

Women Attaining Decent Work: The Important Role of Workplace Climate in Psychology of Working Theory

Jessica W. England, Ryan D. Duffy,
Nicholas P. Gensmer, and Haram J. Kim
University of Florida

Aysenur Buyukgoze-Kavas
Ondokuz Mayıs University

Dylan M. Larson-Konar
University of Florida

Grounded in Psychology of Working Theory (PWT), the current study investigated predictors of decent work among a sample of employed women ($N = 528$). A structural equation model was examined finding that women's experiences of marginalization, work volition, and career adaptability all directly predicted the attainment of decent work, and economic constraints and marginalization experiences indirectly predicted decent work via work volition. Additionally, workplace climate for women employees was examined as both a predictor and moderator variable to explore best positioning of this additive construct. Workplace climate did not significantly moderate any model paths; however, it was a unique predictor of work volition and decent work, suggesting that this construct may be better positioned as a predictor variable in understanding the work experiences of women. These results highlight the importance of further investigating the role of workplace climate in PWT as well as the need for refining our understanding of how marginalized employees achieve decent work. Implications of the present study's results are discussed.

Public Significance Statement

Experiences of marginalization and economic constraints impact women's ability to secure decent work. Workplace climate for women employees is also an important additive predictor of their sense of choice and attainment of decent work, emphasizing the need for further investigation into how workplace climate shapes the systemic oppression of women.

Keywords: psychology of working, marginalization, women, work volition, decent work

In the United States, women commonly experience high levels of discrimination, reporting a broad range of negative experiences associated with their gender such as harassment, bias, unequal or disadvantageous treatment, and differences in pay or health benefits (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012; K. Parker & Funk, 2017), which have been shown to be associated with negative physical and psychological health outcomes (Bond, Punnett, Pyle, Cazeca, & Cooperman, 2004; Sojo, Wood, & Genat, 2016). Marginalization based on gender also extends into the workplace. Around 42% of U.S. women surveyed report experiencing workplace discrimination as a result of their

gender, such as receiving smaller earnings, being treated as incompetent, receiving less support, and experiencing insults at work (K. Parker & Funk, 2017). Considering the potentially detrimental consequences of gender inequality—both in and out of work—it is important to investigate how women's experiences may be impacting their attainment of decent and fulfilling work.

Psychology of Working Theory (PWT; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016), which examines how experiences of marginalization and economic constraints impact the attainment of decent work, provides a framework for investigating the contextual experiences of employed adults. To date, no studies have examined the theory's utility specifically with a population of women, a traditionally under-represented population whose unique experiences of economic constraints and marginalization likely effect vocational outcomes. The present study aimed to principally examine how these experiences may affect women's ability to secure decent work and secondarily explore the potentially additive construct of workplace climate in this process. It is hoped that the results will be useful in both expanding the applicability of PWT in a research capacity as well as informing career counseling strategies with women experiencing some form of economic constraints or marginalization.

Jessica W. England, Ryan D. Duffy, Nicholas P. Gensmer, and Haram J. Kim, Department of Psychology, University of Florida; Aysenur Buyukgoze-Kavas, Department of Educational Sciences, Ondokuz Mayıs University; Dylan M. Larson-Konar, Department of Psychology, University of Florida.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jessica W. England, Department of Psychology, University of Florida, P.O. Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611. E-mail: jwengland@ufl.edu

Theoretical Framework

PWT (Duffy et al., 2016) aims to explain how individuals' experiences of economic constraints and marginalization predict their attainment of decent work. As the theory's central construct, decent work is defined as work that provides adequate compensation and health care, is physically and interpersonally safe, allows for time off and adequate rest, and has values that align with one's own family and social values (Duffy et al., 2016). With the attainment of decent work, the model predicts individuals will meet their needs for survival, social connection, and self-determination, ultimately leading to work fulfillment and general well-being.

There has since been support for PWT in samples of those who identify as transgender and gender nonconforming (Tebbe, Allan, & Bell, 2019), sexual minorities (Allan, Tebbe, Bouchard, & Duffy, 2019), racial/ethnic minorities (Duffy et al., 2018), midlife adults (Kim, Fouad, Maeda, Xie, & Nazan, 2018), and employees with chronic health conditions (Tokar & Kaut, 2018). PWT has also been used in qualitative examinations of the career development of undocumented youth (Autin et al., 2018) and to conceptualize the construct of unemployment (Kossen & McIlveen, 2018). Additionally, PWT has served as the theoretical framework in developing important vocational scales such as the Decent Work Scale (DWS; Duffy et al., 2017) and the Work Needs Satisfaction Scale (Autin et al., 2019) and has been used as a framework in research investigating how context affects vocational outcomes (Allan et al., 2019). In general, results from these mixed methods studies have supported propositions from PWT. Specifically, individuals with greater experiences of economic constraints and marginalization tend to endorse less actual or perceived access to decent work, often due to decreased feelings of choice and/or adaptability in their careers.

Women's Experiences of Marginalization and Economic Constraints

PWT was primarily designed to study the work lives of individuals experiencing some type of marginalization. In general, research has shown that individuals belonging to marginalized genders and experiencing economic constraints are consistently more likely to experience negative physical and psychological health outcomes (Simons et al., 2018; Tebbe et al., 2019). Women represent one such historically marginalized group, and in the current section we delineate research connecting contextual and psychological factors that promote decent and fulfilling work among this population, research that is used to build specific hypotheses for the present study.

Across a wide range of studies on social status, which is a similar variable to economic constraints, subjective social status has been inversely associated with chronic stress, negative affectivity, and resting heart rate, and objective social status has been inversely associated with pessimism and passive coping (e.g., Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Furthermore, women belonging to a lower social status may be at higher risk for having depression, diabetes, and obesity compared to those belonging to a higher social status (Simons et al., 2018). At the workplace, gender and social status are frequently interconnected (Acker, 2006). Across racial and ethnic identities, women often fall within the

bottom of the wage continuum in numerous sector-service organizations (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Although greater numbers of women are being hired for higher-rank positions, the majority of lower-rank positions (e.g., secretaries, servers, assistants, etc.) continue to be filled by women (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Following this research as well as initial studies reviewed above testing PWT among other marginalized groups, we hypothesize that in our model, women's experiences of marginalization and economic constraints will be positively correlated (Hypothesis 1).

