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Quiet Workaholics? The Link Between Workaholism and Employee Silence and Moral Voice as Explained by the Social-Cognitive Theory of Morality

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ABSTRACT

When employees engage in potentially harmful behavior, organizations and societies rely on others to voice these issues. We propose that workaholism, a way that some individuals develop to deal with and thrive in today's intense and demanding work environment, reduces these individuals' intention to engage in moral voice and increases employee silence. Drawing on social-cognitive theory of morality, we propose that this occurs because workaholism, being driven by an inner compulsion to working extensively, disengages moral self-regulation which, in turn, affects both the activation of moral behavior (i.e., voice intentions) and the inhibition of immoral behavior (i.e., employee silence). Further, based on social-cognitive theory's premise that moral behavior is jointly regulated by personal and social standards, we propose that a context that endorses this inner pressure to work (i.e., climate of self-interest) strengthens the relationship between workaholism and moral disengagement. Findings from two three-wave time-lagged studies of Italian and UK employees suggest that workaholism—but not workload—is associated with moral disengagement and indirectly with more silence and less moral voice intention. Additionally, Study 2's moderated-mediation model showed that perceived climate of self-interest moderates the relationship between workaholism and moral disengagement and revealed dimension-specific effects of workaholism.

1 | Introduction

Despite promises that technological advancements and flexible work arrangements would create a more leisure-based society, work maintains and broadens its grip on people's lives. Results from large-scale surveys and the organizational behavior literature indicate that today's workplaces demand much from employees, while also providing infinite opportunities (Bliese, Edwards, and Sonnentag 2017; Eurofound 2023). In response to these growing work demands, but also utilizing the

opportunities that work offers, a considerable number of people develop workaholism (Andersen et al. 2023; Taris and de Jonge 2024)—an inner pressure to working, denoted through incessant and incontrollable thoughts about work, excessive time and energy spent working, and feeling negative emotions when not working (or when prevented from working; Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020; Oates 1971).

While the long hours and significant resources that workaholics dedicate to their work can advance their careers and provide a

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sense of fulfillment or even joy while working, this intense focus on work often comes at the expense of their mental and physical health, social relationships within and outside work, and overall life balance (Andersen et al. 2023; Clark et al. 2016; Taris and de Jonge 2024). Research on the impact of workaholism on task performance is less conclusive; while some argue that workaholics may outperform their peers due to their intense dedication and drive (B. Cheng and Gu 2022; Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman 2007), others challenge this notion and find either no significant relationship or even negative associations between workaholism and performance (Clark et al. 2016; Spagnoli et al. 2020; Taris and de Jonge 2024). Compared to well-being and task performance, knowledge is limited on whether and if so, why, workaholism is related to unethical workplace behaviors (Taris and de Jonge 2024). This blind spot is problematic given the detrimental effects of unethical behaviors, such as bullying and fraud, on occupational health and sustainable organizational development (Association of Certified Fraud Examiners [ACFE] 2022; De Cremer and Moore 2020; ERC 2013; Mitchell, Reynolds, and Treviño 2020). Understanding workaholism's potential relationships with unethical behaviors is particularly relevant given recent claims that bottom-line mentalities (i.e., focusing on achieving a single goal while neglecting other priorities; Greenbaum, Mawritz, and Eissa 2012) lead to employees' withdrawal from being involved in moral issues (Entwistle and Doering 2024; Quade, Bonner, and Greenbaum 2022).

At least three barriers hinder the understanding of the link between workaholism and unethical behavior. First, existing research, much like the broader literature on workaholism, predominantly focuses on negative emotions and stress as mediating processes (Balducci et al. 2012; X. Liu, He, and Jiang 2024), neglecting social-cognitive regulatory processes (Bandura 2016) that are central to business ethics studies (e.g., Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008). These self-regulatory processes, such as moral activation and inhibition, are particularly relevant for understanding why individuals engage in unethical conduct even without malicious intent (Bandura 1991). Second, prior studies have primarily investigated acts of commission—active unethical behaviors, such as incivility and workplace aggression (Balducci et al. 2012; X. Liu, He, and Jiang 2024)—while overlooking acts of omission—behaviors that involve failing to do what is morally right (Carnes and Janoff-Bulman 2012). Acts of omission are equally critical, as they perpetuate unethical practices and may contribute to their normalization over time (A. Chen and Treviño 2023; Harlos 2016). Third, knowledge is limited about how context factors shape or amplify the relationship between workaholism and unethical behavior. Understanding how these conditions interact with individual tendencies is essential to understand how to mitigate these negative effects.

Our research addresses these three barriers and makes three key contributions. First, drawing on the social-cognitive theory of moral regulation (Bandura 1991, 2016), we propose that moral disengagement mechanisms (A. Newman et al. 2020; Ogunfowora et al. 2022)—such as moral justification or the distortion of consequences—enable workaholics to reframe unethical acts as acceptable or even desirable. Their propensity to morally disengage may explain the apparent dissonance between workaholics' intense absorption in work and their lack

of involvement in moral issues. To test our proposition that it is the specific disposition to working that characterizes workaholism (Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020; Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman 2007), and not merely working extensively that increases susceptibility to moral disengagement, we control for workload in our analysis.

Second, we examine how moral disengagement mediates the relationship between workaholism and moral omission, using concepts of employee silence and moral voice. Silence, in this context, involves withholding ideas or concerns that could address inefficiencies, harm or unethical practices (e.g., identifying a safety issue or observing abusive behavior from a leader or coworker) (Harlos 2016). By contrast, moral voice reflects active engagement to improve organizational outcomes or prevent harm (A. Chen and Treviño 2023). Examining both silence and voice intentions allows us to test whether moral disengagement interferes with workaholics' moral inhibiting and activating self-regulatory systems which drive silence and voice, respectively (Bandura 1991; Cornwell and Higgins 2015; Sherf, Parke, and Isaakyan 2021). We argue that moral disengagement enables workaholics to do what is morally wrong (i.e., remaining silent) and to avoid doing what is morally right (i.e., moral voice). This perspective further advances understanding of silence and voice as moral phenomena (A. Chen and Treviño 2023; Harlos 2016) by complementing frameworks which have focused on social exchange, exhaustion, and lack of resources as explanations of why extensive work may lead to the withholding voice (Ng and Feldman 2012).

Finally, applying the person-by-context approach of social-cognitive theory (Bandura 1991), we examine work environments that may amplify the morally disengaging effects of workaholism. By examining whether workaholics are more prone to morally disengage in climates they perceive as being focused on self-interest (Simha and Cullen 2012), we contribute to the growing research on bottom-line-mentality environments (i.e., settings that emphasize or reward achieving a single goal while neglecting other priorities; Greenbaum, Mawritz, and Eissa 2012). These contexts are notably common in many domains where unethical practices and behaviors have harmed employees, organizations, and external stakeholders (Greenbaum, Mawritz, and Zaman 2023). Figure 1 shows our model that we test using two three-wave studies conducted in Italy and the United Kingdom.

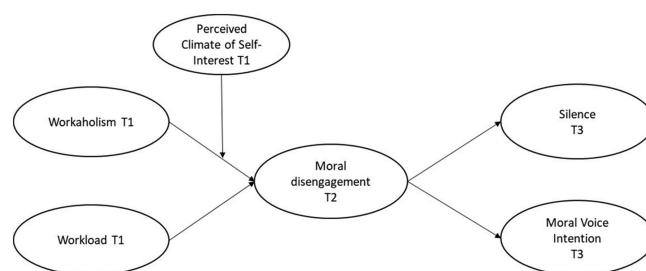


FIGURE 1 | Posited moderated-mediation model from workaholism to silence and moral voice intentions.

