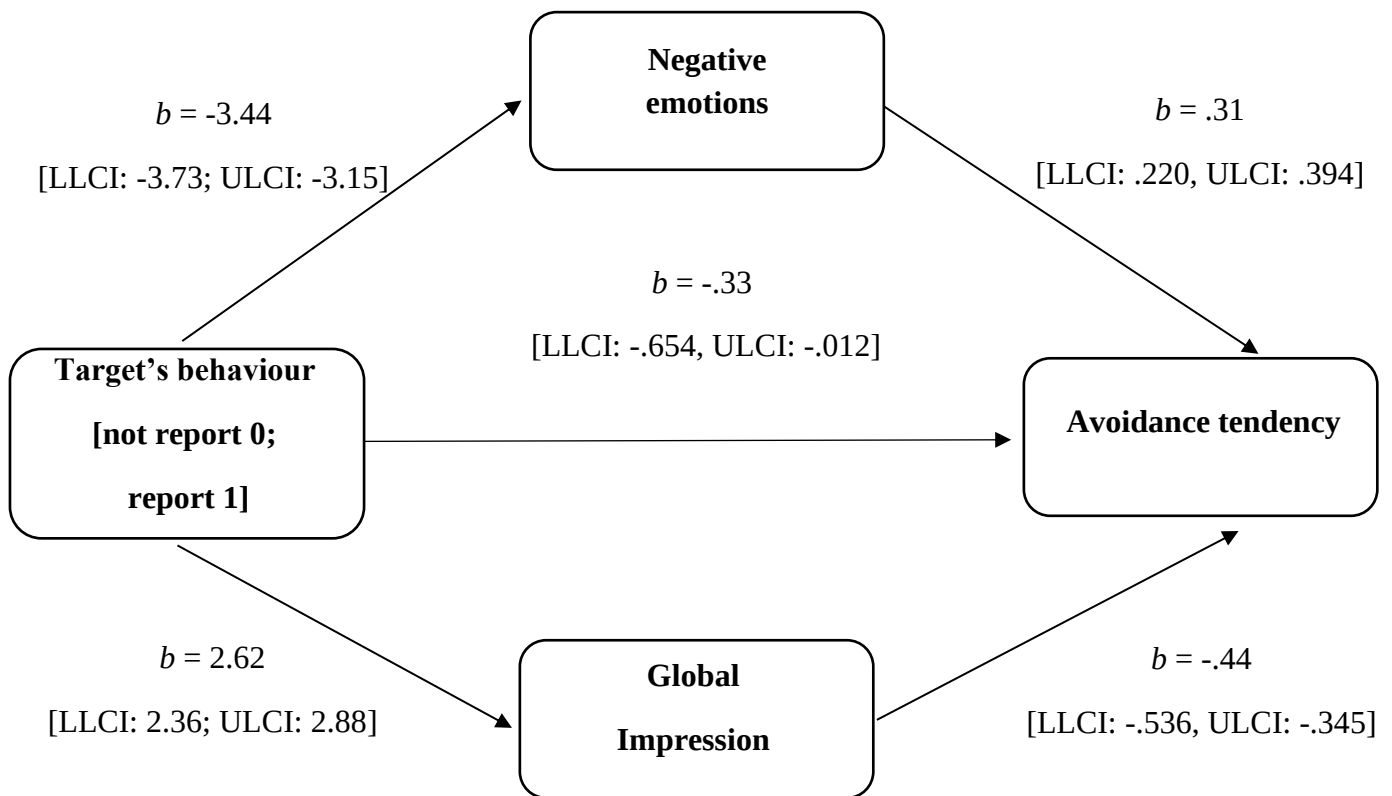
As posited in our hypothesis (*Hp2*), I anticipated that the relationship between the target's behavior and the intention to avoid the target would be mediated by both the global impression of the target and the negative emotions directed towards them. The results, as detailed below, shed light on the interplay between the target's behaviour, moral emotions, the global impression of the target, and the tendency to avoid the target, providing insight into the underlying mechanisms at play.

I employed Model 4, which allows us to examine multiple mediators in a parallel mediation model. We modelled the target's behaviour as a predictor, moral emotions and global impression as mediators and, the tendency to avoid the target as the criterion (see **Figure 5**). In considering the potential effect of gender on our variables, we included gender as a covariate in our model; however, it did not exert a significant effect. The overall equation was significant ($R^2 = .80$; $F(3,272) = 359.11$, $p < .001$). Results showed that the target's behaviour was associated with negative moral emotions elicited by the target ($b = -3.44$, $t(-23.55)$; LLCI = -3.73; ULCI = -3.15) and with the impression of the target ($b = 2.62$; $t(19.67)$; LLCI = 2.36; ULCI = 2.88). Furthermore, moral emotions toward the target was associated with a higher tendency to avoid the target ($b = .31$, $t = 6.96$; LLCI = .220; ULCI = .394), and the impression of the target was associated with a higher tendency to avoid the target ($b = -.44$, $t = -9.10$; LLCI = -.536; ULCI = -

.345). When considering the mediators, the direct effect appears significant ($b = -.33$, $t = -2.04$, $LLCI = -.654$, $ULCI = -.012$). Regarding the indirect effects, we observed that the target's behaviour reduced the tendency to avoid the target (*Indirect effect* = -1.06 , $SE = .18$; $LLCI = -1.45$; $ULCI = -.736$) considering moral emotions as a mediator. When considering the global impression as a mediator, the indirect effect was also significant (*Indirect effect* = -1.15 , $SE = .15$; $LLCI = -1.45$; $ULCI = -.865$). This highlights how the effect of the target's behaviour on the tendency of avoidance can be explained through emotional aspects, specifically the mediation of moral emotions and the global impression of the target.

Figure 5.

Mediation model in which the effects of target's behavior on avoidance tendency are mediated by the negative emotions towards the target and the global impression of the target.



Indirect effect_{moral emotions} = -1.06, SE = .18 [LLCI = -1.45, ULCI = -.736]

Indirect effect_{globalimpression} = -1.15, SE = .15, [LLCI = -1.45, ULCI = -.864]

Note: ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

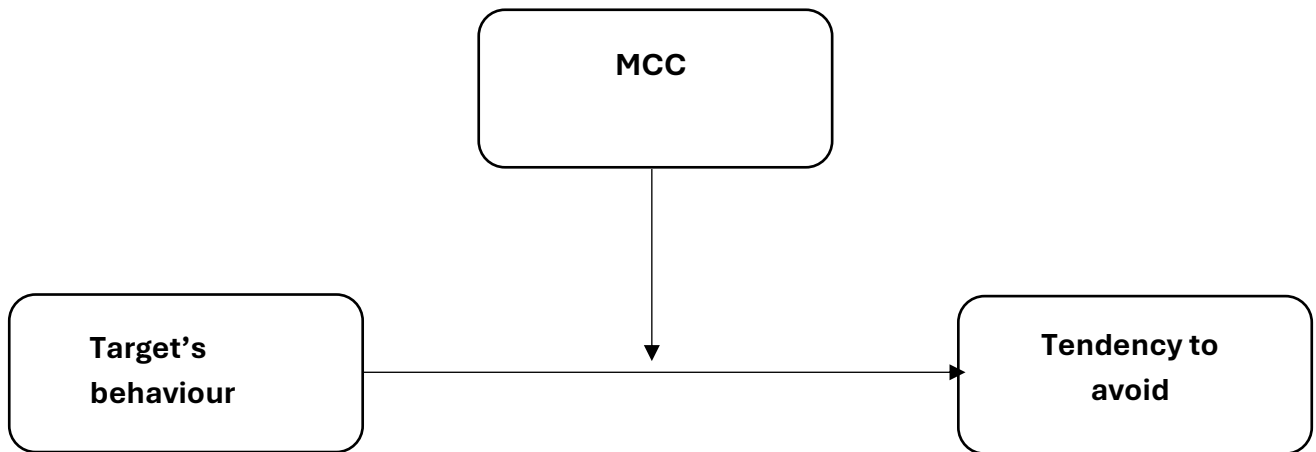
Moderation analysis

The third hypothesis (*Hp3*) posits an interaction between the manipulation of the target's behaviour and the perceived masculinity contest within the organization. Specifically, I anticipated that the relationship between the target's behaviour and avoidance tendencies would be moderated by the perceived masculinity contest within the organization. In line with this hypothesis, I expected participants to exhibit greater avoidance tendencies toward the target when they reported misconduct if they perceived the organization as a masculinity contest. Conversely, I anticipated that this relationship would be weaker or non-existent in contexts where the organization was not perceived as a masculinity contest.

I conducted a moderation analysis using Model 1 in Hayes' PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. The independent variable was the condition, that is the target's behaviour (not reporting as 0; reporting coded as 1), perception of MCCs modelled as a moderator and tendency to avoid the target the dependent variable (see **Figure 6**). In considering the potential effect of gender on our variables, we included gender as a covariate in our model; however, it did not exert a significant effect. The overall equation was significant $R^2 = .59$; $F(3,272) = 135.16$, $p < .001$). The model revealed no significant effect of the perception of masculinity contest on the tendency to avoid the target, $b = .11$, $SE = .08$, $t(1.38)$, $p = .168$; $LLCI = -.047$, $ULCI = .268$, and no significant interaction effect between target's behaviour and the perception of masculinity contest in the workplace, $b = .03$, $SE = .11$, $t(.26)$, $p = .793$; $LLCI = -.194$, $ULCI = .253$.

Figure 6.

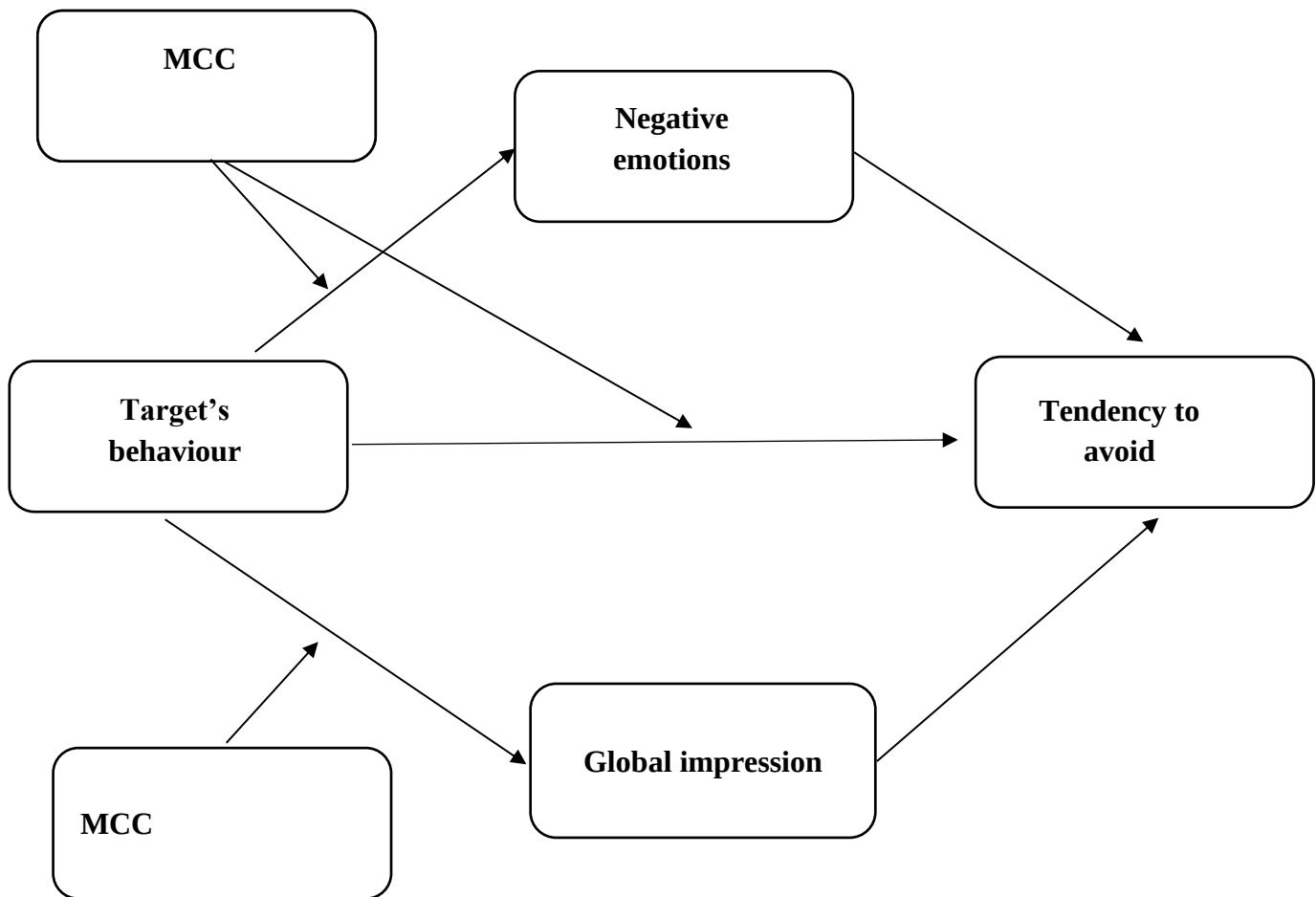
Moderation model in which the effects of target's behaviour on avoidance tendency are (not) moderated by the perception of work as masculinity contest.