In addition to overarching differences such as greater rates of poverty and food insecurity in women (Shaefer, Mattingly, & Edin, 2018), experiencing economic constraints may affect women's attainment of decent work. For example, American women are paid less money than men after only one year following college, leading to greater amounts of student debt (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Furthermore, women experience a gender pay gap across different employment positions (Blau & Kahn, 2017), which seems to be a global issue (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2012). When there are fewer women in leadership roles at an organization, there is an even larger pay gap across genders (O'Neill, 2019). Thus, we hypothesize that women's experiences of economic constraints will be inversely related to decent work (Hypothesis 2). Specifically, the more women endorse feeling confined economically across the course of their lives, the less likely they will be to endorse securing decent work.

According to a survey conducted by National Public Radio, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health (2017), American women report experiencing individual and institutional discrimination because of their gender, which increases at the intersections of race/ethnicity, age, education level, and sexual orientation. In the results of the survey, institutionally, women reported experiencing discrimination when communicating with the police, applying for jobs, pursuing higher education, voting, accessing the health care system, and negotiating to rent or purchase housing; individually, women report experiencing offensive comments and/or negative assumptions based on their gender, gendered insults, sexual harassment, threats, and violence. Building from this research and findings from PWT model tests with different marginalized groups, we hypothesize that marginalization will be inversely associated with decent work (Hypothesis 3). Specifically, the more women have lifelong experiences of feeling marginalized, the less likely they will endorse securing decent work.

PWT proposes that in addition to these structural predictors of decent work, there are psychological factors that also directly predict decent work and mediate the relations of these structural variables. These two constructs are work volition—individuals' perceived ability to make career choices despite barriers (Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012)—and career adaptability—individuals' ability to cope with career tasks and challenges (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These have been consistently associated with each other across research studies (e.g., Duffy et al., 2018), and in longitudinal research, volition was found to predict career adaptability (Autin, Douglass, Duffy, England, & Allan, 2017). Based on this research, we hypothesize that work volition will predict career adaptability in our model (Hypothesis 4).

Gender and social status intersect to influence career development outcomes (Heppner & O'Brien, 2006), and women's expe-

riences of economic constraints may impact their experience of work volition and career adaptability. Across gender, individuals who are less economically constrained have greater access to external resources and higher perceptions of career adaptability (Blustein et al., 2002). Furthermore, women are compensated less than men for work of comparable value and are less likely to secure positions where they are as highly paid as men (International Labor Organization, 2018; O'Neill, 2019). Even in our own field, women psychologists receive smaller salaries compared to men across subfields and achieve tenure in academia after an additional year compared to men (American Psychological Association Center for Workforce Studies, 2015; American Psychological Association Committee on Women in Psychology, 2017). As such, based on these studies and previous PWT model tests, we hypothesize that economic constraints will be inversely associated with work volition (Hypothesis 5) and career adaptability (Hypothesis 6).

Similar to the effects of economic constraints, marginalization may also impact women's experience of work volition and career adaptability. Adolescents' perceived career options are impacted by their understanding of how social status shapes their career aspirations, and choices and young women tend to perceive fewer career options because of their gender (Betz, 2008). Adolescent women who report higher social status and privilege often perceive greater career options, but they may still feel limited choice because of high expectations from others and high pressure to achieve (Lapour & Heppner, 2009). In the workplace, women consistently report greater numbers of career barriers compared to men within the same settings across studies (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). Furthermore, women tend to receive less challenging and complex work tasks (King et al., 2012), have less mobility within their careers (De Pater, Van Vianen, & Bechtoldt, 2010), and are evaluated as having less promotional potential compared to their male colleagues (Roth, Purvis, & Bobko, 2012). For women, research suggests they experience a glass ceiling as well as sticky floors, struggling to get promotions and transition out of low-status positions (Pyle & Bond, 2002). Based off of this research, we hypothesize that experiences of marginalization based on one's female gender will be inversely related to work volition (Hypothesis 7) and career adaptability (Hypothesis 8).

Each of these constructs has also been correlated directly with decent work in previous model tests of PWT (Allan et al., 2019; Tokar & Kaut, 2018) as well as with analogous vocational outcomes variables, such as job satisfaction and work meaning (Tebbe et al., 2019). Broadly, individuals who feel more choice in their careers and more adaptability at work evidence a greater likelihood of attaining decent work and being fulfilled at work. We suspect similar relations in the current study with women, such that work volition (Hypothesis 9) and career adaptability (Hypothesis 10) will be positively related to the attainment of decent work.

Finally, we propose mediation effects connecting the structural variables to decent work via the psychological constructs. We propose that work volition and adaptability will in part explain why structural factors would link to decent work, specifically that women with lower levels of economic constraints and marginalization experiences will be more likely to experience decent work because they feel greater choice in their careers and are more adaptable in the workplace. Several studies have supported these propositions, including some prior model tests of PWT (Douglass

et al., 2017; Duffy et al., 2018; samples ranged from 51.7% to 62.8% women) and other studies that have looked at related vocational outcomes (Allan et al., 2019; Autin et al., 2017; Tebbe et al., 2019). We formally hypothesize that the relation between economic constraints and decent work will be mediated by work volition (Hypothesis 11) and career adaptability (Hypothesis 12) and that the relation between marginalization and decent work will be mediated by work volition (Hypothesis 13) and career adaptability (Hypothesis 14).

Workplace Climate as an Additive Construct

Recent studies using PWT have highlighted the importance of examining experiences of workplace climate when investigating the attainment of decent work. In addition to studying the primary PWT predictor model specifically with women, we were interested in looking at workplace climate as a potential predictor or moderator within our model. Workplace climate, which has also been referred to in the literature as psychological climate and department climate, has been defined by and operationalized through measurements of work environment, job characteristics, oversight experiences, management experiences, and coworker experiences (for meta-analysis, see C. P. Parker et al., 2003). In the present study, workplace climate is defined as the culture within any job-oriented setting that may impact individuals' experiences of acceptance and well-being at their workplace (Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, 2004). This differentiates the construct from marginalization experiences, which refer to lifelong experiences in general versus within a specific domain. It is important to note that in the current study we assess workplace climate, which captures women's experiences of discrimination at work due to their gender. Often this is a result of sexism from coworkers and/or supervisors, although we do not formally measure experiences of sexism.