2 | Theory and Hypotheses Development

2.1 | Workaholism—An Ambivalent Disposition to Working

Organizations' responses to the demands of an increasingly dynamic, complex, competitive, and uncertain environment include increasing flexibility (in terms of time, space, and employment contracts), the rapid adaptation to technological advancements, and the densification of work processes (e.g., reduction of leeway times) (Kelliher and Anderson 2010; Schulte 2014). These adaptations require employees to work both more intensively and extensively (Burke 2009; Hunt and Pickard 2022). Moreover, employees need to adapt to ambiguous roles at work and in their private lives and align their individual dispositions with external (i.e., work and societal) demands (Sennett 1998).

For some individuals this adaptation manifests as workaholism, an approach to working that is both beneficial and tormenting (Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman 2007). The positive emotions (e.g., joy and confidence) workaholics experience while working stem from their belief that working extensively, and what they associate with working extensively, boosts their self-esteem and fulfills their needs for achievement and control (Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman 2007). It is their specific motivation for working extensively that distinguishes workaholics (who also score higher on perfectionism, neuroticism, and narcissism; Clark, Lechhook, and Taylor 2010) from others who work long hours but are not workaholics (Taris and de Jonge 2024). As a side effect, workaholics' dependence on work achievements for self-esteem and life satisfaction makes them more sensitive to constraints on their efforts, making them alert and risk-averse to tasks and events that threaten this work–achievement link (Killinger 2006). This is evident in their negative feelings when prevented from working, low trust in others, high perfectionism, aggression, and difficulty delegating tasks (Balducci et al. 2012; Clark et al. 2016).

Meta-analyses and reviews do not suggest that workaholics have strong ethical or unethical internal standards, but focus on task completion, excelling in domains that feed their self-esteem and gain them acknowledgement, and try to avoid distraction and disturbances (Clark et al. 2016; Taris and de Jonge 2024). For example, some exploratory cross-sectional studies (Balducci et al. 2012; Galperin and Burke 2006) found workaholism to be negatively related to constructive deviance (i.e., departing from the accepted way of working to solve problems) and positively related to destructive deviance (i.e., negative acts directed towards coworkers).

2.2 | Employee Silence and Voice as Moral Issues

While performing their tasks, employees may observe opportunities for improvement that benefit others and the organization, identify safety risks that could threaten themselves or others, or witness behaviors from coworkers, supervisors, or customers that harm others (Morrison 2023; Noort, Reader, and Gillespie 2019; O'Reilly and Aquino 2011). Organizational research has considered addressing such critical issues (i.e.,

voice) as constructive deviance or “extra-role” behavior—discretionary behavior that goes beyond delineated role expectations and has organizational benefits (Van Dyne, Cummings, and McLean 1995). In contrast, the concept of employee silence has been introduced to denote the deliberately withholding of one's views, distinguishing it from the mere absence of voice (Morrison and Milliken 2000). An absence of voice does not necessarily mean intentional withholding because an employee may simply have nothing to say or have not encountered a critical issue, which are both preconditions for the occurrence of employee silence (Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero 2003). Moreover, while voice and silence may appear as opposites in a given situation, employees often alternate between these behaviors over time (Reissner, Guenter, and de Jong 2024). Research also suggests distinct psychological mechanisms underpin silence and voice: While silence is associated with the behavior inhibition system, responsible for action avoidance, voice is driven by the behavioral activation system, which governs approaching goals and self-regulation towards desired states (Sherf, Parke, and Isaakyan 2021).

Although employees are not obliged to demonstrate extra-role behaviors, the decision to remain silent (an inhibitory and avoidant response) or to voice (i.e., actively addressing the issue) often carries a moral dimension particularly if the issues addressed or withheld have the potential to harm others in a way that is illegal or violates common standards (Jones 1991). For instance, silence in the face of bullying, fraud, or safety risks may have severe consequences: Accidents could occur, fraud might harm competitors or society, and unaddressed bullying could perpetuate the suffering of its targets (Harlos 2016; Noort, Reader, and Gillespie 2021). At times, however, the ethical implications of voice and silence are subtler. For example, an employee may choose not to voice an idea that could make work more efficient or less demanding (physically or mentally). While less immediately apparent, such decisions can still shape workplace well-being and organizational outcomes.

Notably, while potential unethical outcomes may arise from silence, unethical intentions are no prerequisite for silence to be considered an act of unethical omission. Employees report a wide range of motives for withholding their views, including fear of negative consequences, feelings of futility, opportunism, or even prosocial motives such as avoiding embarrassment for a colleague (Knoll and Van Dick 2013; Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero 2003). However, even when silence stems from seemingly benign motives, it can still constitute an unethical omission. By failing to address wrongdoing or engage with moral issues, employees may inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of negative developments, enable unethical individuals to remain in position of power, and hinder efforts to mitigate harm (Beamish 2000; Entwistle and Doering 2024; Harlos 2016; Umphress and Bingham 2011).

2.3 | Moral Disengagement as a Mediator Between Workaholism and Moral Voice and Silence

Voicing concerns about critical issues, especially those with an ethical dimension, is an endeavor with uncertain outcomes (A.

Chen and Treviño 2023). It can conflict with workaholics' perfectionism and preference for situational control (Taris and de Jonge 2024). Moreover, spending time addressing ethical issues may jeopardize an employee's progress on their core tasks, from which workaholics derive their self-esteem. In contrast, remaining silent does not detract their resources (e.g., time and energy), complicate task completion, or risk disturbing those whose approval workaholics rely on (e.g., their superiors; Reissner, Guenter, and de Jong 2024). While refraining from addressing critical issues may seem like a convenient way for workaholics to stay focused on their tasks, if the issues they notice (e.g., discrimination, harassment, inefficacy, safety issues, and fraud) have the potential to harm fellow organizational members or external stakeholders (e.g., patients and customers), this strategy of neglect comes at a price that cannot be ignored (Bella 2022; Cornwell and Higgins 2015).

Because societies rely on the ethical behaviors of their members (i.e., behavior that promotes others' welfare and/or avoids unjustified harm) to survive and thrive, they socialize individuals to develop moral standards (e.g., through education, others' responses to their actions, and exposure to role models). According to social-cognitive theory of morality (Bandura 1991, 2016), these standards guide two distinct moral self-regulatory processes. The first is a proactive process that promotes ethical behavior, such as moral voice, by triggering feelings of pride and enhancing self-esteem. The second is an inhibitory process that restrains unethical actions or omission of morally right behavior (such as silence) by triggering negative anticipatory self-evaluative emotions (e.g., guilt and shame) and thoughts (e.g., self-condemnation) when an individual is tempted to act unethically or omit doing what is right.