Moderated mediation

Hp4 proposed that the indirect effect anticipated in *Hp2* would be further moderated by Masculinity Contest Culture. Specifically, it was expected that the mediation effect would be stronger among individuals who perceive a heightened masculinity contest in the workplace. In such contexts, participants with higher perceptions of masculinity contest were hypothesized to evaluate the target more negatively for reporting misconduct, thereby increasing their tendency to avoid the target (see **Figure 7**). To examine whether the indirect effect of the target's behavior on the avoidance tendency—via global impression and negative emotions—is further moderated by MCC (*Hp 4*), I initially planned to conduct a moderated mediation analysis using Model 8 of Hayes' PROCESS macro (2017). However, as the moderation analyses (*Hp3*) revealed no significant effect of masculinity contest perception on the tendency to avoid the target, nor any significant interaction effect between the target's behaviour and masculinity contest perceptions, I decided not to pursue further testing of this hypothesis.

Figure 7.



Discussion

This study examined the relationship between Masculinity Contest Culture and whistleblowing behaviours within organizational contexts. Specifically, it focused on exploring how whistleblowing—or remaining silent in the face of misconduct—is perceived and evaluated by employees. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate how perceptions of MCC may interact with whistleblowing to shape behavioural responses toward the whistleblower.

Consistent with *Study 3*, results indicated that whistleblowers are generally perceived more positively than those who remain silent about misconduct. However, in this study, the

focus specifically pertained to reporting misconduct in the form of unwanted attention in the workplace. This finding emphasizes that whistleblowing, even in this specific context addressing inappropriate or harmful behaviours, continues to be viewed favourably. In fact, participants reported fewer negative emotions toward targets who reported the misconduct and formed a more favourable overall impression of them compared to those who did not report misconduct. As detailed in **Table 6**, these results align with existing literature emphasizing the value of transparency and ethical behaviour in organizations (e.g., Near & Miceli, 1985; Miceli & Near, 2005). Regarding behavioural responses, the findings revealed that reporting misconduct was associated with better evaluations and a lower tendency to avoid the whistleblower. In contrast, not reporting wrongdoing intensified negative emotions and avoidance behaviours. For instance, this pattern supports earlier findings, such as those from *Study 3*, which demonstrated that participants expressed significantly more negative emotions toward targets of misconduct when wrongdoing was not reported. These results further reinforce the idea that whistleblowing fosters positive evaluations of ethical behaviour. Moreover, the study also highlighted the mediating role of emotional and cognitive factors in the relationship between the target's behaviour and the avoidance tendency. Mediation analyses showed that negative moral emotions and overall impressions of the whistleblower were key drivers of avoidance. Specifically, reporting misconduct reduced negative emotions and avoidance behaviours, while silence intensified these negative reactions. These findings underscore the emotional and cognitive pathways influencing behavioural responses to whistleblowing.

However, I did not find evidence of a moderating effect of MCC perception on the relationship between target's behaviour and tendency to avoid the target. Contrary to expectations, stronger perceptions of MCC in the workplace did not amplify negative evaluations of whistleblowers. This raises important questions about the influence of MCC on organizational dynamics. One possibility is that while MCC shapes broader workplace interactions, it may not directly dictate responses to whistleblowing, suggesting a degree of resilience in ethical norms

within such environments. Another explanation could involve social desirability bias, where participants may have felt compelled to evaluate ethical behaviours, such as whistleblowing, more favourably than they otherwise would. To overcome this possible limitation, in the last study of this dissertation I move from participants' perception of, and reactions to, whistleblowing to their meta-perception about how the others would feel and react to whistleblowing within their organizational context.

STUDY 5

Study 4 examined the perception and evaluation of whistleblowing, focusing on how a colleague's decision to report or not report workplace misconduct influenced participants' evaluations, emotional responses, and behavioural intentions toward that colleague. The aim of this study was to complement *Study 4*, to overcome the potential limitation of social desirability, by varying the perspective, seeking to understand participants' views on how coworkers might perceive and evaluate individuals who either reported or refrained from reporting the misconduct.

In fact, in this study, I considered Social Desirability Bias (SDB), a common bias in social research characterized by participants' tendency to provide socially desirable responses, thereby portraying themselves in a positive light (Chung & Monroe, 2003) and is inversely related to the perceived level of privacy or anonymity experienced by participants (Dodou & de Winter, 2014; Joinson, 1999; Fisher, 1993). To minimize social desirability bias, following Fischer's (1993) suggestion I employed an *indirect questioning approach*, which allows participants to respond from the perspective of another person or group, adapting existing measures to a workplace context by shifting the focus to third parties—specifically, the participants' colleagues—rather than having participants reflect on their own reactions. It is indeed possible that participants respond in a way that indirectly reflects their own tendency and behaviour (Fisher, 1993). In fact, many studies have employed this approach, asking participants

to indicate how others behave in certain circumstances to reduce bias and allow them to “report on the nature of the external world” rather than about themselves (Westfall et al., 1957, p. 138). In this study, this approach may allow participants to describe their emotions, perceptions, and behavioural intentions while fostering a sense of impersonality. Therefore, based on this rationale, I proposed the same hypotheses as in *Study 4*, but this time shifting the focus from participants' perceptions of, and reactions to, whistleblowing to their meta-perceptions about how others might feel and react to whistleblowing within the organizational context.

Method

Participants and design

I employed a between-subjects design with two conditions (*Target's behaviour*: report vs. not report a misconduct). Two hundred seventy-three participants (male = 98; female = 173; non-binary = 1, unknown = 1; $M = 33.26$; $SD = 9.55$) voluntarily participated in the research by responding to a survey distributed through the social networks of the researchers (e.g., Facebook groups, Reddit communities, WhatsApp accounts and Instagram accounts) involved in the study. I aimed to achieve a gender-balanced sample, striving for an equal representation of men and women currently employed in Italy. Among these participants, 7 held a middle school diploma, 69 possessed a high school diploma, 50 had a bachelor's degree, 146 had a post-bachelor's degree, and 1 did not provide a response to this question. Considering the employment contract, 64 people had a fixed-term contract with the organization, 142 had a permanent one, 10 people had part-time employment contracts, 41 were self-employed workers, 13 were in internships, and 3 did not provide any information about their employment status.

This research adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. Prior to engaging in the experiment, participants were fully briefed on any potentially sensitive aspects of the study, including procedures and researcher affiliations. They were also informed of their right to withdraw consent at any stage of the experiment or to cease

participation entirely. After confirming their understanding of the study's protocols, participants expressed their willingness to partake and proceeded to complete the survey.

Procedure

First, participants were asked to think about their workplace and complete the *Masculinity Contest Culture Scale* (Glick et al., 2018; “In my work environment”: e.g., “Admitting you don’t know the answer looks weak”; “To get ahead you need to be able to work long hours”; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$). This allowed us to assess their global perception of masculinity in their own workplace. Beside the global index, the scale is formed by 4 dimensions: show no weakness (e.g. avoiding the conveying of hesitations; 5 item, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$), strength and stamina (e.g. emphasizing physical strength and endurance; 5 items; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$), put work first (e.g. work long hours; 5 items; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$), dog-eat dog competition (e.g. highly competitive climate; 5 items; Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$). Responses were scored from 1 (= Not at all true of my work environment) to 7 (= Entirely true of my work environment).

Then, I manipulated the *target’s behavior* by presenting participants with a workplace scenario describing a colleague engaging in inappropriate behaviour toward another coworker, specifically making unwelcome advances. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the two experimental conditions using block randomization, wherein each participant was randomly assigned to one two groups (report condition vs. report condition). In the report condition, participants were informed that the colleague chose to report the incident to management due to its inappropriate nature. Conversely, in the non-report condition, participants were informed that the colleague opted not to report the incident to management despite its inappropriate nature.

Following the reading of the scenario, participants were guided through two distinct sections of the survey corresponding to the different scenarios presented. To reinforce the recall of the report (vs. non-report) condition, participants were reminded to contemplate the

coworkers' decision to report, or not report, the wrongdoing. Identical scales were employed across both survey sections. This time, I shifted our focus from the participant's reaction to the incident to their anticipation of their colleagues' responses in the workplace. The study aimed to determine participants' perspectives regarding their colleagues' evaluations of individuals who either disclosed or refrained from disclosing an instance of misconduct.

Participants were then tasked with evaluating the co-workers' *impression of the target*, in terms of morality and competence, reporting how much they thought the co-workers' perceived the target as trustworthy, honest, sincere (morality: Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$), competent, intelligent, capable (competence: Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$) on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1= not at all so to 7= very much so (Leach et al., 2007). These evaluations were aggregated in a single index representing the global evaluation of the target (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Following this, I assessed the *moral emotions* towards the target by asking participants to think about their colleagues and to rate the extent to which the behaviour of the target who reported (compared to those who did not report) the misconduct could elicit nine moral emotions (admiration, respect, sympathy, trust, disgust, disapproval, anger, outrage, and annoyance) in them (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017; Cuddy et al., 2007). These emotions were assessed on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). After necessary reversals, higher scores on this scale indicated a greater manifestation of negative moral emotions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$).

Additionally, I asked participants to reconsider their colleagues' responses and to indicate their expectations regarding their colleagues' *intention to avoid the target*. This intention was assessed using nine items adapted from Brambilla et al. (2013), reflecting the inclination to steer clear of interactions with the coworker. Participants rated these items on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much so). Higher scores indicated a stronger intention among colleagues to distance themselves from the target (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Manipulation Checks

I first assessed the effectiveness of manipulating the *target's behaviour*. In fact, all participants were asked to indicate whether the target reported or did not report the inappropriate behaviour that occurred in the company. Participants assigned to the report condition were required to respond that the behaviour was reported. Conversely, participants assigned to the non-report condition were required to respond that the behaviour was not reported.

Furthermore, I included another check where participants were asked to identify who the target of the questions was by asking them to indicate whether the colleague was “the target who had observed the incident”, who “had committed the inappropriate behaviour”, or if they were “the target who had received the advances”. Participants who failed the checks were excluded from the analysis.