Previous research has suggested that one's gender influences individual experiences of workplace climate. In the National Public Radio et al. (2017) survey, women reported that their most common experience of institutional discrimination was at work, with the highest number of incidents occurring during the job application process (i.e., 31% of women surveyed) and in being paid or promoted unequally (i.e., 41% of women surveyed). This finding existed across racial and ethnic identities. Furthermore, women seem to be more likely than men to be survivors of workplace harassment (Leskinen, Rabelo, & Cortina, 2015), sexual harassment (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2017), sexual assault (Shaw, Hegewisch, & Hess, 2018), and gender-based prejudice and discrimination (Triana, Jayasinghe, Pieper, Delgado, & Li, 2019). Women's experiences of sexual harassment in particular have been shown to negatively affect job-related outcomes, physical health, and psychological well-being (Merkin & Shah, 2014).

Women's experiences of harmful workplace climates have been shown to negatively affect vocational outcomes as well as well-being variables. In male-dominated work environments, the power imbalance tends to be much stronger across gender, with men having the most power at the workplace (Miner-Rubino, Settles, & Stewart, 2009). Furthermore, these negative impacts of working within gendered workplace climates seem to be exacerbated when the workplace is less responsive to incidents of gender discrimination, leading to lower job satisfaction and worse health outcomes

for women (Bond et al., 2004). In more mixed-gender work environments with women holding positions across status levels, the workplace climate tends to feel more egalitarian (Konrad, Cannings, & Goldberg, 2010). Women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professions describe their workplace climates as cold, unwelcoming, and isolating and report experiences of intentional and unintentional discrimination as well as gender-based microaggressions (Archie, Kogan, & Laursen, 2015). In fact, women report avoiding and exiting professions because of harmful experiences of workplace climate and culture (Trübswetter, Genz, Hochfeld, & Schraudner, 2016).

Two recent studies examined PWT within a marginalized population, and both integrated more specific, workplace-based variables into their investigation. In a sample of employed transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, researchers investigated the associations between social status and marginalization with work volition, overqualification, and vocational and well-being outcomes as well as the moderating role of workplace protections from discrimination (Tebbe et al., 2019). Although the existence of workplace protections from discrimination is not the same as workplace climate, it addresses an organizational consideration for employees' experiences of acceptance and well-being at their workplace as well as the prioritization of employee protection from discrimination. Results showed that having workplace protections from discrimination moderated the relations between some marginalization variables and vocational and well-being outcomes (Tebbe et al., 2019). More specifically, having workplace protections from discrimination may serve as a buffer for the harmful impacts of marginalization on work volition, meaningful work, job satisfaction, depression, and life satisfaction. In the second study, Allan et al. (2019) examined the associations of economic constraints and workplace climate to work volition, meaningful work, and decent work among a sample of individuals with sexual minority identities. Results showed that workplace climate directly predicted work volition and decent work, and workplace climate indirectly predicted decent work through work volition (Allan et al., 2019).

The results of these studies suggest that a supportive workplace climate could be positioned as a moderator or predictor. In the current study, we examine both conceptualizations. Specifically, we will investigate workplace climate as a predictor in our PWT model as well as a moderator for the relations of the four exogenous constructs (economic constraints, marginalization experiences, work volition, and career adaptability) to their associated endogenous constructs (see Figure 1). Based on the findings, we will present a final model with the most empirically supported positioning of workplace climate.

Method

Participants

The current study included 528 employed women, identifying as not transgender, ranging in age from 21 to 77 years old ($M = 47.21$, $SD = 12.81$) in the United States. Participants self-identified as White/European American/Caucasian ($n = 468$; 88.5%), Multiracial ($n = 21$; 4.0%), African/African American/Black ($n = 18$; 3.4%), Asian/Asian American ($n = 11$; 2.4%), Hispanic/Latina/o American ($n = 6$, 1.1%), American Indian/Native American/First Nation ($n = 1$, 0.2%), Arab American/Middle Eastern ($n = 1$, 0.2%), and other ($n = 2$, 0.4%). Participants self-identified as exclusively lesbian/gay ($n = 15$, 2.8%), mostly lesbian/gay ($n = 5$, 0.9%), bisexual ($n = 17$, 3.2%), mostly heterosexual ($n = 55$, 10.4%), exclusively heterosexual ($n = 419$, 79.4%), queer ($n = 4$, 0.8%), and asexual ($n = 12$, 2.3%), and one (0.2%) chose not to answer. Participants ranged in education from some high school ($n = 1$, 0.2%), high school graduate ($n = 8$, 1.5%) to trade/vocational school ($n = 13$, 2.5%), some college ($n = 58$, 11%), college degree ($n = 168$, 31.8%), and professional degree ($n = 279$, 52.8%), and one (0.2%) chose not to answer. Participants self-identified as living in poverty ($n = 3$, 0.6%), working class ($n = 73$, 13.8%), middle class ($n = 279$, 52.8%), upper-middle class ($n = 163$, 30.9%), and upper class ($n = 5$, 0.9%), and five (0.9%) chose not to answer. Participants reported

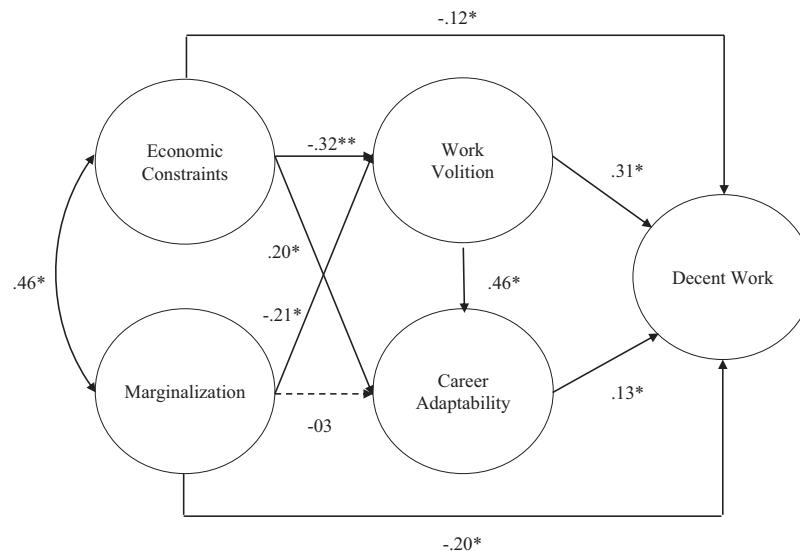


Figure 1. Baseline structural model and path estimates. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

working full time ($n = 437$, 82.8%), part time ($n = 67$, 12.7%), multiple part time jobs ($n = 1$, 0.2%), self-employed full time ($n = 7$, 1.3%), and self-employed part time ($n = 16$, 3%). Participants reported annual household incomes of less than \$25,000 per year ($n = 18$, 3.4%), \$25,000–\$50,000 per year ($n = 80$, 15.2%), \$51,000–\$75,000 per year ($n = 102$, 19.3%), \$76,000–\$100,000 per year ($n = 108$, 20.5%), \$101,000–\$125,000 per year ($n = 75$, 14.2%), \$126,000–\$150,000 per year ($n = 48$, 9.1%), \$151,000–\$175,000 per year ($n = 23$, 4.4%), \$176,000–\$200,000 per year ($n = 18$, 3.4%), \$201,000+ per year ($n = 39$, 7.4%), and “I don’t know” ($n = 10$, 1.9%), and seven (1.3%) chose not to answer. Participants reported being single/never married ($n = 115$, 21.8%), married ($n = 265$, 50.2%), divorced ($n = 79$, 15.0%), separated ($n = 5$, 0.9%), remarried ($n = 3$, 0.6%), living with a partner ($n = 46$, 8.7%), and widowed ($n = 13$, 2.5%), and two (0.4%) chose not to answer.