However, social-cognitive theory also proposes that moral self-regulation can be selectively disengaged. A set of social-cognitive mechanisms that Bandura (1999, 2016) labeled moral disengagement (A. Newman et al. 2020; Ogunfowora et al. 2022) allows people to mentally reconstruct moral issues in ways that enable them to engage in misbehavior without the usual self-censure, self-condemnation, or having to renounce their professed moral standards. Three of these mechanisms operate to mentally reconstruct behavior: They sanctify misconduct as serving a higher moral goal ("moral justification"), compare the (unethical) behavior against other more severe actions ("advantageous comparison"), and utilize sanitized language ("euphemistic labeling"). Another two mechanisms obscure or minimize the individual's role in the harm that has been caused. They do so by attributing responsibility to higher authorities ("displacement of responsibility") or a broader social group ("diffusion of responsibility"). The final three mechanisms reframe the victim or target of the behavior: "distortion of consequences" allows the effects of one's behavior on a target to be minimized, "dehumanization" denies the applicability of usual moral standards to that target, and "attribution of blame" allows responsibility for one's behavior to be directed at its target.

Conceptual elaborations on the nature and personal roots of workaholism, along with associations reported in meta-analyses and reviews (Clark et al. 2016; Taris and de Jonge 2024), suggest that workaholics could be particularly prone to social-cognitive

mechanisms that selectively disengage from moral self-sanctioning (Bandura 1999). Specifically, workaholics may justify their omission (i.e., silence or lack of voice) by emphasizing the valuable contributions their task focus enables (i.e., "moral justification"). Their fixation on task completion and higher levels of depersonalization (Clark et al. 2016) may allow workaholics to obscure or downplay their role in causing subsequent harms or at least deflect attention from their omission by attributing responsibility to those who defined the tasks (i.e., "displacement of responsibility"). Moreover, workaholics' self-perception as superior and indispensable contributors—evidenced by workaholism's associations with narcissism (Clark, Lelchouk, and Taylor 2010)—may lead them to shift responsibility for addressing seemingly "peripheral" tasks to others (e.g., colleagues or a broader social group such as policymakers), whom they view as less competent or critical to task completion ("diffusion of responsibility").

Workaholism is furthermore associated with distrust of others, cynicism, and depersonalization (Clark et al. 2016). Lower empathy and distrust amplify workaholics' tendencies to disregard others' needs and ignore potential harms that can arise from the ethical issue they did not regard as worth addressing ("distortion of consequences"; Paciello et al. 2020). Similarly, this tendency may also lower the threshold for excuses of omitting to meet these demands or prevent them from causing harm. The lower empathy and strong need to justify the current work arrangements (which allow workaholics to achieve the much-needed rewards) make them more prone to blame the targets for these unethical acts and procedures ("attribution of blame") while downplaying others' suffering or rights ("dehumanization").

Drawing on this reasoning, and as depicted on the left-hand side of our model (Figure 1), we propose that workaholics' distinct disposition makes them particularly prone to moral disengagement. On the right-hand side of Figure 1, we further propose that moral disengagement is positively related to silence and negatively related to voice because it interferes with inhibitory and proactive processes of moral self-regulation (Bandura 2016; Cornwell and Higgins 2015). Mechanisms such as "distortion of consequences" and "displacement of responsibility" interfere with inhibitory self-regulation by preventing actions that violate moral standards (e.g., silence) from triggering negative anticipatory self-sanctions, such as guilt, shame, or diminished self-worth. Consequently, silence, driven by the behavioral inhibition system (Sherf, Parke, and Isaakyan 2021), becomes more likely. Similarly, moral disengagement undermines the behavioral activation system that underpins voice (Sherf, Parke, and Isaakyan 2021). Mechanisms such as "advantageous comparison" and "moral justification" obscure the ethical consequences of lacking voice while legitimizing alternative proactive actions more aligned with workaholics' ambitions, such as focusing on core tasks that drive their self-esteem and social recognition. This dynamic allows workaholics to prioritize task completion, experiencing anticipatory positive self-sanctions (e.g., satisfaction and self-worth) associated with proactive moral self-regulation, while avoiding the discomfort and uncertainty of engaging in moral action, such as voicing concerns.

Overall, moral disengagement is suggested to enable workaholics to remain silent by interfering with the inhibitory moral

self-regulation and omit ethical acts (i.e., moral voice) by disrupting the proactive side of moral self-regulation. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a. *Moral disengagement mediates the positive relationship between workaholism and employee silence.*

Hypothesis 1b. *Moral disengagement mediates the negative relationship between workaholism and moral voice intentions.*

2.4 | Climate of Self-Interest as a Facilitator of the Workaholism–Moral Disengagement Link

As discussed above, according to the social-cognitive theory of morality (Bandura 1991), (un)ethical behavior is guided by the anticipation of sanctions that arise from fulfilling or violating personal and social standards. Internalized self-sanctions and social sanctions can either conflict with one another or justify and reinforce each other. We propose that if workaholics perceive their environment as promoting self-interest (Simha and Cullen 2012), moral disengagement is more likely to be activated to justify their narrow work focus and neglect in addressing ethical issues.

Organizational climate denotes how employees perceive their organizational environment including the procedures, routines, policies and practices, and behaviors that employees observe as being rewarded, but also supported and expected, both formally and informally (Ostroff, Kinicki, and Tamkins 2003; Schneider 1987). Although employees within an organization are all socialized in similar ways and are exposed to similar features within the organizational setting, their perceptions of this setting may not always converge (James, Joyce, and Slocum 1988). Different individuals may perceive their environment in different ways, because these perceptions arise “out of the cognitive appraisals, social constructions, and sense-making of individuals” (Ostroff, Kinicki, and Tamkins 2003, 573).

Researchers have identified several work-related climates (e.g., safety climate and service climate) of which the ethical climate—“the perception of what constitutes right behavior, and thus becomes a psychological mechanism through which ethical issues are managed” (Martin and Cullen 2006, 177)—is most relevant for our research. The ethical climate influences “which issues organization members consider to be ethically pertinent (...) [and] determines the moral criteria members use to understand, weigh, and resolve such issues” (p. 177). Several moral criteria including efficacy, social responsibility, laws and professional codes, and self-interest have been identified theoretically and empirically as signatures of different types of ethical climate (Kuenzi, Mayer, and Greenbaum 2020; Victor and Cullen 1988). We argue that ethical climates that use self-interest as criteria to deal with ethical issues are particularly likely to facilitate workaholics’ moral disengagement.

Self-interest leads people to focus narrowly on their own desires and interests, often with little awareness of how their actions

affect others and their interests (Adams and Maine 1998; Elçi and Alpkan 2009). A context that encourages self-interest (e.g., individualized job design, top management’s bottom-line mentality, and team climate of self-interest) not only diverts employees’ attention away from others’ needs and shields them from ethical concerns (Babalola et al. 2020; De Dreu and Nauta 2009; Y. Liu and DeFrank 2013; Mo et al. 2023) but also provides justification for downplaying ethical considerations that would otherwise require action, such as moral voice (Ogunfowora et al. 2022). Prior meta-analyses and reviews have not suggested that workaholics have strong ethical or unethical internal standards (Taris and de Jonge 2024). Thus, workaholics adopt a “pragmatic orientation” (Bandura 1991, 253), including ethical concerns into their role definitions only when these concerns enhance their work-based self-esteem and fulfill their needs (Morrison 1994). If they perceive their environment as a climate of self-interest, workaholics are further motivated to succumb to their internal pressure to remain task-focused, leading them to neglect activities with potential ethical implications. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. *Perceived climate of self-interest moderates the relationship between workaholism and moral disengagement in a way that this relationship is stronger for higher perceived climate of self-interest.*