Table 7. Means, standard deviations and correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.SHOW NO WEAKNESS	3.10 (1.36)		1									
2. STRENGHT AND STAMINA	2.97 (1.40)		.511***	1								
3. PUT WORK FIRST	4.08 (1.51)		.665***	.467***	1							
4. DOG EAT DOG	4,08 (1.51)		.596***	.511***	.658***	1						
5. MASCULINITY	3,56 (1.19)		.837***	.751***	.853***	.847***	1					
6. NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	4,06 (1.77)		.094	.075	.068	.100	.102	1				
7. MORALITY	3.77 (1.99)		-.051	.012	.002	-.022	-.017	-.831***	1			
8. COMPETENCE	3.94 (1.44)		-.031	.026	-.001	-.019	-.007	-.633***	.755***	1		
9. GLOBAL IMPRESSION	3.86 (1.61)		-.045	.019	.001	-.022	-.014	-.797***	.956***	.914***	1	
10. AVOIDANCE	3.63 (1.48)		.146*	.148*	.170**	.128*	.180**	.774***	-.774***	-.609***	-.751***	1

Table 8.

	COND	N	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t
NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	REPORT	132	2.78	1.43	t (245.46) = 15.96
	NOT REPORT	141	5.26	1.10	
IMPRESSION OF THE TARGET	REPORT	132	4.96	1.29	t (271) = -14.52
	NOT REPORT	141	2.83	1.13	
TENDENCY TO AVOID	REPORT	132	2.82	1.30	t (271) = 10.25
	NOT REPORT	141	4.39	1.22	

Results

In a similar vein to *Study 4*, participants in this study who were exposed to the report (vs. non-report) condition evaluated the target more favourably, exhibited fewer negative emotions toward them, and displayed a lower tendency to avoid the target compared to the non-report condition (**see Table 8**). Although this finding is not in line with our initial hypotheses, it aligns with the previous studies (*study 2* and *study 3* and *study 4*). In fact, these findings suggest that the act of reporting misconduct is consistently perceived throughout the studies conducted here more positively within organizational contexts.

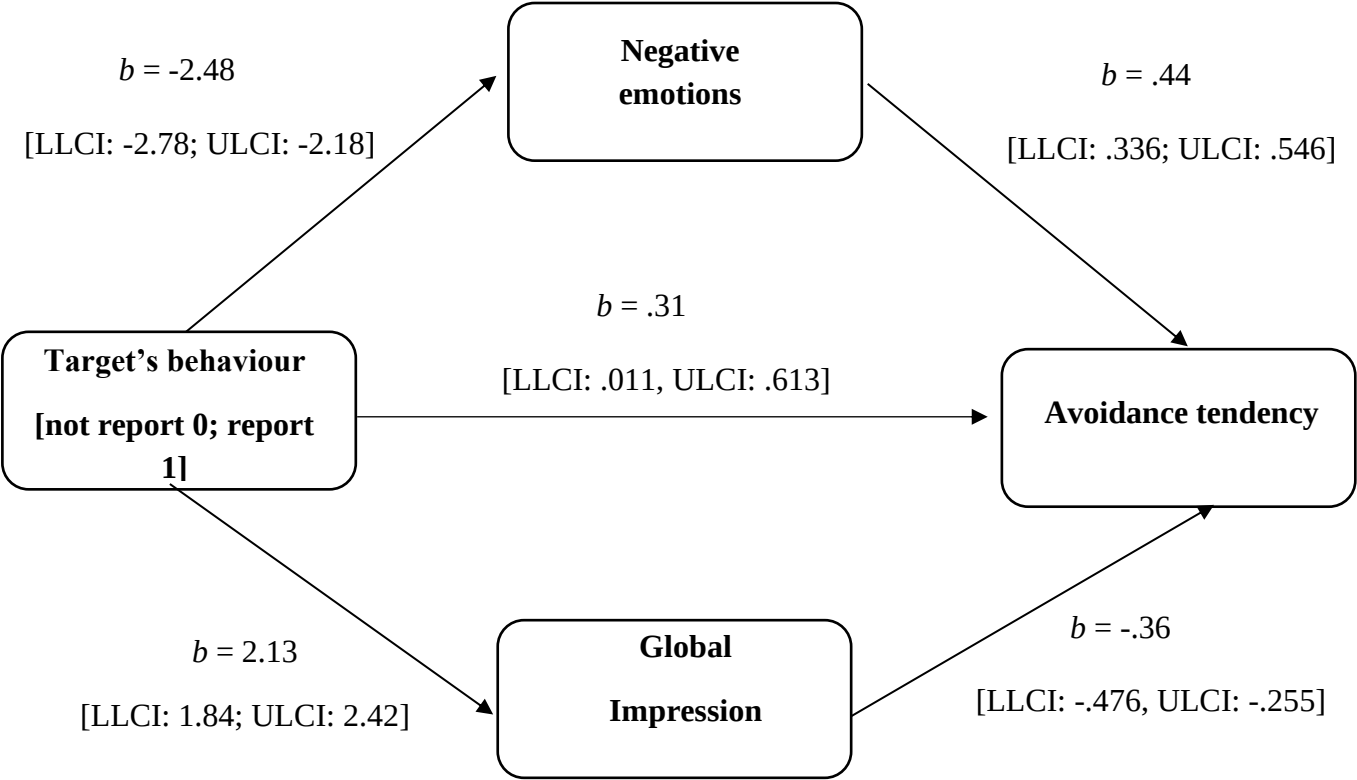
Mediation analysis

As posited in *Hp2*, we anticipated that the relationship between the target's behaviour and the intention to avoid the target would be mediated by both the global impression of the target and the negative emotions directed towards them. I employed Model 4, allowing us to examine multiple mediators in a parallel mediation model. In this model, the *target's behavior* was modelled as the predictor, with moral emotions and the global impression of the target acting as mediators and, the tendency to avoid the target as the criterion (see **Figure 8**). In considering the potential effect of

gender on our variables, we included gender as a covariate in our models; however, it did not exert a significant effect. The overall equation was found to be significant ($R^2 = .65$; $F(3,269) = 169.19$, $p < .001$). Results revealed significant associations between the target's behaviour and both negative moral emotions elicited by the target ($b = -2.48$, $t(-16.10)$; LLCI = -2.78; ULCI = -2.18) and the impression of the target ($b = 2.13$; $t(14.52)$; LLCI=1.84; ULCI=2.42). Furthermore, moral emotions toward the target were positively associated with a higher tendency to avoid the target ($b = .44$, $t(8.26)$, LLCI = .336, ULCI = .546), as was the impression of the target ($b = -.36$, $t(-6.52)$, LLCI = -.476, ULCI = -.255). When considering the mediators, the direct effect of the target's behaviour on the tendency to avoid the target was found to be significant ($b = .31$, $t(2.04)$, LLCI = .011; ULCI = .613). Additionally, indirect effects were observed, indicating that the target's behaviour increased the tendency to avoid the target through the mediation of both moral emotions (*Indirect effect* = -1.09, SE = .20; LLCI = -1.52; ULCI= -.737) and the global impression of the target (*Indirect effect* = -.78, SE = .17; LLCI = -1.12; ULCI = -.444). In summary, these results support our hypothesis, demonstrating that the effect of the target's behaviour on the tendency to avoid the target is mediated by both negative emotions and the global impression of the target. This highlights how the effect of the target's behaviour on the tendency of avoidance can be explained through emotional and cognitive aspects, specifically the mediation of moral emotions and the global impression of the target.

Figure 8.

Mediation model in which the effects of target's behaviour on avoidance tendency are mediated by the negative emotions towards the target and the global impression of the target.



Indirect effect_{moral emotions} = -1.09, SE=.20 [LLCI=-1.52, ULCI= -.737]

Indirect effect_{global impression} = -.78, SE=.17, [LLCI=-1.12, ULCI= -.444]

Moderation model

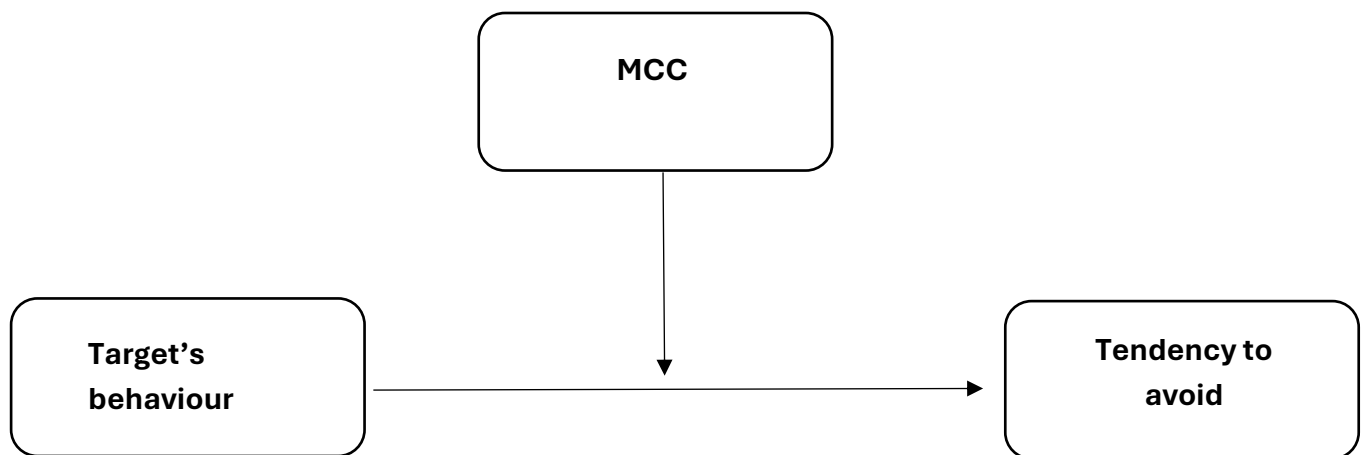
To test *H_{p3}*, which proposed that the relationship between the target's behaviour and avoidance tendencies would be moderated by the perceived masculinity contest within the organization, I conducted a moderation analysis using Model 1 of Hayes' PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) with 5,000 bootstraps resample. The independent variable was the condition (*target's behaviour*: reporting coded as 1 and not reporting as 0), with the perception of work as a masculinity contest serving as the moderator and the tendency to avoid the target as the dependent variable (see **figure 9**). In considering the potential effect of gender on our variables, we included gender as a covariate in our model; however, it did not exert a significant effect. The overall equation was found to be significant ($R^2 = .35$; $F(3,269) = 49.14$, $p < .001$). Results revealed a significant interaction effect between the target's behaviour and the perception of masculinity contest in the workplace ($b = .54$, $SE = .12$, $t(4.41)$, $p < .001$; $LLCI = .298$, $ULCI = .779$), indicating that the effect of the target's behaviour on the tendency to avoid them was contingent on the participants' perception of the work environment as a masculinity contest.

Specifically, when participants perceived low levels of masculinity contest in the workplace, reporting the target's behaviour was associated with a significant decrease in the tendency to avoid them ($b = -2.17$, $SE = .20$, $t(-10.73)$, $p < .001$, $LLCI = -2.57$; $ULCI = -1.78$). This suggests that in work environments perceived as less focused on masculine competition, reporting a colleague's behaviour did not lead to increased avoidance of that individual. However, as the perception of the work environment as a masculinity contest increased, this negative effect of reporting the target's behaviour on the tendency to avoid them became progressively weaker. At moderate levels of perceived masculinity contest, the negative effect was attenuated, though still statistically significant ($b = -1.58$, $SE = .14$, $t(-10.91)$, $p < .001$; $LLCI = -1.87$; $ULCI = -1.29$) and at high levels of perceived masculinity contest, the negative effect was further attenuated, though still statistically significant ($b = -0.91$, $SE = .20$, $t(-4.43)$, $p < .001$; $LLCI = -1.31$; $ULCI = -.505$).

These findings indicate that in work environments where masculinity is more salient, reporting a colleague's behaviour is less likely to reduce the tendency to avoid that individual. The perception of the work context as a masculinity contest appears to amplify the negative consequences of reporting a coworker's behaviour, leading to greater avoidance of the target. These results indicate that the interaction between the target's behaviour and the perception of masculinity contest significantly influences the tendency to avoid the target, with the effect varying based on different levels of masculinity contest perception within the workplace.

Figure 9.

Moderation model in which the effects of target's behaviour on avoidance tendency are moderated by the perception of work as masculinity contest.