Measures

Marginalization. Perceptions of experiences of marginalization were measured using the Lifetime Experiences of Marginalization Scale (Duffy, Gensmer, et al., 2019). This scale has three items, and higher scores indicate greater levels of experienced marginalization. Instructions are as follows: “We are interested in the degree to which you consider yourself to be marginalized in the United States. By marginalized, we mean being in a less powerful position in society, being socially excluded, and/or having less access to resources because you are a member of a specific group, have a specific identity, or life history. This often occurs due to one’s gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, religious beliefs, physical appearance, or being a part of other minority groups/identities. With this definition in mind, please respond to the following items below considering the experiences you have had throughout your entire life.” This scale uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and sample questions include “During my lifetime, I have had many interpersonal interactions that have often left me feeling marginalized,” and “I have felt marginalized within various community settings for as long as I can remember.” Across studies with samples of racial and ethnic minority employed adults (Duffy, Gensmer, et al., 2019), the scale responses demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability, correlated in the expected directions with previously established measures of marginalization and discrimination, and predicted decent work to a stronger degree than previously established measures. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha was .95.

Economic constraints. Experiences of economic constraints were measured using the 5-item Economic Constraints Scale (Duffy, Gensmer, et al., 2019), which assessed individuals’ experiences of constraints across their lifetime. Higher scores indicate greater levels of experienced economic constraints, and questions used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Example questions include the following: “For as long as I can remember, I have had very limited economic or financial resources,” and “For most of my life, I have not felt financially stable.” Across three studies with samples of racial and ethnic minority employed adults (Duffy, Gensmer, et al., 2019), the scale responses were shown to demonstrate strong internal consistency reliability, correlate in the expected directions with

previously established measures of social status and financial stress, and predict decent work to a stronger degree than previously established measures. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha was .94.

Work volition. Perceptions of work volition were measured using three items from the Work Volition Scale (Duffy et al., 2012), which measures participants’ perceptions of their ability to make job decisions despite potential barriers. The fourth item was included in the survey but was misworded and thus removed from the analyses. The three items were used in the present study in order to measure participants’ feelings of volition, which included “I’ve been able to choose the jobs I have wanted,” “I can do the kind of work I want, despite external barriers,” and “I feel total control over my job choices.” Responses to questions ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) on a 7-point Likert scale, and higher scores indicate higher volition. Reliability in participant responses has been consistently demonstrated, with Cronbach’s alpha estimates equal to or greater than .78 (Duffy et al., 2012; Tebbe et al., 2019). Validity in participant responses has also been consistently demonstrated in correlations with other vocational outcomes such as job satisfaction and work meaning (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Duffy et al., 2012). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha was .83.

Career adaptability. Levels of career adaptability were measured using the 11-item Career Adaptability subscale of the Career Futures Inventory (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005), which measures perceptions of how well participants can cope with new or changing work circumstances. This measure uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores corresponding with higher career adaptability. Sample items include “I can overcome potential barriers that may exist in my career,” and “I am good at adapting to new work settings.” Rottinghaus et al. (2005) found the Cronbach’s alpha of the Career Adaptability subscale to be .85. Furthermore, the validity of responses has also been shown in relations with similar constructs, including problem solving, skills confidence, and life orientation (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). In the current study, the total Cronbach’s alpha was .87.

Decent work. Attainment of decent work was measured using the DWS (Duffy et al., 2017), which has 15 items and five subscales: physically and interpersonally safe working conditions, access to health care benefits, adequate compensation, hours for free time and rest, and matching organizational values with one’s family and social values. Higher scores are associated with greater achievement of decent work, and responses range from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Example questions from the five subscales include “At work, I feel safe from emotional or verbal abuse of any kind,” “I get good healthcare benefits from my job,” “I am rewarded adequately for my work,” “I have free time during the work week,” and “My organization’s values align with my family values.” Duffy et al. (2017) found the Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale to be .86. Validity within the responses has also been demonstrated through correlations with similar variables such as pay satisfaction and workplace safety (Duffy et al., 2017). Furthermore, responses have been shown to correlate with PWT model variables such as work volition and career adaptability in previous model tests (Douglass et al., 2017; Duffy et al., 2018). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the overall scale was

.85. Estimates for the subscales listed above were .77, .98, .87, .89, and .92.

Workplace climate. Workplace climate was examined using the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Climate Inventory (Liddle et al., 2004), which was adapted to examine the experiences of women at work. Previous studies investigating workplace climate in women often adapt preexisting measures (e.g., Archie et al., 2015), as an adequate measure does not exist that assesses workplace climate for women specifically related to their gender. Thus, we decided to adapt a preexisting measure that has been designed for and validated with another marginalized population at work for the present study. Six items that only applied to the LGBT community were removed (e.g., "Coworkers are as likely to ask nice, interested questions about a same-sex relationship as they are about a heterosexual relationship") from the original 20-item measure, resulting in a total of 14 items. Other questions were edited to investigate women employees; for example, the item "Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) employees are treated with respect" was edited to "Women employees are treated with respect." This scale uses a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*doesn't describe at all*) to 4 (*describes extremely well*), and higher scores indicate a more accepting and affirming workplace climate. Liddle et al. (2004) reported Cronbach's alpha to be .96 and the split-half reliability to be .97. Validity in responses has been demonstrated through correlations with vocational variables such as job satisfaction and related variables such as workplace discrimination (Liddle et al., 2004). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Given that this was the first time this scale has been adapted to examine climate experiences related to gender, we compared scores on our newly adapted scale to scores on the 10-item Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (Pinel, 1999). This measure was developed and validated across six studies, with a version specifically designed to be used with women. Stigma consciousness pertains to the degree to which individuals feel their stereotyped group membership influences their interactions with others outside of that group. Example items from this scale include "Most men have a problem viewing women as equals," and "When interacting with men, I feel like they interpret all my behaviors in terms of the fact that I am a woman." Scores on this instrument correlated $r = -.40$ with the adapted workplace climate measure, indicating women who were more conscious of stigma reported less supportive workplace climates. This moderate correlation suggests these are related but distinct constructs, providing preliminary validity evidence for our adapted measure.