Hypothesis 3. *The indirect effects of workaholism on employee silence (H3a) and moral voice intentions (H3b) via moral disengagement are moderated by perceived climate of self-interest. The effects are stronger for higher perceived climate of self-interest.*

2.5 | Discriminant Validity From Comparing Effects for Workaholism With the Effects for Workload

To determine whether the effects of workaholism are caused by their characteristic inner drive to working extensively, and not merely by the high workload that workaholics also shoulder, we aimed to examine whether results are distinct for workaholism compared to those of workload. High workload, conceptualized as the excessive amount of work that an employee must finish within a given period (P. Y. Chen and Spector 1992), is among the most-frequently encountered job stressors (Bowling et al. 2015). Working long hours under high demands maintains high allostatic levels which create feelings of stress and unease that become intensified as the means of recovery are reduced (Tietze and Musson 2005). Because high workload increases stress and exhaustion and drains resources, it potentially reduces employees’ willingness and ability to engage in extra-role behaviors such as voice (Binnewies, Sonnentag, and Mojza 2010; Bolino and Turnley 2005). Employees who already have a heavy workload and suffer from stress and resource loss would avoid further depletion of their limited resources (e.g., time, physical energy, emotional energy, and attention) which is likely if they challenge the status quo (Hobfoll 1989; Ng and Feldman 2012). To exclude the possibility that the effects that we hypothesize for workaholism are merely due to working extensively (a feature that workaholics share with employees who have a high workload), we include workload as a control variable (Bernierth and Aguinis 2016).

3 | Overview of the Studies

In the first study, we preliminary examine the posited mediational model. In line with Hypotheses 1a and 1b, we expect that workaholism is positively related to silence and negatively to moral voice intention, through its association with moral disengagement. We expect that this mediation effect occurs above and beyond the role of workload. In Study 2, we aim to cross-validate the mediation effect with a sample from a different country and additionally examine the full moderated-mediation model (Figure 1) considering climate of self-interest. In line with Hypothesis 2, we expect that the relation between workaholism and moral disengagement is stronger when employees perceive their organizational climate to be driven by self-interest. In addition, in line with Hypothesis 3, we expect the indirect effects of workaholism on both silence and voice through moral disengagement to be moderated by climate of self-interest.

4 | Study 1

4.1 | Methods

4.1.1 | Participants and Study Design

This study is part of a larger project led by researchers from Italy and the United Kingdom. We designed and conducted a three-wave study on a convenience sample of the Italian working population. Data collection was executed by IPSOS¹ in 2021 and participants were part of their panels. Those matching the inclusion criteria (i.e., being employed in an Italian organization, having at least 6-month job tenure at their current organization) were contacted and invited to participate. Their time was compensated for with a point reward system that allowed them to receive prizes. The study was approved by the relevant university's ethics committee. Full study data can be accessed upon request from the corresponding author. Syntax and model results along with the complete survey can be accessed in the anonymous folder https://osf.io/ey7xk/?view_only=9b8ef21bc4184c1db5290f74953fa6bd.

The sample at Time 1 (T1) comprised 505 employees (65% males) with a mean age of 42.3 ($SD = 11.2$). The majority had a full-time job (88%) with a permanent contract (80%). Almost half of the participants held at least a secondary school diploma (45%) and had worked less than 6 years in their current organization (49%). While 45% of the participants reported to not work from home at the time of the data collection, 30% reported working mostly or always remotely. Most participants were employed in the services' sector (41%), followed by the retail (31%) and manufacturing/production (28%).

Participants were contacted again 1 (T2) and 3 months (T3) later. Due to budget constraints of the project, data collection at both T2 and T3 was agreed to stop after passing about 50% response rate. This procedure secured sufficient cases to test our models (Little 2013), but it also left us with attrition rates of 43% at T2 and 48% at T3. The sample at T2 included 290 employees (61% males), and the sample at T3 comprised 152 employees (63% males). As the budget-induced attrition rates could raise questions about the reliability of our findings, we performed a non-response bias

test to understand whether attrition from T1 to T3 was partially selective, as well as the Little's test of missing data to assess whether missing data were completely at random. Results of the ANOVA (for $p < 0.007$ after the Bonferroni correction) showed that there were no differences in all the study variables between those who did not participate at all stages of the study and those who participated (workload $F(1, 290) = 1.653$, $p = 0.20$; motivational workaholism $F(1, 290) = 0.088$, $p = 0.71$; cognitive workaholism $F(1, 290) = 1.722$, $p = 0.19$; emotional workaholism $F(1, 290) = 0.001$, $p = 0.97$; behavioral workaholism $F(1, 290) = 0.041$, $p = 0.84$; moral disengagement $F(1, 290) = 0.225$, $p = 0.64$). Results of the Little's test including all study variables (workaholism, workload, moral disengagement, silence, and moral voice intention) and the socio-demographics (gender, organizational tenure, working remotely, age, education, employment status, industry, and contract type) was not significant ($\chi^2(38) = 50.92$, $p = 0.08$) suggesting that missing data were missing completely at random. Hence, following methodological recommendations to reduce bias and maintain statistical power in longitudinal studies (Graham 2009; D. A. Newman 2014; M. Wang et al. 2017), we implemented full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation (Arbuckle 1996) to model missing data.

4.1.2 | Measures

If established items were not available in Italian, items were back-translated from English to Italian by a native speaker fluent in English and living in an anglophone country. Except for employee silence, all variables were assessed by asking participants to rate their level of agreement with each of the items using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The authors were responsible for scale selection.

Workaholism at T1 was measured using the Multidimensional Workaholism Scale (Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020). This scale comprises four subscales with three items each: *motivational* (sample item: "I always have an inner pressure inside of me that drives me to work"), *cognitive* (sample item: "I feel like I cannot stop myself from thinking about working"), *emotional* (sample item: "I feel upset if I have to miss a day of work for any reason"), and *behavioral* (sample item: "When most of my co-workers will take breaks, I keep working").

Moral disengagement at T2 was measured with eight items developed by Fida et al. (2015) and Paciello et al. (2023). A sample item was "It is alright to exaggerate the truth to keep your company out of trouble."

Employee silence at T3 was measured with the Italian version of the scale by Knoll and van Dick (2013). The timeframe was selected to match the amount of time that had passed since T1. Due to the difficulty of defining morality and ethics in absolute terms (see Tenbrunsel and Smith-Crowe 2008), the scale follows recommendations to "take an approach that reflects the subjectivity of ethical judgments" (Mitchell, Reynolds, and Treviño 2020, 13). Specifically, in the introduction of the scale, participants are asked "In the last 6 months have you ever noticed situations at work where you thought that colleagues or supervisors acted in an incorrect, inefficient, immoral, or otherwise problematic way." Then, participants were asked to rate

how often the following reasons made them remain silent on a 7-point scale (from 1 = *never* to 7 = *very frequently*). With three items each, four differentially motivated types of silence were measured: acquiescent silence (sample item: “I remained silent, because I will not find a sympathetic ear, anyway”), prosocial silence (sample item: “... because I do not want to embarrass others”), opportunistic silence (sample item: “... because that would mean having to do avoidable additional work”), and quiescent silence (sample item: “... because of fear of negative consequences”). We used this scale as it covers the most-frequently examined silence types (Hao et al. 2022). Including a broad range of motives is important given the heterogeneity of our sample in terms of industry and organization characteristics. As we did not propose distinct effects for specific silence motives, an overall silence score was computed from its four facets as it has been done regularly by researchers using this scale.²

Moral voice intention at T3 was assessed with four items from the Moral Potency Questionnaire developed by Hannah and Avolio (2010). Sample item: “I will confront my peers if they commit an unethical act.” The reason to assess specifically moral voice intention was inspired by Rothwell and Baldwin’s (2006) research on whistleblowing. As employees may not have faced an unethical issue within the timeframe of our study, we can still assess how they would act in such a situation. Of course, this interpretation needs to acknowledge that behavior and intentions are not the same (Ajzen 1991; Hassan, Shiu, and Shaw 2016).