Moderated mediation

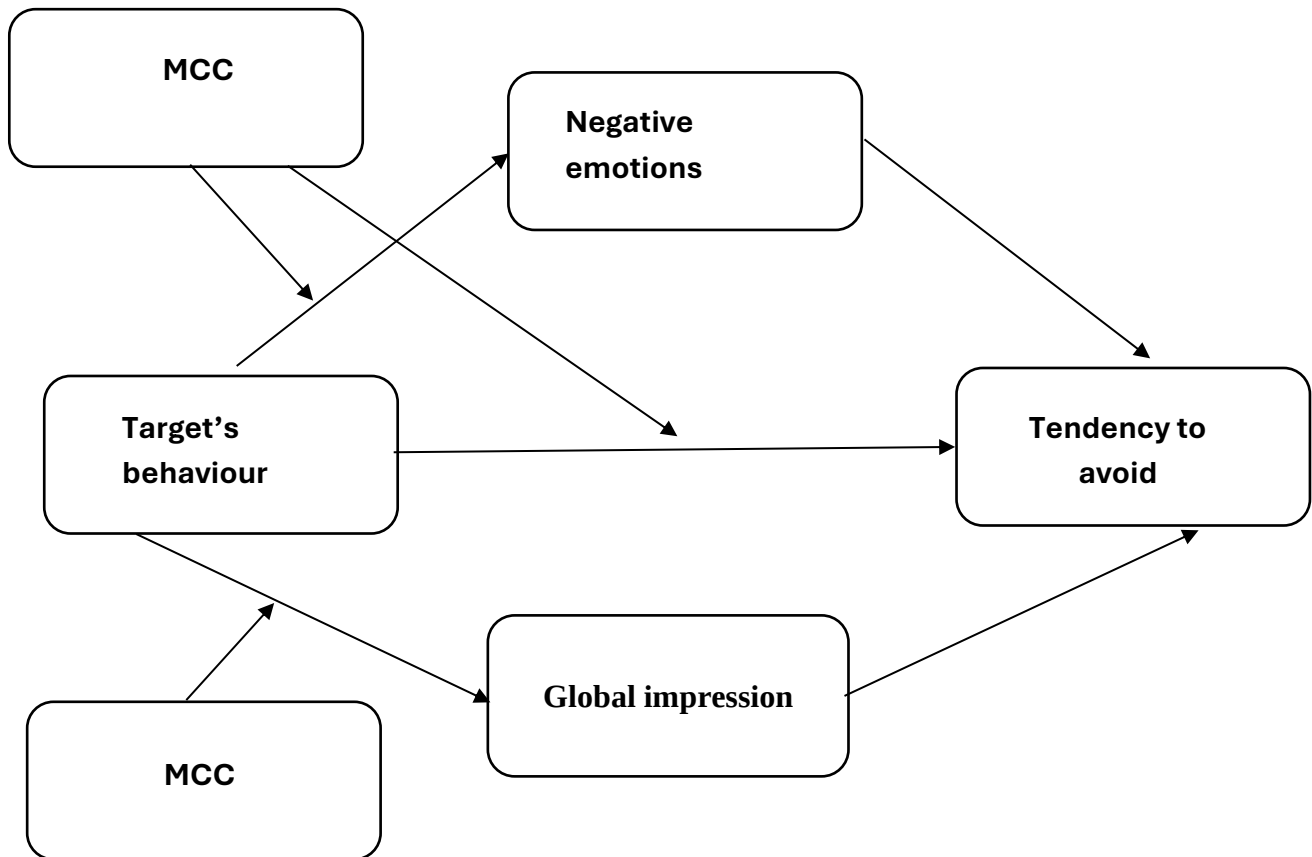
To test whether the indirect effect of the target's behaviour on avoidance tendencies through global impression and negative emotions is further moderated by the MCC (*Hp4*), I conducted a moderated mediation analysis using Model 8 of Hayes' PROCESS macro (2017).

The target's behaviour was modelled as a predictor, tendency to avoid the target as a dependent variable, negative emotions and global impression of the target as parallel mediators, and participants' perception of work as a masculinity contest was considered as a moderator (see **Figure 10**). In considering the potential effect of gender on our variables, we included gender as a covariate in our model; however, it did not exert a significant effect. The overall equation was significant, $R^2 = .67$; $F(5,267) = 111.02$, $p < .001$. Results showed that the perception of masculinity contest was found to moderate the effect of target's behaviour ($b = .20$, $SE = .09$, $t(2.26)$, $p = .024$; $LLCI = .026$; $ULCI = .379$). Negative emotions towards the target were associated with tendency to avoid the target ($b = .39$, $SE = .05$, $t(7.27)$, $p < .001$; $LLCI = .284$; $ULCI = .495$) and also global impression of the target was associated with the tendency to avoid the target ($b = -.39$, $SE = .05$, $t(-7.00)$, $p < .001$; $LLCI = -.492$; $ULCI = -.276$). The target's behaviour did not have a significant direct effect on the tendency to avoid the target when considering the mediated effects of negative emotions and the global impression of the target.

The overall moderated mediation model was significant, with the index of moderated mediation of .21 ($SE = .07$; $LLCI = .091$; $ULCI = .356$) for mediation through negative emotions, and .13 ($SE = .06$; $LLCI = .010$; $ULCI = .269$) for mediation through global impression of the target. The analysis revealed significant indirect effects of the target's behaviour on the tendency to avoid them, mediated by both negative emotions and the global impression of the target. These indirect effects were conditioned by the perception of the work environment as a masculinity contest, that is for low levels of perception of masculinity contest, the indirect effect through negative emotions was negative and significant ($b = -1.20$, $SE = .24$; $LLCI = -1.72$; $ULCI = -.750$), and the indirect effect

through the global impression was also negative and significant ($b = -.97$, $SE = .21$; $LLCI = -1.38$, $ULCI = -.570$). Furthermore, for moderate levels of perception as work as masculinity contest, the indirect effect through emotions was negative and significant ($b = -.97$, $SE = .20$; $LLCI = -1.40$; $ULCI = -.600$), and the indirect effect through global impression was also negative and significant ($b = -.83$, $SE = .17$, $LLCI = -1.16$; $ULCI = -.499$), for high levels of perception as work as masculinity contest, the indirect effect through negative emotions was negative and significant ($b = -.72$, $SE = .18$; $LLCI = -1.11$; $ULCI = -.399$), and the indirect effect through global impression of the target was also negative and significant ($b = -.66$, $SE = .16$; $LLCI = -.995$; $ULCI = -.377$). This indicates that the indirect effect of the target's behaviour on the tendency to avoid them, through negative emotions and overall evaluation, was stronger for participants perceiving a higher masculinity contest in the organization. The results suggest that the perception of a work environment featured by a masculinity contest can amplify the negative effects of reporting a colleague's behaviour on their evaluation and avoidance, both through increased negative emotions and a more negative overall impression of the target.

Figure 10.



Discussion

This study explored the dynamics of workplace culture, with a particular focus on how perceptions of masculinity contest culture influence whistleblowing evaluations. Consistent with *Study 4*, whistleblowers were generally perceived more positively than those who remained silent in the face of misconduct. Participants anticipated that colleagues would view whistleblowers more favourably, associating them with fewer negative emotions and lower tendency to avoid them, compared to colleagues who chose not to report. The study also highlighted a mediation effect, showing that the relationship between the target's behaviours and avoidance tendencies was mediated by global impressions of the whistleblower and negative emotions directed at them. This

underscores the critical role of emotions and perceptions in shaping workplace dynamics surrounding whistleblowing.

An intriguing finding emerged regarding the moderating role of MCC. The results revealed an interaction between participants' perception of MCC and target's behaviours. In fact, in this study, when participants anticipated the reactions their colleagues might have, the results showed that while reporting misconduct generally decreased avoidance tendencies, this effect weakened in workplaces perceived as highly masculine. Under such conditions, the effect of target's behaviours on avoidance tendencies weakened, suggesting that masculine workplace cultures may mitigate the positive perception of whistleblowing. It appears that in contexts where masculinity is more salient, reporting a colleague for misconduct has a less pronounced effect in reducing avoidance tendencies toward the target. Additionally, the moderated mediation analysis demonstrated that emotions and global impressions mediate the relationship between target's behaviours and avoidance tendencies, with this mediation being contingent on the level of perceived MCC. Indeed, for participants who perceived high levels of Masculinity Contest Culture in their workplace, the findings suggest a reduced decrease in avoidance tendencies associated with the target's reporting behaviour, but only for those who perceived high levels of MCC. In study 4, this analysis did not yield significant results, and no such effect was observed.

Practical implications.

Whistleblowing in the workplace significantly impacts both organizational dynamics and society at large, influencing the company's operations and the personal well-being of employees (Miceli & Near, 1992). However, misconduct in the workplace may manifest in various forms, including sexual harassment, discrimination, or bullying, each undermining ethical standards and negatively affecting the work environment. Taking responsible action within an organization involves identifying and reporting such misconduct, as adherence to ethical principles is a core component of effective workplace management. However, moral guidance alone is insufficient, as

standing by these values requires courage and determination (Nonet et al., 2016). In fact, many whistleblowers continue to face retaliation, highlighting the conflict between adhering to ethical principles and the potential risks to one's career and personal safety (Carollo et al., 2020).

Ethical boundaries in organizations are shaped not only by employees but also by the organizational culture, which defines what is acceptable or unacceptable. The findings of this study provide robust evidence that organizational culture, particularly the MCC dimension, plays a crucial role in shaping how employees perceive and evaluate those who report or refrain from reporting misconduct. A key recommendation is to address the influence of MCC by fostering workplace cultures that encourage open discussions about misconduct and actively support ethical reporting. The positive perception of whistleblowing identified in the study offers hope for the future, signaling a shift toward workplaces where reporting wrongdoing is celebrated as a contribution to the common good rather than condemned. These insights extend beyond theoretical implications, providing organizations with actionable strategies to reshape attitudes toward whistleblowing. Such cultural transformations could help redefine whistleblowers as protectors of integrity, paving the way for more supportive and ethically driven workplace environments. Yet, promoting ethical values requires more than rhetorical commitment. In fact, it demands actionable policies, including clear anti-retaliation measures and a supportive culture for those who report misconduct (Laasch & Conaway, 2015). Overall, these studies contribute to a deeper understanding of how MCC influences organizational culture and whistleblowing behaviour, offering valuable insights for fostering environments where integrity and accountability are prioritized. By addressing these cultural nuances, organizations can better align their practices with the principles of ethical governance and employee well-being.

Limitations and future directions. These studies are not without its limitations. One limitation shared by many studies on whistleblowing is the use of ad hoc scenarios specifically created for research purposes. However, as mentioned in previous studies, it is quite common in

whistleblowing research to employ both real and fictional cases to explore the contextual and situational variables that may influence perceptions and evaluations of whistleblowing (Fisher & Gollwitzer, 2023). Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce biases. In fact, participants undoubtedly perceive their work environment as masculine or not, it would be beneficial to expand this investigation by collecting data not only from employees but also from upper management, allowing for an exploration of the real impact of shared perceptions of masculinity within the workplace. However, the results of both studies have portrayed whistleblowing in a positive light, and it may be true that organizational norms encourage whistleblowing and view it as a good practice. It is also possible that participants in the first study might feel pressured to respond in ways they believe are socially acceptable, which could potentially skew the results. Therefore, the second study tried to address the influence of social desirability bias in order to obtain more accurate insights into attitudes towards whistleblowing and its perceived value within organizations. While indirect questioning may not provide a definitive solution to the issue, it can significantly enhance our understanding of complex dynamics, such as whistleblowing. For instance, by comparing the results of the two studies that employed identical measures, I can gain deeper insights into the social norms shaping and directing behaviour. In summary, these studies showed the interplay between masculinity contest culture and organizational dynamics.