Procedure

An institutional review board approved our study request before we began collecting data, and informed consent was gathered from all participants. Participants completed self-report surveys using Qualtrics. Inclusion criteria for participation included being currently employed, identifying as a woman, living in the United States, and being at least 18 years old. Participants were recruited online through ResearchMatch (Harris et al., 2012), which is a health volunteer registry within the U.S. that was created to connect researchers with consenting volunteers who have registered to participate in studies. Several academic institutions collaborated to create ResearchMatch, and it is supported by the U.S. National

Institutes of Health as part of the Clinical Translational Science Award program. The registry currently includes 144,082 volunteers, 7,735 researchers, and 168 institutions and is free.

To date, 746 studies have been conducted using ResearchMatch, including several studies looking at similar constructs such as gender bias and sexism (Bates, Lauve-Moon, McCloskey, & Anderson-Butcher, 2019), perceived discrimination (Shallcross & Spruill, 2018), and financial strain (Perry et al., 2019). Participation in our study was completely voluntary, and participants were informed of their choice whether or not to participate and their ability to withdraw at any time. Participants were not compensated for participation in this study. To date no studies have been conducted specifically examining the validity of data collection with ResearchMatch. However, we used validity checks typically recommended for other online data collection methods (e.g., MTurk) in the current study. Specifically, there were three attention check items included, such as "Please answer 'Neutral,'" and participants were removed if they answered any of the three attention checks incorrectly. Six hundred and eighteen participants completed some part of the survey. Of these, 75 participants were removed for failing attention checks, 2 for identifying as transgender men, 8 for not being employed, and 5 for not completing all of the study scales. The final total was 528 participants, which represented 85.4% of participants who completed some part of the survey.

Our sample contained both full- ($n = 444$) and part-time ($n = 84$) workers. Given the possibility that these two groups have different work experiences, we tested for group differences across the six main model variables. Full-time workers had significantly higher levels of decent work ($M_s = 79.21$ v. 75.21 , $t = 2.25$, $p < .05$) and significantly higher levels of career adaptability compared to part-time workers ($M_s = 79.21$ v. 75.21 , $t = 2.74$, $p < .01$). Given that these differences were not large, only found on two of the model variables, and our sample size of part-time individuals was too low to conduct an independent model test, we proceeded to test the model with both groups included in the analyses. This is further examined in the discussion.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to constructing our structural model, we examined the data for the presence of outliers. Although no cases emerged as multivariate outliers, there was one univariate outlier with a z-score of greater than $|3|$ on career adaptability. Because some extreme scores are expected in a random sample, we did not remove this case from analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Following guidelines of Weston and Gore (2006), we examined the variables to see if there were skewness values $> |3|$ or kurtosis values $> |10|$. None of the study variables approached this threshold. Table 1 depicts the means, standard deviations, and manifest correlations of the five key latent constructs (discussed below).

We examined missing data to determine whether or not data were missing at random. Forty-four participants were missing data on at least one item, and there were 58 missing data points (.002%). We conducted Little's test, which suggested that data were not missing completely at random ($\chi^2 = 1655.37$, $p < .05$). We examined whether participants were more likely to be missing

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations of Decent Work and Predictor Variables (N = 528)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Decent work (DW) total	—										
2. DW—Safe conditions	.60*	—									
3. DW—Healthcare	.52*	.11*	—								
4. DW—Compensation	.72*	.32*	.22*	—							
5. DW—Free time and rest	.60*	.27*	-.05	.34*	—						
6. DW—Matching values	.72*	.45*	.23*	.37*	.35*	—					
7. Economic constraints	-.37*	-.31*	-.20*	-.29*	-.16*	-.20*	—				
8. Marginalization	-.36*	-.35*	-.11*	-.32*	-.24*	-.19*	.44*	—			
9. Work volition	.42*	.39*	.11*	.33*	.23*	.31*	-.37*	-.32*	—		
10. Career adaptability	.22*	.23*	.14*	.22*	.11*	.16*	.02	-.04	.32*	—	
11. Workplace climate	.51*	.54*	.11*	.37*	.28*	.44*	-.28*	-.40*	.24*	.04	—
<i>M</i>	78.57	17.84	16.57	13.24	14.83	16.02	14.31	10.10	15.08	45.68	47.05
<i>SD</i>	14.70	3.46	5.62	5.06	5.10	4.11	8.39	5.30	4.09	6.78	7.66

* $p < .05$.

data across the six main model variables and the following demographic characteristics: age, educational attainment, employment status, and social status. No significant differences emerged on any of the variables. As such, we retained all participants in the analyses and used full information maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors.

Model Testing

We used MPlus to examine the structural models. The baseline predictor model consisted of 10 latent constructs. For economic constraints (5 items), marginalization (3 items), and work volition (3 items), individual scale items were used as observed indicators. For career adaptability, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation for the 11-item scale. The structure matrix demonstrated two distinct constructs, one with 8 items assessing adaptability and one with 3 items assessing the sense of control in one's career success. These three items were "I am not in control of my career success," "I am rarely in control of my job choices," and "My career success will be determined by my own efforts." We determined that although these three items were part of the original scale, they were not capturing the construct as originally intended by PWT. As such, we removed these items and ran an EFA with the remaining 8 items. These all loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue over one. We followed the recommendations of Weston and Gore (2006) and created three parcels from these eight items, two parcels containing three items, and one parcel containing two items. Items were assigned according to factor loading size to ensure similar item factor loadings for all three parcels.