4.1.2.1 | Control variables. Our selection of control variables was based on Bernerth and Aguinis’s (2016) recommendations. As there are theoretical arguments that link between workload and voice and silence (see Ng and Feldman 2012), and workload could function as an alternative explanation for the effects we hypothesized, it was included as a control variable. Workload at T1 was measured using three items from the Effort–Reward Imbalance (ERI) Questionnaire (Siegrist et al. 2004). A sample item was “I have constant pressure due to a heavy workload.”

4.1.3 | Data Analysis

We first examined the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Workaholism and employee silence were each defined as overall latent variables measured by their respective subdimensions while workload, moral disengagement,

and moral voice intention were defined as latent variables measured by their respective items. Then, we tested the posited mediation model (see Figure 1). As described above, workload was included as a covariate. To investigate the indirect effects of the model, we used the indirect effect test with the Bootstrap procedure with 5000 Bootstrap resamples (MacKinnon 2012).

All analyses were performed using *Mplus* 8.7 (Muthén and Muthén 2017). Model fit was evaluated considering the following: chi-square test, comparative fit index (CFI ≥ 0.90), Tucker and Lewis Index (TLI ≥ 0.90), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA ≤ 0.08), RMSEA 90% confidence interval and RMSEA test of close fit (H_0 : RMSEA ≤ 0.05) (Browne and Cudeck 1993), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR ≤ 0.08) (Hu and Bentler 1999). FIML strategy with robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLR) was used to correct the parameters’ standard errors for the slight departures from univariate normal distributions of the data (Yuan and Bentler 2000).

4.2 | Results

4.2.1 | Preliminary Analysis: Measurement Model

The measurement model fit the data satisfactorily: $\chi^2(406) = 682.96$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.037 [90% CI: 0.032, 0.041; $p = 1.00$]; SRMR = 0.060. Because the latent correlations between the workaholism dimensions were higher than those found by Clark, Smith, and Haynes (2020), ranging from 0.74 (correlation between cognitive and emotional workaholism) to 0.92 (correlation between motivational and behavioral workaholism), we compared the factor model of the workaholism scale (with four correlated subscales $\chi^2(48) = 103.096$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.048 [90% CI: 0.035, 0.060; $p = 0.60$]; SRMR = 0.032) with the alternative model positing a second-order factor ($\chi^2(50) = 103.570$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.046 [90% CI: 0.033, 0.059; $p = 0.68$]; SRMR = 0.032). The comparison of the two models showed that the four-factor model did not significantly improve the model fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.12$, $df = 2$; $p = 0.57$). Therefore, the measurement model was respecified by defining workaholism as a latent variable measured by its four subscales ($\chi^2(220) = 358.95$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.035 [90% CI: 0.029, 0.042; $p = 1.00$]; SRMR = 0.065). Table 1 shows the internal reliabilities (i.e., omega scores), descriptive statistics, and correlations among the study variables.

TABLE 1 | Study 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables.

	Mean	SD	Sk	Ku	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Workaholism T1	3.01	0.76	−0.18	−0.09	(0.95)				
2. Workload T1	3.36	0.77	−0.28	0.15	0.43***	(0.70)			
3. Moral disengagement T2	1.97	0.79	0.61	−0.55	0.13*	−0.04	(0.92)		
4. Silence T3	3.51	1.41	−0.01	−0.60	0.39***	0.19*	0.31***	(0.89)	
5. Moral voice intention T3	3.49	0.84	−0.08	−0.11	−0.03	0.01	−0.25**	−0.26**	(0.87)

Note: $N_{T1} = 505$; $N_{T2} = 290$; $N_{T3} = 152$. McDonald’s omega coefficients are reported in brackets in the diagonal.

Abbreviations: Ku = kurtosis; SD = standard deviation; Sk = skewness; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

4.2.2 | Hypothesis Testing: Mediation of Moral Disengagement

The fit of the posited mediation model was satisfactory: $\chi^2(220)=358.95$, $p<0.001$; CFI=0.95; TLI=0.94; RMSEA=0.035 (90% CI: 0.029, 0.042; $p=1.00$); SRMR=0.065. As shown in Figure 2 and in line with Hypotheses 1a and 1b, workaholism was indirectly—through moral disengagement—related to both silence ($\beta=0.061$, 95% Bootstrap CI: 0.009, 0.125) and moral voice intention ($\beta=-0.064$, 95% Bootstrap CI: -0.150 , -0.008). Additionally, workaholism at T1 was directly related to silence at T3 ($\beta=0.36$, $p<0.01$) but not directly related to moral voice intention at T3 ($\beta=0.07$, $p=0.64$). Workload was neither related to silence ($\beta=0.09$, $p=0.44$) nor to moral voice intention ($\beta=-0.01$, $p=0.92$). While workload was not correlated with moral disengagement ($r=-0.04$; see Table 1), our model showed a negative regression coefficient between these variables ($\beta=-0.18$, $p<0.05$).^{3,4}

4.3 | Discussion

The results of Study 1 supported our hypotheses that the relationships between workaholism at T1 and subsequent silence and moral voice intention (T3) are mediated by T2 moral disengagement. It also showed that the effect was specific for workaholism as workload was not correlated with moral disengagement, silence, and moral voice intention. When included in the model together with workaholism, however, workload was negatively associated with moral disengagement. As the independent variables (i.e., workaholism and workload) were correlated and workload was not correlated with moral disengagement, we interpret their counterintuitively negative association in the model in line with the psychometric literature (Cohen et al. 2003; Friedman and Wall 2005; Pedhazur 1997) to

exist due to suppression effects between the regression predictors. We further elaborate on this issue in Section 7.

5 | Study 2

Study 2 aims to (a) cross-validate the mediating role of moral disengagement in the relationship of workaholism on silence and moral voice intention, (b) further examine the possible specific effects of the four workaholism facets that we could not be tested in Study 1 due to their high correlations among the facets, and (c) substantiate that the relationship between workaholism and moral disengagement is distinct from the influence of workload. Most importantly, we (d) extend our model by considering whether a theoretically derived context factor (i.e., perceived climate of self-interest) increases the moral disengaging effect of workaholism.