Chapter 6

General Discussion

The phenomenon of whistleblowing defined as "the act of reporting unethical or illegal conduct within an organization" (Near & Miceli, 1984) has garnered increasing attention in academic research, particularly due to the moral and ethical challenges it entails. However, it is important to recognize that not all misconduct is reported by employees within organizations, which points to the complexity of this phenomenon (Anvari et al., 2019). In fact, in the study of whistleblowing, understanding the factors that influence an individual's decision to report or withhold information about misconduct has been a central focus for researchers. Scholars have long sought to identify how both personal characteristics and contextual elements contribute to shaping this decision-making process (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Recent studies suggest that whistleblowing is not merely an individual act but is deeply embedded within the broader dynamics of the workplace. In fact, group norms, organizational culture, and collective meanings significantly influence how employees perceive and respond to unethical behaviours (Ellemers & De Gilder, 2023). Evidence indicates that contextual factors—such as peer support, organizational climate, and perceptions of retaliation—play a more significant role in the decision to report misconduct than personal characteristics (Near & Jensen, 1983; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). As discussed in earlier chapters, organizational climate has been recognized as a key factor in shaping attitudes and behavioural intentions (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005) and determining whether whistleblowing behaviours are perceived as acceptable or problematic within an organization. For instance, as emphasized in this dissertation, recent studies by Pacilli and colleagues (2023) have illustrated that such perceptions of whistleblowing are highly context-dependent, with whistleblowers being seen either as moral champions or as disruptive troublemakers, depending on the organizational environment. Despite these insights, relatively less attention has been paid to how organizational culture—specifically, one characterized by masculine

values such as competition, dominance, and toughness (Berdahl et al., 2018)—influences the whistleblowing process. In fact, in recent years, Berdahl, Cooper, and colleagues (2018) have significantly expanded the study of toxic and dysfunctional organizations, coining the term *Masculinity Contest Culture* (MCC) to describe organizational norms, practices, and values that drive relentless competition for power, strength, and status. As discussed in their research, such environments prioritize outperforming others and asserting dominance, often at the expense of collaboration and collective organizational success. As highlighted in the literature review, this masculinity contest culture can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including heightened workplace toxicity, reduced cooperation, and impaired organizational functioning. Moreover, it promotes environments that enable toxic behaviours, including sexual harassment (Glick et al., 2018; Matos et al., 2018; Rawski & Workman-Stark, 2018), and contributes to work-related stress, psychosocial stress, lower work engagement, and decreased job satisfaction. Given these dynamics, considering organizational climate in the study of workplace behaviours, such as whistleblowing, is a powerful tool. In line with this premise, this dissertation seeks to explore how masculinity contest culture shapes the perception and evaluation of misconduct, as well as reactions to whistleblowing. Through *five studies*, this research investigates the relationship between MCC and whistleblowing within organizations, beginning with the connection between MCC and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs), and further analyzing how MCC interacts with the decision to report or not report misconduct within organizations. The dissertation also delves into how perceptions of whistleblowing are shaped by moral emotions and cognitive evaluations, which are critical in determining whether a whistleblower is seen as a courageous ethical actor or a source of conflict. These evaluations, in turn, can influence the behavioural reactions of individuals, particularly in terms of tendencies toward avoidance.

The decision to focus on the variable of behavioural intention to avoid as the primary outcome of these studies was guided by several key considerations. First, in line with previous research

(Brambilla et al., 2013; Pacilli et al., 2023; Pagliaro et al., 2013), avoidance can be conceptualized as a subtle yet meaningful form of retaliation. While individuals may not engage in overt acts of confrontation toward whistleblowers, they may engage in more covert behaviours, such as excluding them from meetings, social gatherings, or collaborative projects. These acts, though indirect, can significantly impact the whistleblower's career and psychological well-being. As such, even when not immediately visible, the intention to avoid is still predictive in some cases and constitutes a form of retaliation, which, as outlined in the dissertation's introduction, can have repercussions on well-being both within the company and in the workplace, as well as personal consequences. Moreover, avoidance may be symptomatic of a broader organizational issue. When employees demonstrate reluctance to associate with those who report misconduct, this may signal a culture in which speaking up is discouraged or penalized. Thus, although the present research did not directly assess other organizational outcomes such as turnover intention, the intention to avoid remains a valuable indicator for evaluating the ethical climate and the extent to which whistleblowers are genuinely supported and protected within the organization.

By examining the interplay of masculinity contest culture and whistleblowing reactions, these studies offer a deeper understanding of the factors that shape the whistleblowing process in organizations.

Main Findings

This research project comprised five studies that integrate the concepts of *whistleblowing* and *Masculinity Contest Culture* to address two critical areas in organizational behaviour. The aim was to deepen understanding of how organizational cultures characterized by MCC—defined as competitive and hypermasculine work environments—shape the occurrence of counterproductive workplace behaviours. Additionally, the studies examined how such cultures influence employees'

responses to reporting unethical conduct and their behavioural reactions, providing valuable insights into the broader implications of MCC within the workplace.

The Relationship Between Perceptions of a Masculine Work Environment and Counterproductive Work Behaviours

The findings presented in the previous chapter confirmed the hypothesized relationship between perceptions of a masculine work environment—characterized by competition and dominance—and the likelihood of engaging in counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs). Specifically, the *Study 1* revealed how Masculinity Contest Culture influences various organizational outcomes among employees in the banking and insurance sectors. These outcomes include self-objectification at work and work tension, both of which contribute to a greater tendency to engage in CWBs. In fact, the results highlight that MCC is associated with these two significant outcomes: first, it increases self-objectification, where employees begin to view themselves primarily as tools valued solely for their productivity and, second, it heightens work tension, reflecting employees' stress responses to the demands of a highly competitive and dominant workplace environment. Additionally, the study explored the link between MCC and CWBs, demonstrating that perceiving the work environment as an MCC fosters greater self-objectification, which in turn raises the likelihood of engaging in CWBs. Central to this dynamic is the role of self-objectification, which might be understood by considering the masculine characteristics prevalent in masculinity contest organizations. In such work environments, employees, driven by the need to compete with one another, may begin to objectify themselves, potentially prioritizing productivity over their personal attributes. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of understanding workplace dynamics through the lens of Masculinity Contest Culture. They underline how this cultural framework affects employee attitudes and behaviours, particularly in relation to counterproductive work behaviours, offering critical insights for organizational management and intervention strategies.

The role of moral emotions and judgments in mediating reactions to whistleblowing

Within the complexity of social interactions in organizational contexts, morality undeniably occupies a central position (Ellemers, 2019). Through a series of studies—beginning with *Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5*—this research sought to investigate the relationship between Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC) and perceptions of whistleblowing in organizational settings, emphasizing the pivotal role of moral emotions and cognitive evaluations. These emotions, as noted by Tangney et al. (2007), are essential in guiding individuals toward ethical behaviour and arise in response to adherence to or violations of moral norms (Haidt, 2003). More specifically, the studies explored how moral emotions and global evaluations—defined in terms of perceived morality and competence—shape judgments and behavioural reactions toward whistleblowers, particularly in workplace cultures dominated by masculinity. In fact, one key focus of this dissertation was to examine behavioural reactions, particularly individuals' tendencies to avoid whistleblowers as targets of indirect retaliation. The aim was to explore whether reactions to whistleblowing go beyond cognitive and affective responses, also encompassing behavioural tendencies such as avoidance. This aligns with established research showing the tendency to avoid a target as a form of indirect retaliation (Brambilla et al., 2013; Pacilli et al., 2023; Pagliaro et al., 2013). The findings presented in this dissertation demonstrate that the relationship between a target's actions (i.e., reporting or refraining from reporting misconduct) and avoidance tendencies is mediated by both emotional and cognitive factors. This highlights how the behavioural impact of the target's actions can be understood through these dimensions. In sum, this research underscores the central role of moral emotions and overarching moral evaluations in shaping responses to whistleblowing. These results build upon the findings of Pacilli et al. (2023), further supporting the idea that moral evaluations and emotions are critical in understanding behavioural reactions to whistleblowing.

A positive light on whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is a critical aspect of organizational dynamics, influenced by both individual traits and workplace characteristics (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Research has shown that whistleblowing can elicit either positive or negative evaluations depending on factors such as the personal relevance of the situation or group identification. For instance, Pacilli et al. (2023) demonstrated that whistleblowers are often judged more negatively when the context is personally significant to the evaluator or when the whistleblower is a member of the same group. Building on this foundation, this research explored the effects of a target's decision to report—or not report—misconduct on participants' perceptions, evaluations, and behavioural tendencies across *Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5*. The findings consistently revealed that participants experienced more negative emotions toward the target when they chose not to report misconduct compared to when they did. Moreover, targets who refrained from reporting were judged more unfavourably overall, and participants exhibited a stronger tendency to avoid them. Notably, whistleblowers were perceived more positively both when the nature of the misconduct was not explicitly detailed and when information about the wrongdoing was provided. In fact, in the *Study 4 and Study 5*, the wrongdoing was framed as a general instance of undesired workplace attention, yet this still led to a positive perception of whistleblowing. These findings offer a novel contribution to the literature by providing a new lens through which to interpret whistleblowing perceptions.

The impact of masculinity contest culture on employees' evaluations of whistleblowers

One of the primary aims of this dissertation was to explore the organizational culture that underpins the workplace, specifically focusing on Masculinity Contest Culture. Early research on MCC suggests that the pressure to avoid showing weakness, demonstrate strength, and prioritize work—coupled with inherent competitiveness—can amplify the negative aspects of such environments, leading to burnout, elevated stress levels, lack of psychological safety within teams,

greater intentions to leave the organization, and other harmful consequences (Berdahl et al., 2018; Glick et al., 2018; Matos et al., 2018). As demonstrated in *Study 1*, the perception of the work environment as a masculinity contest, characterized by competition and dominance, is associated with various adverse outcomes. These include increased self-objectification, work tension, and the likelihood of counterproductive work behaviours. Another key objective of this dissertation was to examine the impact of masculinity contest culture on the evaluation of whistleblowing. *Study 2* served as an initial exploration of the relationship between MCC and participants' reactions to whistleblowers, shedding light on the connection between MCC and key variables of interest, such as moral emotions, global evaluations of the target, and tendencies to avoid the target. However, *Study 3*, which manipulated the workplace context as either a masculinity contest or a non-masculine context, yielded no significant effects, and no interaction between MCC and the target's behaviour was found. In *Studies 4 and 5*, which aimed also to address social desirability bias, a deeper exploration of the effects of MCC on employees' evaluations of whistleblowers was conducted. Although *Study 4* found no significant effects of MCC on behavioural responses to whistleblowing, *study 5* revealed a moderating role for MCC in the evaluation of whistleblowers. In particular, the findings demonstrated an interaction between participants' perceptions of MCC and the target's behaviour. When participants anticipated how their colleagues might react to the target's actions, the results showed that reporting misconduct generally reduced avoidance tendencies. However, this effect weakened in workplaces perceived as highly masculine. In such environments, the positive impact of reporting misconduct on avoidance tendencies was diminished, suggesting that masculine workplace cultures may reduce the positive perception of whistleblowing. Moreover, the results of *Study 5* indicated that the relationship between the target's behaviour and avoidance tendencies was mediated by negative emotions toward the target and overall evaluation, and this mediation effect was contingent upon the levels of MCC perceived by participants. Specifically, for participants who perceived high levels of MCC in their workplace, the findings suggested a less pronounced decrease in avoidance tendencies associated with the target's whistleblowing behaviour.

The studies conducted highlight the importance of investigating organizational cultures, particularly those shaped by masculine ideals, to understand their influence on employees' attitudes and behaviours, including their perceptions of whistleblowers.

Sample insights on whistleblowing and MCC

The five studies provide valuable insights into the dynamics of Italian workplaces, while also highlighting key differences among the participants. The voluntary survey approach, using snowball sampling, ensured a diverse range of respondents with respect to gender, education, and employment status.