For decent work, we represented the constructs and associated subscales with a bifactor approach. This approach was suggested in the original instrument development paper (Duffy et al., 2017). Here all three items of each subscale are set to load their respective five latent constructs (work conditions, access to health care, adequate compensation, time and rest, and complementary values), and all 15 items are also set to load on a general decent work factor. This created six new latent constructs (five factors plus a general factor) that are included in all model tests. However, in the current study, we were only interested in the prediction of the general decent work factor, and as such the five subscale factors were included in the model but are not included as outcome

variables. This practice is similar to what has been completed in previous studies (e.g., Duffy, Gensmer, et al., 2019) given a) the desire to focus on general decent work as a shared construct among all items and b) the desire to decrease overall model complexity. Specifically, including each of the five subscales as standalone factors predicted by all other model variables—along with those associate indirect effects—would require a much greater sample size to account for this complexity that is beyond the scope of the current study.

In order to test for moderation effects, four additional models were examined. In each of these models, two new latent constructs were constructed. First, for each model, a latent construct of workplace climate was constructed in an analogous fashion of the adaptability construct (Weston & Gore, 2006). We factor analyzed the 14-item workplace climate scale and found that two factors had Eigenvalues greater than one, one factor with 8 items and one factor with 6 items. The factors were highly correlated (.73), and item content differed primarily with 8 items being indicative of a positive climate (e.g., "Women employees feel accepted by their coworkers") and 6 items being indicative of a negative climate (e.g., "The atmosphere for women employees is oppressive"). In assessing the factor matrix, only one item, "Women employees fear job loss because of gender," had a loading of .20 or less apart. We added the items from each factor together respectively to create two observed indicators of that construct.

Second, in each model, we created a unique interaction term. We were interested in climate moderating the paths among the four predictor variables in the model (i.e., economic constraints, marginalization, work volition, and career adaptability) and their associated endogenous constructs (e.g., decent work). As such, interaction terms were created for all four models by multiplying the latent climate construct with the particular latent construct in that model (e.g., climate X economic constraints). In each model, climate and the interaction term were included as an additional predictor of endogenous constructs in addition to the core PWT predictor variables.

In MPlus, structural models with interaction terms are run using random effects and as such do not produce fit statistics. However, the models produce effect sizes and significance levels for variables in each model equation, including the interaction terms. As

such, we will examine the significance of all variables in each equation, again including the interaction terms. We chose to examine climate as a moderator for each of the four exogenous variables (economic constraints, marginalization, work volition, and career adaptability) independently. There were two reasons for this decision. Our main reason was that we aimed to reduce multicollinearity in the models, which—if run all at once—would include multiple interaction terms containing the same latent construct (climate). Secondarily, conducting latent interaction tests within structural models is complex, and statistical programs such as MPlus do not have the capacity to successfully run models with multiple interaction terms.

Finally, we explored whether the sample size was appropriate for the model tests. To do so we followed guidelines by [Weston and Gore \(2006\)](#), who recommended a minimum of 200 participants and also suggested exploring the number of parameter estimates, with a suggestion of at least 10 participants per estimate. Our most complex model contained six latent constructs and 58 parameter estimates. A sample size of 528 was slightly below the recommended 10 participants per estimate but well above the recommended 200 participants minimum. As such, we deemed the sample size acceptable.

Baseline measurement and structural models. These two models consist of the five core PWT predictor model variables represented by 10 latent constructs to account for the bifactor setup of the DWS. Specifically, these 10 constructs are economic constraints, marginalization, work volition, career adaptability, the five decent work subscales, and the general decent work factor composed on all scale items. The goodness of fit was based on typical indicators such as RMSEA (<.08 is indicative of good fit) and CFI (>.95 is indicative of good fit; [Hu & Bentler, 1999](#); [Weston & Gore, 2006](#)). The baseline measurement model was shown to be a good fit to the data: $\chi^2(528) = 572.94, p < .001$; CFI = .98; and RMSEA = .04, $p < .001$. The baseline structural model—which included the hypothesized path estimates—also fit the data well: $\chi^2(528) = 615.37, p < .001$; CFI = .97; and RMSEA = .04, $p < .001$. This model is depicted in [Figure 1](#).

Moderator Model 1: Climate and economic constraints. In this model, we added climate and an interaction term to the baseline structural model. Specifically, climate and the interaction term between climate and economic constraints were introduced as predictor variables in the equations predicting a) work volition, b) career adaptability, and c) decent work. Climate was found to be a significant direct predictor of work volition and decent work, but the interaction term did not significantly predict any of the three outcomes.

Moderator Model 2: Climate and marginalization. In this model, climate and the interaction term between climate and marginalization were introduced as predictor variables in the equations predicting a) work volition, b) career adaptability, and c) decent work. As in Model 1, climate was found to be a significant direct predictor of work volition and decent work, and the interaction term did not significantly predict any of the three outcomes.

Moderator Model 3: Climate and work volition. In this model, climate and the interaction terms between climate and work volition were introduced as predictor variables in the equations predicting decent work. Climate was found to be a significant direct predictor of decent work, and the interaction term did not significantly predict decent work.

Moderator Model 4: Climate and career adaptability. In this model, climate and the interaction terms between climate and career adaptability were introduced as predictor variables in the equations predicting decent work. Climate was found to be a significant direct predictor of decent work, and the interaction term did not significantly predict decent work.

Final structural model. In all of our moderation model tests, consistent results emerged. Specifically, none of the eight investigated moderation effects were found to be significant, but climate was found to be a consistent, significant direct predictor of both work volition and decent work. As such, we ran a final structural model that was identical to the baseline model but included climate as a latent construct and had climate directly predicting work volition and decent work. Climate was also allowed to correlate with economic constraints and marginalization. Prior to running this structural model, we examined the goodness of fit of the measurement model, which in this case included 11 latent constructs (the 10 constructs from the baseline model plus climate). The measurement model fit the data well: $\chi^2(528) = 813.61, p < .001$; CFI = .96; and RMSEA = .05, $p < .001$. The structural model also fit the data well: $\chi^2(528) = 798.84, p < .001$; CFI = .96; and RMSEA = .04, $p < .001$. The latent variables correlations can be seen in [Table 2](#). In this final model (see [Figure 2](#)), decent work was significantly predicted by economic constraints (Hypothesis 1), work volition (Hypothesis 9), career adaptability (Hypothesis 10), and climate; work volition was significantly predicted by economic constraints (Hypothesis 5), marginalization (Hypothesis 7), and climate; adaptability was significantly predicted by work volition (Hypothesis 4) and adaptability (note that this effect was the opposite of the hypotheses); and economic constraints and marginalization were significantly correlated (Hypothesis 1). Model variables explained 43% of the variance in decent work, 22% in work volition, and 17% in adaptability.