5.1 | Methods

5.1.1 | Participants and Study Design

This study is part of the larger funded project mentioned in Study 1. It is a three-wave study of UK employees. As with Study 1, data collection was conducted by IPSOS adopting the same methodology (convenience sample of the working population, including three waves of data). T1 comprised 1046 employees (58% males) with a mean age of 43.8 ($SD=12.2$). The majority had a full-time job (99%) with a permanent contract (89%). Half of the participants held at least a vocational degree (51%) and had worked less than 6 years for their current organization (57%). While 45% of the participants reported not working from home at the time of the data collection, 39% reported working mostly or always remotely. Most participants were employed in

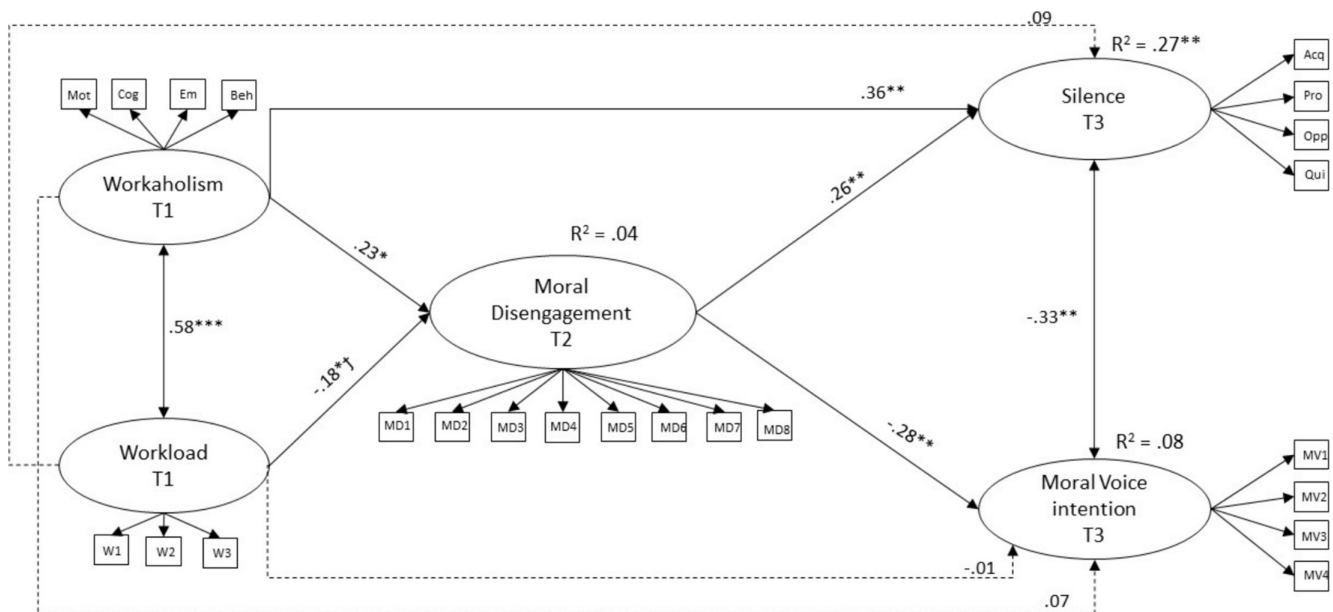


FIGURE 2 | Study 1 results of the final model. Note: $N=505$. All the factor loadings are significant for $p<0.001$ ranging from 0.55 (Item 2 of workload) and 0.93 (quiescent silence); T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3; dotted lines denote non-significant paths; *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$. †: possible spurious effect, please see the discussion of the results.

the services' sector (38%), followed by the retail (34%) and the manufacturing/production sector (28%). As with Study 1, participants were contacted again 1 (T2) and 5 months (T3) after T1. The sample at T2 included 594 employees (59% males). The sample at T3 comprised 292 employees (62% males).

As with Study 1, data collection at both T2 and T3 was stopped after reaching about 50% response rate, due to budget constraints. This procedure left us with attrition rates of 43% at T2 and 51% at T3. Results of the missing data showed that although there were some differences (for $p < 0.007$ after the Bonferroni correction) between those who participated in all the stages of the study and those who did not (workload $F(1, 594) = 3.042$, $p = 0.08$; motivational workaholism $F(1, 594) = 9.654$, $p < 0.002$; cognitive workaholism $F(1, 594) = 4.920$, $p = 0.03$; emotional workaholism $F(1, 594) = 1.663$, $p = 0.20$; behavioral workaholism $F(1, 594) = 1.274$, $p = 0.26$; moral disengagement $F(1, 594) = 5.997$, $p = 0.01$), results of the Little's test considering all the study variables and socio-demographics was not significant ($\chi^2 = 24.92$, $df = 18$, $p = 0.13$), suggesting that data were missing completely at random (MCAR). Consequently, as for Study 1, this allowed us to implement a FIML approach (Arbuckle 1996) to model missing data.

The study was approved by the relevant university's ethics committee. Full study data can be accessed upon request from the corresponding author. Syntax and model results can be accessed here https://osf.io/ey7xk/?view_only=9b8ef21bc4184c1db5290f74953fa6bd.

5.1.2 | Measures

Workaholism at T1, *moral disengagement* at T2, and *employee silence* and *moral voice intention* at T3 were measured with the same scales used in Study 1.

Perceived climate of self-interest at T1 was measured with three items by Elçi and Alpan (2009). A sample item was "In this company, people are mostly out for themselves." Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each of the items using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

5.1.2.1 | Control Variables. As in Study 1, we included workload as control variable, which was measured with the same scale.

5.1.3 | Data Analysis

After having ascertained the fit of the measurement model, a moderated-mediation model was specified in line with our hypotheses (Figure 1). For that purpose, we applied latent moderated structural (LMS) equations following a multistep approach (Sardeshmukh and Vandenberg 2017). First, we tested the model without the latent interaction terms (Model 1: baseline model) and examined the indirect effects with the Bootstrap procedure with 5000 Bootstrap resamples (MacKinnon 2012). Given the four workaholism dimensions, we examined four different models, each of them with the specific posited latent interaction

term (Models 1a–1d). The significant interactions were examined both statistically (simple slope analysis) and graphically (Aiken, West, and Reno 1991). As a following step, we estimated a final model including all the significant moderations (Model 2). Based on this we computed the conditional indirect effects using *Mplus* constraints (Stride et al. 2015). Because fit indices generally used to interpret the goodness-of-fit of SEM are not available for LMS models, we assessed the overall fit by employing the log-likelihood ratio test ($D = -2[(\log\text{-likelihood for the baseline model}) - (\log\text{-likelihood for the LMS model})]$) (Sardeshmukh and Vandenberg 2017). The log-likelihood ratio test allowed us to determine whether the more parsimonious model without interaction terms exhibited a significant loss of fit compared to the LMS model (Maslowsky, Jager, and Hemken 2015). Moreover, to corroborate the log-likelihood ratio test results, we compared the AIC values from the baseline and the LMS models ($\Delta\text{AIC} = \text{AIC for the LMS model} - \text{AIC for the baseline model}$; Vandenberg and Grelle 2009). Models showing lowest AIC values should be preferred. All analyses were performed using *Mplus* 8.7 (Muthén and Muthén 2017). We adopted a FIML parameter estimate strategy (Arbuckle 1996) with MLR estimator (Yuan and Bentler 2000).

5.2 | Results

5.2.1 | Preliminary Analysis: Measurement Model

The measurement model fit the data well: $\chi^2(491) = 749.85$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.022 (90% CI: 0.019, 0.026; $p = 1.00$); SRMR = 0.041. The correlations between the workaholism dimensions were consistent with Clark, Smith, and Haynes (2020) and ranged from 0.60 (correlation between cognitive and emotional workaholism) to 0.73 (correlation between motivational and behavioral workaholism). As done in Study 1, we compared the factor model of the workaholism scale (with four correlated subscales $\chi^2(48) = 117.52$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.037 [90% CI: 0.029, 0.046; $p = 0.99$]; SRMR = 0.031) with the alternative model positing a second-order factor ($\chi^2(50) = 126.73$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.038 [90% CI: 0.030, 0.047; $p = 0.99$]; SRMR = 0.033) and found that the four-factor model fitted the data significantly better ($\Delta\chi^2 = 8.79$, $df = 2$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 2 shows internal consistencies (i.e., omega coefficients), descriptive statistics, and the correlations among the study variables.