Most participants held permanent or fixed-term employment, suggesting a degree of job stability that may have influenced their perceptions of workplace dynamics and whistleblowing, compared to those in more precarious positions. Future research should explore how perceived job security and seniority influence these dynamics. While permanent contracts were predominant, Studies 4 and 5 included a higher proportion of self-employed and part-time workers, groups that may perceive whistleblowing differently due to their organizational relationships and potential vulnerability.

Although sample sizes varied (ranging from 212 to 336 participants), the larger samples provided greater statistical power but also potentially greater variability. There was also some variation in average participant age, which could influence perceptions of MCC and whistleblowing, given that older participants may have more experience navigating workplace dynamics and therefore hold different perspectives on reporting misconduct.

The exclusive focus on Italian workplaces introduces a cultural dimension, as Italian workplaces are shaped by specific cultural norms (traditional gender roles, hierarchical structures) that may amplify the effects of MCC. In fact, masculine values may be particularly salient in certain industries (e.g.,

banking, insurance). These cultural norms likely interact with MCC to shape perceptions of whistleblowing. Future research should expand beyond a single cultural context to examine cross-cultural differences in MCC and whistleblowing dynamics.

Practical implications

Whistleblowing plays a critical role in shaping both organizational dynamics and societal norms, with implications for company operations and employee well-being (Miceli & Near, 1992). Misconduct in the workplace—such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and bullying—undermines ethical standards and corrodes the work environment. However, ethical boundaries are not solely defined by individuals; they are also influenced by organizational culture, which determines what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable. This research highlights the importance of organizational climate as a contextual factor that influences how workplace behaviors are perceived and managed, offering valuable insights for practitioners, particularly in Human Resources.

Understanding the underlying climate is essential for identifying cultural patterns—such as competitiveness, emotional suppression, or hyper-masculinity—that may foster dysfunctional dynamics. Given the risks associated with Masculinity Contest Cultures (MCCs), including increased stress, reduced well-being, and retaliatory behavior, organizations should prioritize interventions that promote more ethical and inclusive environments. These interventions should begin with an assessment of the existing climate using validated tools like the MCC scale, helping to pinpoint areas where masculine norms—such as excessive competitiveness, emotional toughness or and prioritization of work above all else—are overly emphasized.

Based on these insights, organizations can implement targeted practices, including training programs that promote inclusion and collaboration, initiatives that support work-life balance, and leadership models grounded in ethics and transparency. The findings suggest that fostering a cooperative rather than competitive climate is essential for reducing workplace dysfunction,

encouraging openness, and promoting psychological safety. This is particularly relevant to whistleblowing: the studies show that how misconduct is evaluated and addressed is deeply shaped by the surrounding organizational culture.

Furthermore, this thesis specifically explored the relationship between organizational climate and whistleblowing, demonstrating that the broader workplace context significantly shapes how whistleblowing is evaluated and addressed in response to misconduct. From a practical standpoint, investing in practices that support whistleblowing is critical. These include creating peer support systems, involving senior leadership in ethical culture-building, and ensuring transparency in reporting mechanisms. Establishing confidential and anonymous channels can reduce fear of reprisal, while formal anti-retaliation policies are essential for protecting those who report wrongdoing in good faith. Raising awareness about the ethical value of whistleblowing can further foster a culture of accountability and inclusion.

Moreover, reducing masculinity-driven cultural norms can enhance communication, trust, and collaboration across the organization. Organizations should invest in bystander intervention training, empowering employees to safely and effectively challenge unethical behavior and support those who have been targeted. Training in emotional intelligence—emphasizing empathy, self-awareness, and perspective-taking—can also strengthen a supportive and respectful work environment. Training initiatives on ethical reasoning may further engage employees in reflecting on shared values and organizational standards.

This thesis ultimately encourages a constructive view of whistleblowing—as a contribution to the collective good rather than a stigmatized act. To realize this transformation, organizations must go beyond rhetorical commitments to ethics and implement concrete, actionable measures. These include anti-retaliation measures and a system of support for those reporting misconduct (Laasch & Conaway, 2015). By addressing the influence of MCCs, organizations can build

environments where integrity, accountability, and employee well-being are not only protected but actively promoted.

Limitations and future directions

The findings of this thesis offer valuable insights into the relationship between masculinity contest culture and whistleblowing, contributing to both theoretical and practical domains. Nonetheless, several avenues for future research could refine and expand upon these findings. One area for further exploration is the absence of a detected gender effect. Specifically, the gender of the participants did not influence the key variables in the studies.

A limitation of the current study is the lack of an explicit inquiry into how participants perceived the severity of the reported misconduct or whether they considered it to be sexual harassment. Perceptions of misconduct can be highly subjective; for example, what one person might view as a harmless joke, another might interpret as a serious violation (Holland et al., 2016). Research has shown that perceptions of what is deemed acceptable can differ not only between individuals but also across genders, organizational cultures, and even within the same organization, depending on the local climate. These variations in perception are likely to influence whether individuals decide to report misconduct, as they affect how severe or inappropriate the behaviour is perceived to be.

However, when reflecting on the role of gender, it is important to consider that future studies could examine participants' endorsement of traditional gender norms. These factors may significantly shape how misconduct cases are perceived and evaluated, especially those involving violence or unwanted attention. In fact, research by Holland et al. (2016) has suggested that in masculine organizations, men who don't conform to traditional masculine norms (for instance, men with feminist values) can actually experience more sexual harassment themselves as a form of

punishment by other men. These men may perceive retaliation toward someone reporting misconduct as more unfair compared to men who uphold traditional masculine norms.

Another limitation of the studies relates to the manipulation of gender within the scenarios. Some studies focused on situations where a woman received unwanted attention from a man, which led to generally positive evaluations of whistleblowing. Interestingly, even when the specific nature of the misconduct was not explicitly detailed, this positive perception of whistleblowing remained consistent across all studies. However, future research could further explore the manipulation of gender in scenarios, examine how these perceptions change when varying the gender of both the victim and the perpetrator, which could open up broader possibilities for understanding how gender dynamics influence the evaluation of misconduct and whistleblowing.

Also, the manipulation of masculinity related workplace climates requires refinement. Future studies could introduce three distinct organizational climates: one dominated by masculine traits, one neutral, and one collaborative—emphasizing cooperation and work-life balance over competition. This expanded framework could provide a more nuanced understanding of how varying cultural contexts influence perceptions and behaviours related to whistleblowing.

Another challenge concerns the potential influence of participants' prior workplace experiences, which may have shaped their interpretation of the manipulated scenarios. Although this is a common issue in experimental research, it may be particularly relevant here, as the organizational context and individuals' experiences within it could influence their perceptions of masculinity and whistleblowing. To address this, future research should include a more diverse sample, incorporating both lower-level employees and also upper management, to provide a broader and more representative understanding of masculinity within the organization. In addition, future studies should aim to develop more specific and relatable scenarios that closely reflect participants' actual work environments. Alternatively, they could investigate real organizational settings, comparing

environments with low and high levels of masculinity, and exploring the types of jobs typically associated with masculine traits. Particular attention could be directed toward professions strongly associated with masculine traits to explore how these environments establish norms that shape perceptions of misconduct and whistleblowing.

Furthermore, it would be valuable for future research to examine the role of organizational position and how it might influence individuals' views on whistleblowing and its potential consequences.

One factor that prompted me to consider this issue is leadership positions, as holding a senior role might lead individuals to feel increased pressure to protect the company's reputation, even if that means downplaying misconduct. Alternatively, such individuals may feel a greater responsibility to uphold ethical standards. This dynamic could be perceived differently, for instance, when considering individuals in more junior positions, who may feel more vulnerable to retaliation.

In conclusion, future research directions are varied and could address topics such as gender norms, behavioural tendencies, or other dimensions that significantly impact organizational dynamics. Each of these paths aims to shed further light on the complexity of organizational processes. By addressing these gaps, future research can enhance understanding of the interplay between MCC, whistleblowing, ultimately offering practical insights to foster more supportive and ethical workplaces.

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Appendix A

Work as masculinity contest scale (Glick et al., 2018)

Study 2,3,4,5

ENGLISH

Please focus on your work environment. Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, using a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

In my work environment...:

Show no weakness factor:

- 1. Admitting you don't know the answer looks weak*
- 2. Expressing any emotion other than anger or pride is seen as weak*
- 3. Seeking other's advice is seen as weak*
- 4. The most respected people don't show emotions*
- 5. People who show doubt lose respect*

Strength and stamina factor:

- 6. It's important to be in good physical shape to be respected*
- 7. People who are physically smaller have to work harder to get respect*
- 8. Physically imposing people have more influence*
- 9. Physical stamina is admired*
- 10. Athletic people are especially admired*

Put work first factor:

- 11. To succeed you can't let family interfere with work*
- 12. Taking days off is frowned upon*
- 13. To get ahead you need to be able to work long hours*
- 14. Leadership expects employees to put work first*
- 15. People with significant demands outside of work don't make it very far*

Dog eat dog factor:

- 16. You're either "in" or you're "out," and once you're out, you're out*
- 17. If you don't stand up for yourself people will step on you*
- 18. You can't be too trusting*
- 19. You've got to watch your back*

20. *One person's loss is another person's gain*

ITALIAN

Ti chiediamo di concentrarti sul tuo ambiente di lavoro. Indica il tuo grado di accordo con le affermazioni che seguono, sulla scala che va da a 1 (completamente in disaccordo) a 7 (completamente d'accordo).

Nel mio ambiente di lavoro...:

Fattore "Non mostrare debolezza"

1. *Ammettere di non conoscere la risposta a una domanda fa apparire deboli*
2. *Esprimere qualsiasi emozione diversa dalla rabbia e dall'orgoglio è considerata una debolezza*
3. *Cercare il consiglio degli altri è visto come una debolezza*
4. *Le persone più stimate non mostrano le proprie emozioni*
5. *Le persone che mostrano dubbi perdono rispetto*

Fattore "Forza e resistenza"

6. *È importante essere in buona forma fisica per essere rispettati*
7. *Le persone fisicamente più piccole devono lavorare di più per ottenere rispetto*
8. *Le persone fisicamente imponenti hanno più influenza*
9. *La resistenza fisica è guardata con ammirazione*
10. *Le persone atletiche sono particolarmente ammirate*

Fattore "Mettere il lavoro al primo posto"

11. *Per avere successo non bisogna lasciare che la famiglia interferisca con il lavoro*
12. *Prendere giorni liberi non è visto di buon occhio*
13. *Per andare avanti è necessario essere in grado di lavorare molte ore*
14. *I capi si aspettano che i dipendenti mettano il lavoro al primo posto*
15. *Le persone con esigenze significative al di fuori del lavoro non vanno molto lontano*

Fattore “competizione spietata”

16. *O sei "dentro" o sei "fuori", e una volta fuori, sei fuori*
17. *Se non ti difendi da solo/a, le persone ti calpesteranno*
18. *Non ci si può fidare troppo degli altri/delle altre*
19. *Bisogna guardarsi le spalle*
20. *La perdita di una persona è il guadagno di un'altra persona*

MASCULINITY WORK CONTEST: 9 items (study 1)

1. *Ammettere di non conoscere la risposta a una domanda fa apparire deboli (è considerata una debolezza)*
2. *Le persone più stimate (rispettabili) non mostrano le proprie emozioni*
3. *Le persone che mostrano dubbi perdono rispetto*
4. *Le persone fisicamente più piccole devono lavorare di più per ottenere rispetto*
5. *Le persone atletiche sono particolarmente ammirate*
6. *Per avere successo non bisogna lasciare che la famiglia interferisca con il lavoro*
7. *Prendere giorni liberi non è visto di buon occhio*
8. *Se non ti difendi da solo, le persone ti calpesteranno*
9. *Non ci si può fidare troppo degli altri*

ETHICAL CLIMATE

(Friendship and Self-interest item extracted and adapted from Cullen et al., 1993; Study 1)

Indica quanto si manifestano i seguenti comportamenti all'interno della tua azienda:

1. *In questa azienda, le persone si preoccupano l'un l'altra del bene altrui*
2. *Le persone tendono soprattutto a fare i propri interessi**

3. In questa azienda, ci si preoccupa innanzitutto di cosa è meglio per l'altro/a collega
4. L'organizzazione/azienda ha a cuore il benessere di ciascun individuo
5. Non c'è spazio per principi morali ed etici personali*
6. Le persone hanno a cuore gli interessi degli altri colleghi
7. Ci si interessa innanzitutto a cosa è meglio per gli altri colleghi
8. Le persone tutelano i propri interessi al di là di tutto*
9. Ci si aspetta che, prima di prendere una decisione, si tengano in conto gli interessi delle persone che verranno coinvolte
10. Le persone si preoccupano innanzitutto di cosa è meglio per loro stesse*

**Items of perceive self-interest climate*

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOURS

**Adaptation of Italian version of Barbaranelli et al., (2013), from the original checklist by
Spector et al. (2006)**

For the scope of the present research, I selected 18 of the original items;

study 1

Con quale frequenza ha fatto ognuna delle seguenti cose nel tuo attuale lavoro:

1. *Ti sei lamentato/a per cose insignificanti*
2. *Hai detto a persone esterne alla sua azienda che lavora in un posto orrendo*
3. *Hai eseguito di proposito il lavoro in maniera non corretta*
4. *Sei arrivato/a al lavoro in ritardo senza autorizzazione*
5. *Hai di proposito eseguito il suo lavoro lentamente quando c'era bisogno che le cose venissero fatte in tempi adeguati*
6. *Hai rifiutato un compito che ti veniva richiesto*
7. *Sei arrivato/a di proposito in ritardo ad un appuntamento o ad una riunione*
8. *Hai omesso di riferire un problema in modo che peggiorasse*
9. *Hai fatto una pausa più lunga di quanto autorizzato*
10. *Hai lasciato il posto di lavoro in anticipo rispetto all'orario previsto senza autorizzazione*

11. *Hai offeso qualcuno per la sua prestazione di lavoro*
12. *Hai portato a casa materiali o strumenti di lavoro senza autorizzazione*
13. *Ti sei rifiutato/a di aiutare qualcuno/a*
14. *Hai sottratto a qualcuno/a delle informazioni di cui aveva bisogno*
15. *Hai incolpato qualcun altro/qualcun'altra per errori che hai commesso*
16. *Hai fatto un gesto osceno (ad esempio, mostrato il dito medio) a qualcuno/a*
17. *Hai guardato la posta o le cose private di qualcuno senza autorizzazione*
18. *Hai insultato o ti sei preso/a gioco di qualcuno/a*

CONFORMITY TO MASCULINE NORMS INVENTORY(CMNI)

adaptation of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Levant et al., 2020) from the original

Ti chiediamo di indicare il tuo grado di accordo con le frasi che seguiranno:

1. *Tendo a condividere i miei sentimenti*
2. *Mi piace parlare dei miei sentimenti*
3. *Per me, la miglior sensazione al mondo viene dalla vittoria*
4. *Faccio di tutto per vincere*
5. *Avere una posizione sociale prestigiosa non è importante per me*
6. *Penso che cercare di essere importanti sia una perdita di tempo*
7. *Il lavoro viene prima di tutto per me*
8. *Ho bisogno di dare priorità al mio lavoro rispetto ad altre cose*
9. *Mi dà fastidio quando devo chiedere aiuto*
10. *Non mi vergogno di chiedere aiuto*
11. *Mi piace assumere rischi*
12. *Assumo rischi*

TRUST

(3 items from Maiolo & Zuffo, 2018; study 1)

Ti chiediamo di rispondere alle seguenti domande tenendo conto di questi parametri:

1. Mi fido del mio supervisore diretto
2. Mi fido dei/delle miei/mie colleghi/e
3. Mi fido della mia organizzazione nel suo complesso

WORK TENSION SCALE

Work Tension Scale (adapted from House & Rizzo, 1972; study 1)

Indica il tuo grado di accordo con le affermazioni che seguono:

1. Il mio lavoro incide direttamente alla mia salute
2. Lavoro sotto una forte tensione
3. Mi sono sentito irrequieto o nervoso a causa del mio lavoro
4. Se avessi un lavoro diverso, la mia salute probabilmente migliorerebbe
5. I problemi associati al mio lavoro mi hanno tenuto sveglio la notte
6. Mi sono sentito nervoso prima di partecipare alle riunioni in azienda
7. Spesso "porto il mio lavoro a casa con me", nel senso che penso al lavoro quando faccio altre cose

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION SCALE

(Manuti & Bosco, 2012 adapted from Mael & Ashfort, 1992; Study 1 and study 2)

Indica il tuo grado di accordo con le affermazioni che seguono:

1. Quando qualcuno muove delle critiche all'azienda per la quale lavoro, mi sento insultato sul piano personale
2. Sono molto interessato a ciò che gli altri pensano dell'azienda per la quale lavoro
3. Quando parlo dell'azienda per la quale lavoro generalmente dico «noi» piuttosto che «loro»
4. I successi dell'azienda per la quale lavoro sono i miei successi
5. Quando qualcuno elogia l'azienda per la quale lavoro, mi sento come se facessero un complimento a me
6. Se i mass media dovessero criticare l'azienda per la quale lavoro mi sentirei in imbarazzo

TURNOVER INTENTION

ENGLISH

a single item adapted from literature (Waung and Brice, 2007); STUDY 1

Participants have provided their answer on a 7-point Likert-type scales (from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 = “completely agree”).

“If I had the opportunity, I would certainly quit my actual job”

ITALIAN

“Se ne avessi l’opportunità, non ci penserei due volte a cambiare lavoro”

SELF-OBJECTIFICATION SCALE

(Baldissarri et al., 2017; STUDY 1)

ITALIAN

Quando lavoro mi sento simile a:

1. una persona
2. uno strumento
3. una cosa
4. un essere umano
5. un individuo
6. un utensile
7. un soggetto
8. una macchina

JOB SATISFACTION

Single item

Job satisfaction was measured by asking participants to indicate their global satisfaction with their job, using a single item. The answer was rated on a scale of 1 to 7 (ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 =greatly).

MORAL EMOTIONS SCALE

ENGLISH

This scale is adapted from Ashburn-Nardo, 2017 and Cuddy et al., 2007 (study 2,3,4,5)

Participants indicated to what extent the target described in the scenario, made them feel nine moral emotions

Now we ask you to indicate, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a lot), how much you felt the following emotions towards the target

Disapproval

Anger

Indignation

Annoyance

Disgust

*Estimation**

*Admiration**

*Sympathy**

*Trust**

*After reversing the positive moral emotions, a final negative index was created by averaging participants' answers.

ITALIAN

Ora ti chiediamo di indicare, su una scala da 1 (per niente) a 7 (molto), quanto hai provato le seguenti emozioni nei confronti del target

1. Disapprovazione
2. Rabbia
3. Indignazione
4. Fastidio
5. Disgusto

6. Stima
7. Ammirazione
8. Simpatia
9. Fiducia

Dopo aver invertito le emozioni morali positive, è stato creato un indice finale calcolando la media delle risposte dei partecipanti

GLOBAL IMPRESSION SCALE

(Leach et al., 2007 (3 items moralità e 3 items competenza; study 2,3,4,5))

Leggi i seguenti aggettivi e indica, su una scala da 1 (per niente) a 7 (moltissimo), quanto pensi che rispecchino l'idea che ti sei fatto del collega che non ha denunciato l'accaduto. Quanto, secondo te, il target è:

1. affidabile *
2. onesto *
3. sincero *
4. competente
5. intelligente
6. capace

*Items riferiti alla moralità

ENGLISH

Participants responded on a scale from 1 (1 not at all) 7 (very much)

Please indicate how much you think the target is:

1. trustworthy
2. honest

3. sincere
4. competent
5. intelligent
6. capable

TENDENCY TO AVOID THE TARGET SCALE

(Brambilla et al., 2013; *study 2,3,4,5*)

ENGLISH

Indirect retaliation was measured with nine items adapted from Brambilla et al. (2013) on a 7-point scale.

Read the following adjectives and indicate, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much), how much you think they reflect your idea of the target:

1. I would be rude to the target if I ever met him.
2. When dealing with the target, I would want to keep the target at a distance if we ever met.
3. I would like to deal with the target in the future
4. I would like to meet the target
5. I would be willing to cooperate with the target if I ever met him.
6. I really want to have a conversation with the target
7. I would probably fight the target if I ever met him.
8. I would probably be annoyed if I met the target
9. I would try to stay away from the target
10. I would have nothing to do with the target

ITALIAN

L'intenzione comportamentale di evitamento è stata misurata con nove items adattati da Brambilla et al. (2013) su una scala a 7 punti.

Ora immagina di incontrare il target. Per ciascuna affermazione, utilizzando la scala che va da 1 (per nulla) a 7 (moltissimo), indica il punto che credi corrisponda alla tua intenzione

1. Se incontrassi il target, sarei maldisposto verso di lui
2. Se incontrassi il target cercherei di tenerlo a debita distanza
3. Mi piacerebbe avere a che fare con il target in futuro
4. Mi piacerebbe incontrare il target
5. Se incontrassi il target sarei disposto a cooperare con lui
6. Mi piacerebbe parlare realmente con il target
7. Se incontrassi il target probabilmente litigherei con lui
8. Se incontrassi il target probabilmente mi mostrerei seccato
9. Cercherei di evitare il target
10. Non vorrei avere nulla a che fare con il target

Appendix B

Manipulation 1. Below, I report the manipulation used in **Study 3**

Work context (masculinity framed vs. control condition)

MASCULINITY FRAMED CONDITION

Ti chiediamo di prenderti qualche minuto e immaginare di lavorare in uno dei team che compongono l'azienda YouGroup & Co.

Qui di seguito, sono descritte alcune caratteristiche peculiari di questa azienda. Leggile attentamente, cercando di immedesimarti quanto più possibile in uno dei lavoratori o delle lavoratrici di questa azienda.

La YouGroup & Co. è un'azienda leader in ambito internazionale. L'azienda si è sempre distinta oltre che per i risultati ottenuti anche per il clima che caratterizza l'ambiente di lavoro. Chi lavora per questa azienda si riconosce per la propria intraprendenza nel mettere il lavoro al primo posto nella vita. La competizione ricopre un valore centrale per il raggiungimento dei risultati e non è visto di buon occhio mostrare dubbi ed esitazioni rispetto allo svolgimento dei compiti. Mostrare forza è invece la base per essere riconosciuti all'interno del contesto aziendale, perché è noto che bisogna prevalere per contare qualcosa nel gruppo lavorativo.

CONTROL CONDITION

Ti chiediamo di prenderti qualche minuto e immaginare di lavorare in uno dei team che compongono l'azienda YouGroup & Co.

Qui di seguito, sono descritte alcune caratteristiche peculiari di questa azienda. Leggile attentamente, cercando di immedesimarti quanto più possibile in uno dei lavoratori o delle lavoratrici di questa azienda.

La YouGroup & Co. è un'azienda leader in ambito internazionale. L'azienda si è sempre distinta oltre che per i risultati ottenuti anche per il clima che caratterizza l'ambiente di lavoro. Chi lavora per questa azienda si riconosce per la possibilità di conciliare la propria vita personale con il carico lavorativo. La cooperazione ricopre un valore centrale per il raggiungimento dei risultati ed è visto di buon occhio esprimere dubbi ed esitazioni rispetto allo svolgimento dei compiti. Mostrare flessibilità è invece la base per essere riconosciuti all'interno del contesto aziendale, perché è noto che bisogna cooperare per contare qualcosa nel gruppo lavorativo.

In study 3 I present a second manipulation as follow:

Target's behaviour (report vs. not report)

REPORT CONDITION

Tenendo a mente ciò che hai letto nello scenario precedente, ti chiediamo adesso di immedesimarti in una situazione in cui, durante una pausa nell'area ristoro dell'azienda, ti trovi ad ascoltare involontariamente una conversazione tra due colleghi.