Given that this was our final model, we also used it to test for indirect effects. This included the hypothesized indirect effects as well as the indirect effect of climate on decent work via work volition. Drawing from [Shrout and Bolger's \(2002\)](#) recommendations, we used 1,000 bootstrapped samples to generate indirect effects estimates (see [Table 3](#)). As hypothesized, work volition partially mediated the relation of economic constraints to decent work (95% CI [-0.09, -0.02]; Hypothesis 11) and partially mediated the relation of marginalization to decent work (95% CI [-0.05, -0.003]; Hypothesis 13). Career adaptability significantly mediated the relation of work volition to decent work (95% CI [0.01, 0.23]), and work volition did not significantly mediate the

Table 2
Latent Correlations of Decent Work and Predictor Variables (N = 528)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Decent work total	—					
2. Economic constraints	-.32*	—				
3. Marginalization	-.36*	.46*	—			
4. Work volition	.45*	-.41*	-.35*	—		
5. Career adaptability	.22*	.02	-.04	.37*	—	
6. Workplace climate	.57*	-.27*	-.42*	.27*	.06	—

* $p < .05$.

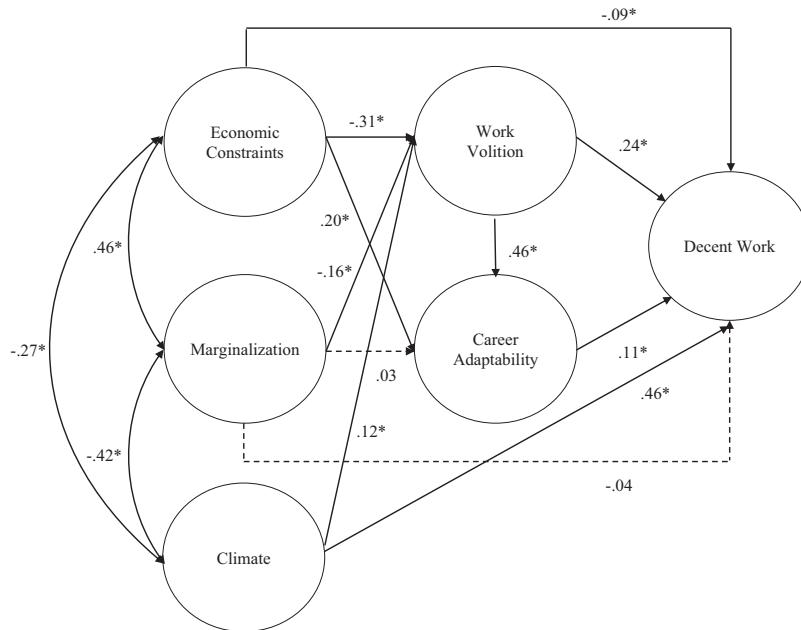


Figure 2. Final structural model with workplace climate as an additional predictor variable. * $p < .05$.

effect of climate on decent work (95% CI [−0.01, 0.06]). Finally, we examined two multiple mediation paths based on significant model paths (climate to decent work via volition and adaptability; marginalization to decent work via volition and adaptability). Neither of these were significant.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to test the propositions of PWT with a group of working women, specifically examining how their experiences of economic constraints and marginalization affect their ability to secure decent work. Additionally, we examined workplace climate as a variable that may weaken or strengthen the relations among model variables (moderator) or act as a direct predictor. Of the hypothesized paths and post hoc tests, 12 were supported, providing preliminary evidence for how women's experiences of economic constraints and marginalization relate to their ability to secure decent work.

Table 3
Test of Unique Indirect Relations ($N = 528$)

Predictor	Mediators	Criterion	Unstandardized indirect relation		95% CI of unstandardized indirect relation	
			B	SE	Lower bound	Upper bound
Economic constraints	Work volition	Decent work	−.06	.02	−.10	−.03*
Marginalization	Work volition	Decent work	−.03	.01	−.06	−.01*
Climate	Work volition	Decent work	.06	.03	−.003	.13
Work volition	Career adaptability	Decent work	.06	.01	.01	.10*
Climate	Work volition, career adaptability	Decent work	.01	.01	−.005	.02
Marginalization	Work volition, career adaptability	Decent work	−.006	.004	−.01	.002

* $p < .05$.

As hypothesized, we found a positive correlation between economic constraints and marginalization. This result reflects previous literature that shows the interconnectedness between gender and social status (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Economic constraints also directly and indirectly predicted decent work via work volition, as hypothesized. Noting that similar results have been found in a few recent studies with racial/ethnic minority employed adults (Kozan, Işık, & Blustein, 2019), an individual's sense of volition may be a key explanatory variable linking economic constraints with access to decent work. However, it is important to note that our sample had a higher average household income compared to the U.S. average among women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). It is possible that for women with greater economic constraints, the direct effects to decent work may be even stronger, as its effects may be broader than a sense of choice. It will be critical that future studies identify and study populations with greater economic resource challenges.

As hypothesized in PWT, having general experiences of marginalization was negatively related to securing decent work. Moreover, this marginalization to decent work link was also mediated by work volition, matching previous model tests of PWT. This indicates that the adverse effect of marginalization on decent work may be in part explained by working women's lowered sense of freedom in choosing their careers. This further supports previous studies testing the propositions of PWT among sexual minorities (Douglass et al., 2017) and racially and ethnically diverse employed adults (Duffy et al., 2018), which yielded the same results, as well as previous studies supporting the mediating role of similar constructs such as personal control and locus of control in the association between discrimination and mental health (Moradi & Hasan, 2004; Moradi & Risco, 2006).

The most notable divergent results from PWT theory concerned the paths from economic constraints and marginalization to career adaptability. Although there was a direct link of career adaptability and decent work, marginalization was a nonsignificant predictor and economic constraints were a significant predictor but in the opposite direction as hypothesized. The significant path is likely a suppression effect after including work volition as a predictor variable, as the latent correlation between economic constraints and adaptability was only .02. However, the results mirror other PWT studies, which have found nonsignificant effects between both structural predictors and career adaptability (Douglass et al., 2017; Duffy, Gensmer, et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2018). Evidence is mounting that the original positioning of career adaptability within PWT may need amendment, perhaps including it only as a predictor of decent work versus being tied to economic constraints and marginalization.

Overall, the partial mediations of work volition in the relations between contextual variables (i.e., economic constraints and marginalization) and decent work, as well as its mediating role in the association between career adaptability and decent work, further signify the importance of this construct. The perceived that capability to freely make choices may be a critical explanatory variable connecting subjective experiences of economic constraints and marginalization with work-related outcomes among women. However, these findings need to be considered very cautiously, given that they are based on cross-sectional data. Although several longitudinal studies have shown work volition to be predicted by aspects of social status and to predict work outcomes over time (Autin et al., 2017; Duffy et al., 2018), no research to date has looked at how these variables predict decent work longitudinally.