5.2.2 | Baseline Model: Direct and Indirect Effects of Workaholism on Silence and Moral Voice Intention

The model without interactions fitted the data well: $\chi^2(493) = 756.71$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.023 (90% CI: 0.019, 0.026; $p = 1.00$); SRMR = 0.043. None of the workaholism dimensions at T1 were directly associated with silence (cognitive: $\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.60$; motivational: $\beta = -0.19$, $p = 0.11$; emotional: $\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.20$; behavioral: $\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.75$) and moral voice intention (cognitive: $\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.50$; motivational: $\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.63$; emotional: $\beta = -0.10$, $p = 0.47$; behavioral: $\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.18$) at T3. Because none of these effects were

TABLE 2 | Study 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables.

	Mean	SD	Sk	Ku	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Motivational workaholism T1	3.40	0.88	-0.58	0.10	(0.82)								
2. Cognitive workaholism T1	3.33	0.84	-0.29	-0.01	0.52***	(0.90)							
3. Emotional workaholism T1	2.85	0.99	-0.03	-0.63	0.59***	0.52***	(0.82)						
4. Behavioral workaholism T1	2.76	1.06	0.03	-0.85	0.60***	0.54***	0.52***	(0.78)					
5. Workload T1	3.33	0.88	-0.22	-0.39	0.30***	0.43***	0.20***	0.41***	(0.75)				
6. Perceived climate of self-interest T1	3.08	0.91	-0.05	-0.31	0.11***	0.19***	0.12***	0.16***	0.26***	(0.83)			
7. Moral disengagement T2	1.64	0.79	1.46	1.19	-0.00	0.17***	0.10*	-0.00	0.01	0.24***	(0.92)		
8. Silence T3	3.02	1.46	0.16	-0.94	0.02	0.16**	0.10	0.09	0.15*	0.24***	0.21***	(0.91)	
9. Moral voice intention T3	3.58	0.75	-0.42	0.74	0.13*	0.04	0.06	0.11	-0.02	-0.03	-0.17**	-0.21***	(0.84)

Note: $N_{T1} = 1046$; $N_{T2} = 594$; $N_{T3} = 292$; McDonald's omega coefficients are reported in brackets in the diagonal. Abbreviations: Ku = kurtosis; SD = standard deviation; Sk = skewness; T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

significant, we tested the more parsimonious full mediation model (i.e., a model which does not include the direct effects of workaholism dimensions on silence and moral voice intention). The full mediation model fitted the data well ($\chi^2(501) = 766.27$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.022 [90% CI: 0.019, 0.026; $p = 1.00$]; SRMR = 0.047), and it was not significantly different from the partial mediation model ($\Delta\chi^2(8) = 9.52$, $p = 0.30$).

Results showed that while the cognitive and emotional workaholism at T1 dimensions were positively associated with moral disengagement at T2 (cognitive: $\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$; emotional: $\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$), the motivational dimension was not ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = 0.11$) and behavioral workaholism was negatively associated with moral disengagement ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.01$) despite the non-significant zero-order correlation ($r = 0.00$, see Table 2). Moral disengagement at T2 was related to both silence ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$) and moral voice intention ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$) at T3. Perceived climate of self-interest at T1 was also related to moral disengagement at T2 ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). Workload at T1 was related to silence at T3 ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), but it was not related to neither moral voice intention at T3 ($\beta = -0.04$, $p = 0.61$) nor moral disengagement at T2 ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = 0.24$).

In line with Hypotheses 1a and 1b, the indirect effects showed that both the cognitive and the emotional workaholism dimensions at T1 were indirectly associated with silence (cognitive: $\beta = 0.080$, 95% Bootstrap CI: 0.038, 0.133; emotional: $\beta = 0.047$, 95% Bootstrap CI: 0.007, 0.095) and moral voice intention (cognitive: $\beta = -0.071$, 95% Bootstrap CI: -0.127, -0.023; emotional: $\beta = -0.041$, 95% Bootstrap CI: -0.093, -0.005) at T3 through moral disengagement at T2.

5.2.3 | Moderated Mediation: The Disengagement Facilitating Effect of Self-Interest Climate

Results of the four models including each of the posited interactions of the workaholism dimensions with perceived climate of self-interest are reported in Table 3. Results showed significant moderation effects for the cognitive workaholism–moral disengagement relationship and the emotional workaholism–moral disengagement relationship (Models 1a and 1b). The analysis of the simple slope effects (see Figure 3a,b) showed that the relationship between either the cognitive or emotional workaholism at T1 with moral disengagement at T2 was stronger for individuals who reported medium (cognitive: $b = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$; emotional: $b = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$) or high self-interest climate (cognitive: $b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$; emotional: $b = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$) than for those low in this dimension (cognitive: $b = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$; emotional: $b = 0.05$, $p = 0.39$). For these dimensions, Hypothesis 2 was thus supported. All the other relationships estimated in the model were consistent with the baseline model described above.

To investigate the overall moderated-mediation model (Hypotheses 3a and 3b), we estimated a final model (Model 2) that included the two significant interactions (i.e., perceived climate of self-interest on the relationship between emotional workaholism and moral disengagement and between cognitive workaholism and moral disengagement). Results (see Figure 4) suggests that only the interaction between emotional

TABLE 3 | Study 2: Results of the tested models.

	# parameters	LL	AIC	Δ parameters	Δ (<i>p</i>)	Δ AIC	Interaction term standardized β (<i>p</i>)
Model 0 (baseline model without interaction)	136	−32 230.15	64 732.30	—	—	—	
Model 1 (full mediation without interaction)	128	−32 235.56	64 727.12	—	—	—	
Model 1a (interaction between CW and SI on MD)	129	−32 232.09	64 722.19	1	6.93**	4.93	0.11*
Model 1b (interaction between EW and SI on MD)	129	−32 228.78	64 715.56	1	13.56***	11.56	0.16**
Model 1c (interaction between BW and SI on MD)	129	−32 235.03	64 728.07	1	1.05	−0.95	0.04 (0.35)
Model 1d (interaction between MW and SI on MD)	129	−32 233.79	64 725.58	1	3.53	1.53	0.08 (0.11)
Model 2 (final model including the interactions between EW and SI and between CW and SI on MD)	130	−32 228.76	64 717.52	2	13.60**	9.60	CW $\times$ SI = 0.01 (0.84); EW $\times$ SI = 0.15*

Note: *N* = 1046.

Abbreviations: BW = behavioral workaholism; CW = cognitive workaholism; EW = emotional workaholism; MD = moral disengagement; MW = motivational workaholism; SI = perceived climate of self-interest.

**p* < 0.05.

***p* < 0.01.

****p* < 0.001.

workaholism and moral disengagement remained significant ($\beta = 0.15$, *p* < 0.01). The additional variance explained in moral disengagement by the interaction terms was 4.1%.