Prendi il tempo necessario per leggere e comprendere l'estratto del dialogo:

A: ...*Ma cosa è successo?...In ufficio non si parla d'altro...*
 B:...*è accaduta una cosa spiacevole l'altro giorno. Una di quelle cose che possono accadere in ufficio, però stavolta ho preferito non farmi i fatti miei e denunciare tutto alla direzione!*
 A: *Dunque hai denunciato ufficialmente l'accaduto?*
 B: *Sì, ho denunciato quanto successo al responsabile degli uffici del personale*

NOT REPORT CONDITION

Tenendo a mente ciò che hai letto nello scenario precedente ti chiediamo adesso di immedesimarti in una situazione in cui durante una pausa nell'area ristoro dell'azienda ti trovi ad ascoltare involontariamente una conversazioni tra due colleghi.

Prendi il tempo necessario per leggere e comprendere l'estratto del dialogo:

A: ...*Ma cosa è successo? In ufficio non si parla d'altro...*
 B:...*è accaduta una cosa spiacevole l'altro giorno. Una di quelle cose che si possono presentare in ufficio, però stavolta ho preferito farmi i fatti miei e non denunciare tutto alla direzione!*
 A: *Dunque non hai denunciato ufficialmente l'accaduto?*
 B: *No, non ho denunciato l'accaduto al responsabile dell'ufficio del personale*

Manipulation 2. Below, I report the manipulation used in Study 4.

Target's behaviour (report vs. not report a misconduct)

NOT REPORT CONDITION

Ora ti chiediamo di leggere attentamente lo scenario seguente. Prenditi tutto il tempo necessario per comprendere quanto viene descritto: Immagina di trovarti in una tipica giornata di lavoro. Mentre svolgi i tuoi compiti quotidiani, hai appreso che un collega, John, ha fatto avances indesiderate a un'altra collega, Emily, mettendola a disagio. Un terzo collega, **Alex**, ha osservato il comportamento inappropriato. Alex, il terzo collega che ha assistito a quanto è accaduto, ha trovato

il comportamento inappropriato e ne è rimasto parecchio sorpreso, ma **ha scelto di non denunciarlo** al dipartimento delle risorse umane.

REPORT CONDITION

Ora ti chiediamo di leggere attentamente lo scenario seguente. Prenditi tutto il tempo necessario per comprendere quanto viene descritto: Immagina di trovarti in una tipica giornata di lavoro. Mentre svolgi i tuoi compiti quotidiani, hai appreso che un collega, John, ha fatto avances indesiderate a un'altra collega, Emily, mettendola a disagio. Un terzo collega, **Alex**, ha osservato il comportamento inappropriato. Alex, il terzo collega che ha assistito a quanto è accaduto, ha trovato il comportamento inappropriato e ne è rimasto parecchio sorpreso, così **ha scelto di denunciarlo** al dipartimento delle risorse umane.

Manipulation 3. Below, I report the manipulation used in Study 5.

Target's behaviour (report vs. not report a misconduct)

NOT REPORT CONDITION

Ora ti chiediamo di leggere attentamente lo scenario seguente.
Prenditi tutto il tempo necessario per comprendere quanto viene descritto:

Immagina di trovarti in una tipica giornata di lavoro. Mentre svolgi i tuoi compiti quotidiani, hai appreso che un collega, Giovanni, ha fatto avances indesiderate a un'altra collega, Maria, mettendola a disagio. Un terzo collega, Alessandro, ha osservato il comportamento inappropriato. Alessandro, il terzo collega che ha assistito a quanto è accaduto, ha trovato il comportamento inappropriato e ne è rimasto parecchio sorpreso, ma ha scelto di non denunciarlo al dipartimento delle risorse umane.

REPORT CONDITION

Ora ti chiediamo di leggere attentamente lo scenario seguente.
Prenditi tutto il tempo necessario per comprendere quanto viene descritto:

Immagina di trovarti in una tipica giornata di lavoro. Mentre svolgi i tuoi compiti quotidiani, hai appreso che un collega, Giovanni, ha fatto avances indesiderate a un'altra collega, Maria, mettendola a disagio. Un terzo collega, Alessandro, ha osservato il comportamento inappropriato. Alessandro, il terzo collega che ha assistito a quanto è accaduto, ha trovato il comportamento

inappropriato e ne è rimasto parecchio sorpreso, così ha scelto di denunciarlo al dipartimento delle risorse umane.

Appendix C

Supplementary material

Study 1

In this section, I present exploratory analyses examining the associations of additional variables not included in the main study. First, I considered the relationship between different

ethical climates—self-interest ethical climate versus friendship ethical climate. Ethical work climates are typically understood as shared perceptions of organizational procedures, both formal and informal, that establish expectations for ethical behaviour within the workplace (Victor & Cullen, 1987). Additionally, I explored the relationship between MCC and various work outcomes, including organizational identification, adherence to masculine norms, trust, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions.

Measures:

In accordance with past research (Pagliaro et al., 2018; Teresi et al., 2019), the *Ethical organizational climate of friendship* was measured through six items (e.g., «In this company, people look out for each other's good»; $\alpha = .86$) and the *Ethical organizational climate of self-interest* was assessed using four items (e.g., «In this company, people are primarily interested in themselves»; $\alpha = .76$) selected from the Italian version of the Cullen et al.'s (1993) Ethical Climate Questionnaire. Responses were given through a 7-point scale (from 1 = “Never” to 7 = “Always”; $\alpha = .87$).

I assessed *Organizational identification* using the Italian adaptation (Manuti and Bosco, 2012) of the original six-item scale by Mael and Ashforth (1992) modified for organizational context (e.g. “When someone criticizes my organization, it feels like a personal insult”). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 = “completely agree”; $\alpha = .86$),.

Then, I measured the *adherence to masculine norms*, that is the extent to which people personally adhere to the demands of male norms was assessed through an adaptation of the *Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory* (Levant et al., 2020) from the original scale (e.g. “I tend to prioritize my work over other things”; “It bothers me when I have to ask for help”; a $\alpha = .66$). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-scale (from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 = “Completely agree”).

After that, I measured *trust* by asking participants to indicate the degree to which they trust their supervisor, co-workers and the organization (e.g. “I trust my organization as a whole”; $\alpha = .75$). In particular, the three items were mutated by the Maiolo and Zuffo’s scale (2018). Response choices were presented in a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = “never” to 7 = “greatly”).

I measured the *turnover intention* or the intention to leaving their job making use of a single item (“If I had the opportunity, I would certainly quit my actual job”) adapted from literature (Waung and Brice, 2007). Participants have provided provided their answer on a 7-point Likert-type scales (from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 = “completely agree”).

Job satisfaction was measured by asking participants to indicate their global satisfaction with their job, using a single item. The answer was rated on a scale of 1 to 7 (ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 =greatly).

Results

Table 9.*Means, standard deviations, correlations.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.Masculinity</i>	3.54	1.12	--									
<i>2.Friendship</i>	3,39	1.16	-.378***	--								
<i>Climate</i>												
<i>3.Self interest</i>	4,68	1.12	.517***	-.568***	--							
<i>Climate</i>												
<i>4.Identification</i>	4.52	1.43	-.047	.329***	-.094	--						
<i>5. CMNI</i>	3.81	.79	.292***	.008	.091	.197***	--					
<i>6.Trust</i>	5.29	1.46	-.242***	.604***	-.379***	.377***	.017	--				
<i>7. CWB</i>	1.79	.81	.229***	-.052	.135*	-.084	.236***	-.068	--			
<i>8.Turnover</i>	3.88	1.96	.343***	-.361***	.378***	-.257***	-.032	-.359***	.140*	--		
<i>9.Satisfaction</i>	4.48	1.44	-.282***	.522***	-.355***	.420***	.081	.543***	-.053	-.430***	--	

10. Self-objectification	3.09	1.31	.378***	-.455***	.367***	-.290***	.058	-.405***	.250***	.381***	-.536***	--
11. Work Tension	4.05	1.33	.383***	-.274***	.356***	.032	.143**	-.228***	.181**	.381***	-.228***	.424***
												--

Note. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Results

The results indicate that perceiving the workplace as a context of masculinity is positively associated with a self-interest ethical climate and negatively associated with an ethical climate of friendship. Furthermore, perceiving the workplace in terms of masculinity contest culture is negatively associated with trust, suggesting that a higher perception of MCC corresponds to lower trust in the organization, coworkers, and supervisors. Additionally, MCC appears positively correlated with adherence to masculine norms. In terms of broader organizational outcomes, perceiving the work environment as a masculinity contest is linked to poorer indicators of both organizational and individual well-being, with negative associations with job satisfaction and positive associations with turnover intentions. Notably, no association was found between MCC and organizational identification.

Supplementary material

Study 2

In this section, I present exploratory analyses examining the associations of additional variables not included in the main *study 2*. I explored the relationship between Masculinity Contest Culture (MCC), along with its subdimensions, and organizational identification. Also, I explored potential relationship between climate of silence and other variables of the study.

Measures:

Organizational identification was assessed using the Italian adaptation (Manuti and Bosco, 2012) of the original six-item scale by Mael and Ashforth (1992) adapted for organizational context (e.g. “When I talk about the company for which I generally work I say «we» rather than «them»”). Responses were provided on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1(= completely disagree) to 7(=completely agree). Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$.

Climate of silence, which consists of widely held beliefs among employees that speaking up about issues or concerns is useless and risky, was measured using three items adapted from Morrison & Milliken (2000) (e.g. "My voicing the bug could be dangerous for my career"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .46$). Participants provided responses on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Table 10.*Means, standard deviations, correlations.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>1.Show no weakness</i>	2.87	1.32	--											
<i>2.Strenght and stamina</i>	3.03	1.34	.507***	--										
<i>3.Put work first</i>	3.88	1.31	.616***	.545***	--									
<i>4.Dog eat dog</i>	3.86	1.47	.596***	.478***	.620***	--								
<i>5.MCC</i>	3.41	1.11	.827***	.769***	.845***	.833***	--							

6.Organizational	4.42	1.42	-.183**	.052	-.078	-.104	-.096	--
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Identification

7. Moral emotions	3.28	1.39	.074	.186**	-.016	.059	.093	-.072	--
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8.Moral evaluation	4.83	1.43	-.107	-.067	.027	.033	-.033	.118	-.578***	--
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9.Competence	4.10	1.25	-.001	.039	.136*	.090	.081	.055	-.496***	.668***	--
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10.global impression	4.47	1.22	-.063	-.019	.085	.065	.022	.097	-.591***	.925***	.901***	--
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11.Tendency to avoid	2.77	1.29	.111	.170*	.007	.043	.100	-.009	.702***	-.633***	-.531***	-.641***	--
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12.	3.70	1.59	.363***	.201**	.299***	.272***	.346***	-.380***	.051	-.089	.037	-.033	.062	--
Organizational														
silence														

Note. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Results.

No significant associations were found between the overall Masculinity Contest Culture and organizational identification. However, an examination of the MCC subdimensions revealed a significant negative correlation between the *show no weakness* dimension and organizational identification. Specifically, perceiving the workplace as an environment that discourages vulnerability was associated with lower levels of identification with the organization. Conversely, no significant relationships were found between the other MCC dimensions (strength and stamina, put work first, dog-eat-dog competition) and organizational identification. As for the variable of climate of silence, it shows a rather low alpha. However, it appears to correlate positively with MCC and all its subdimensions. Additionally, this climate of silence is negatively correlated with organizational identification.

Supplementary material

Study 5

In this section, I present exploratory analyses examining the associations of additional variables not included in the main *study 5*.

I measured participants' political orientation by inviting them to position themselves on a political scale ranging from 1 (left or liberal) to 9 (right or conservative), regardless of their country's political parties.

However, this variable was only collected at the conclusion of the survey and was not incorporated into the exploratory analyses