In addition to these more established propositions of PWT, we also examined workplace climate as an additive construct. All four models indicated that climate was not a significant moderator. In other words, the level of work climate did not change the direction or the magnitude of the predictors (i.e., economic constraints, marginalization, work volition, and career adaptability) to the outcomes (i.e., work volition, career adaptability, and decent work). This indicates that, at least in the current sample, economic constraints and marginalization negatively affect working women's vocational outcomes regardless of their perceptions of climate. However, climate was a unique predictor, suggesting that it may be better positioned as an important predictor in understanding work experiences of women versus as a moderator.

Based on this finding, we tested a final model in which climate directly predicted work volition and decent work in

addition to all the hypothesized paths in the baseline model. As a result, climate had a significant positive, weak effect on work volition and strong effect on decent work. This reflects a robust work climate literature, which shows positive effects of climate on job attitudes and individual vocational behavior (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). Specifically, we can infer that the work climate in which women work may impact their perceived capacity to make career choices freely and also impact their ability to attain decent work. From the PWT perspective, this highlights the importance of measuring both lifetime contextual variables as well as the specific environment where one is currently located. Indeed, in comparing model effect sizes, climate had a stronger effect on decent work than volition or adaptability. Although these results need to be taken cautiously given their cross-sectional nature, they indicate a possible need for future modifications in PWT model tests, focusing on the current environment in addition to lifelong experiences.

Practical Implications

The findings from our research have several practical implications for practitioners and organizations. Numerous studies have consistently documented that women experience more workplace discrimination than men, such as through harassment, bulling, and aggression (for meta-analysis see, McCord, Joseph, Dhanani, & Beus, 2018). Providers strive to understand the impact of bias and discrimination on the physical and mental health of their clients, in line with the guidelines advocated by the American Psychological Association (2007). Thus, providers can help their clients develop healthy coping strategies for reacting to negative workplace environments rather than internalizing the blame often associated with their experiences (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). Effective coping strategies may include empowering clients to learn more about their rights, training in assertiveness, discussing social support resources and ways of confrontation, and participating in events and organizations promoting social justice and advocacy.

Practitioners should also be aware of intersectionality, including the feelings of marginalization that some women confront related to their economic constraints. Women with limited economic resources who experience classism may encounter greater barriers to work volition and securing decent work. Practitioners should help clients explore and address potential sources of marginalization. Based on the tenets of feminist theory, exploring potential external causes of distress (e.g., sex discrimination at work) can promote empowerment and agency (Enns, 2012). This strengths-based approach provides insight into learning how to exert power and voice to increase individuals' self-esteem and self-efficacy. In fact, research has shown that women of color who stay in STEM professions emphasize the importance of their agency in order to cope with experiences of oppression at work (Hodari, Ong, Ko, & Smith, 2016). Furthermore, organizations can reevaluate their policies, which may lead to powerful insights into workplace behaviors, associated penalties, protections from retaliation, and complaint processes (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1999). Organizations may need to perform diversity training (King, Gulick, & Avery, 2010), providing demonstration, practice, and performance feedback to employees on how to creative healthy, supportive workplace climates (McCord et al., 2018).

It is important to advocate for policies and legislation that actively work to end discrimination against women and fight for access to decent work. Organizations must prioritize supporting and protecting women from the harmful systemic impacts in the workplace and create a workplace climate that is safe for everyone. Furthermore, advocacy for laws addressing issues such as pay equity (World Health Organization, 2019), providing a living wage (Smith, 2015), and precarious work and underemployment (Blustein, Kenny, Di Fabio, & Guichard, 2019) is essential to address the oppressive experiences of marginalization and economic constraints.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although these findings contribute to the growing support for the generalizability of PWT, findings should be interpreted in light of a number of limitations. Although many central variables of PWT have been examined across different groups, more studies are needed testing the model longitudinally. In particular, researchers in future studies could use longitudinal designs in order to understand whether marginalization experiences result in decreased work volition and access to decent work over time.

Another limitation of the study is the use of an adapted measure, the modified Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Climate Inventory, which has not been previously tested. To provide psychometric information, we conducted additional analyses and compared the scores to a valid measure of stigma consciousness around gender. However, such information from one independent study may not be sufficient (Meier & Davis, 1990). In particular, items for this scale were initially developed for an LGBT population, and how these items are worded and group together may differ for women. Indeed, entirely new items may be needed to accurately capture women's experiences. As such, it may be beneficial for future researchers to develop and rigorously validate a similar scale specifically for women, which could be useful for future researchers studying women's work experiences.

Furthermore, the sample is more White, heterosexual, educated, and higher income compared to the general U.S. population. In fact, approximately 88.5% of the present sample identified as White, which is much higher than the 60.4% of White, non-Hispanic/Latina/o people who were estimated to be in the general U.S. population in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Although the difficulty of obtaining a representative sample exists across recruitment platforms, it is important to acknowledge this limitation within our sample. From an intersectionality perspective, repeated examination with a more diverse sample of women could boost the generalizability of our results. Future studies may also collect information about number of dependents and caregiving responsibilities in order to further understand the impacts of contextual variables.

This study expands PWT literature by investigating workplace climate along with a number of other central constructs. Future studies may examine the other theory-driven critical moderators of PWT such as proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support, and economic conditions. It may also be helpful to increase the sample size of future studies testing moderators, as our sample was slightly below the recommended minimum in terms of the parameter estimate to participant ratio (Weston & Gore, 2006).

It is important to test PWT within the context of intersectionality and different employment statuses. For example, although we did see significant differences on decent work and career adaptability for those working full- versus part-time, we did not compare subgroups of participants given issues with sample size. An important future direction would be to understand how PWT functions differently across the range of employment types. Future studies must also further investigate PWT within more homogeneous groups (e.g., all Asian/Asian American, all Hispanic/Latina/o American, etc.) as well as within the intersections of subgroups.

Conclusion

In sum, this study provided support for the applicability of PWT with a group of working women and showcased workplace climate as a potential predictor in understanding the work experiences of women. Although the study has its limitations, it expands PWT literature by specifically testing propositions with a traditionally underrepresented population and provides ideas for modification to the PWT model. The findings also provide practical implications for practitioners and organizations interested in understanding the impact of marginalization and economic constraints on women's work experiences.

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