The conditional indirect effects are reported in Table 4. Starting from Hypothesis 3a, emotional workaholism at T1 was associated with silence at T3 through moral disengagement at T2 at high levels of perceived climate of self-interest (*indirect effect* = 0.180, 95% CI: 0.049, 0.311) but not at low levels of perceived climate of self-interest (*indirect effect* = 0.033, 95% CI: −0.038, 0.104). The difference between low and high levels of perceived climate of self-interest was significant (*indirect effect* = −0.147, 95% CI: −0.272, −0.022); thus, Hypothesis 3a was supported. In line with Hypothesis 3b, moral voice intention at T3 through moral disengagement at T2 was significant at high levels of perceived climate of self-interest (*indirect effect* = −0.072, 95% CI: −0.136, −0.009) but not at low levels of climate of self-interest (*indirect effect* = −0.013, 95% CI: −0.043, 0.017). The difference between the indirect effects of emotional workaholism on moral voice intention at low and high levels of climate of self-interest was significant (*indirect effect* = 0.059, 95% CI: 0.003, 0.115). All the other relationships estimated in the model were consistent with the baseline model described above^{5,6}

5.3 | Discussion

The results of Study 2 provide further evidence for the time-lagged association between workaholism and both silence and moral voice intention through moral disengagement. Specifically, findings showed that the cognitive and emotional workaholism facets were associated with them. As expected, workload was not associated with moral disengagement. Going beyond Study 1 findings, results supported the moderating role of perceived climate of self-interest: working in a climate of self-interest exacerbates the relationship between workaholism (the cognitive and emotional subscale) and moral disengagement. It also showed the proposed moderated mediation as significant for the interaction of perceived climate of self-interest with the emotional facet of workaholism. Notably, besides the expected positive association between the emotional and cognitive workaholism dimensions with moral disengagement, Study 2 results also revealed a negative link between behavioral workaholism and moral disengagement when all workaholism dimensions were included in the model. Due to the absence of a correlation between moral disengagement and behavioral workaholism (*r* = −0.00) and the considerable correlation among the predictors (i.e., the workaholism dimensions), we interpreted

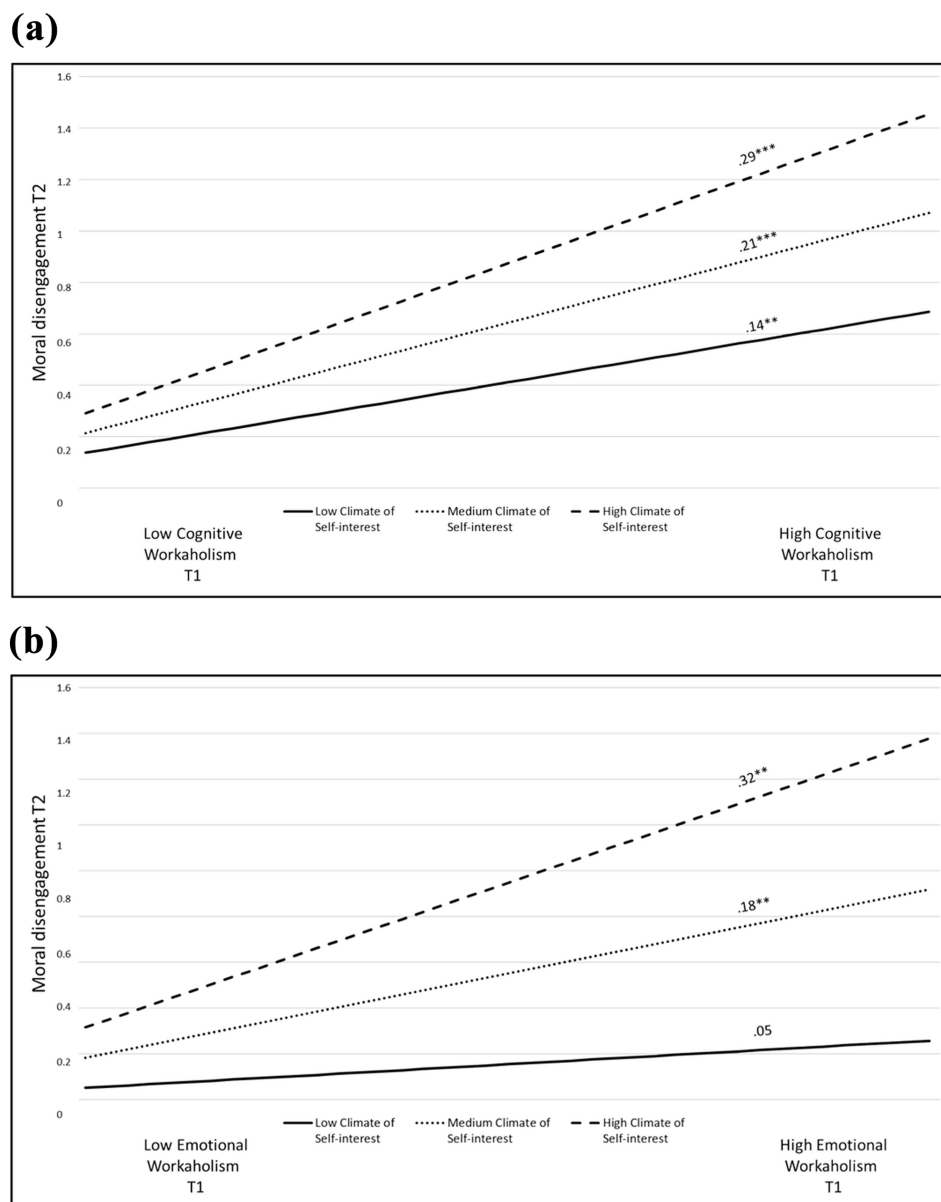


FIGURE 3 | Moderating effects of climate of self-interest. (a) Moderation of perceived climate of self-interest in the relation between cognitive workaholism at T1 and moral disengagement at T2 (Model 1a). Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$. $N = 1046$. Low perceived climate of self-interests = -1 standard deviation; high perceived climate of self-interests = $+1$ standard deviation. (b) Moderation of perceived climate of self-interest in the relation between emotional workaholism at T1 and moral disengagement at T2 (Model 1b). Note: ** $p < 0.01$. $N = 1046$. Low perceived climate of self-interests = -1 standard deviation; high perceived climate of self-interests = $+1$ standard deviation.

this counterintuitive finding with caution as it may be due to a suppressor effect (Cohen et al. 2003; Friedman and Wall 2005; Pedhazur 1997). However, as it may be of interest in terms of a more in-depth understanding of the workaholism dimensions, we elaborate on this finding in Section 7.

6 | General Discussion

Drawing on social-cognitive theory of morality (Bandura 1991, 2016), we proposed and tested joint effects of personal (i.e., workaholism) and social (i.e., climate of self-interest) factors on employee's tendencies to express or withhold concerns that may have ethical implications. Results from two multiwave studies

of Italian and UK employees support the proposed role of disengaged moral self-regulation (Bandura 1991) as a mediator between workaholism and silence and moral voice intention. Also, in line with social-cognitive theory, workaholics were particularly likely to morally disengage when their social context (here: perceived climate of self-interest) supported a narrow work focus neglecting the ethical implications silence and a lack of voice may have. Furthermore, we found that the emotional and cognitive dimensions of workaholism (Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020) are specifically associated with silence and moral voice intention through moral disengagement. The proposed moderated mediation was significant for the interaction of perceived climate of self-interest with the emotional facet of workaholism.

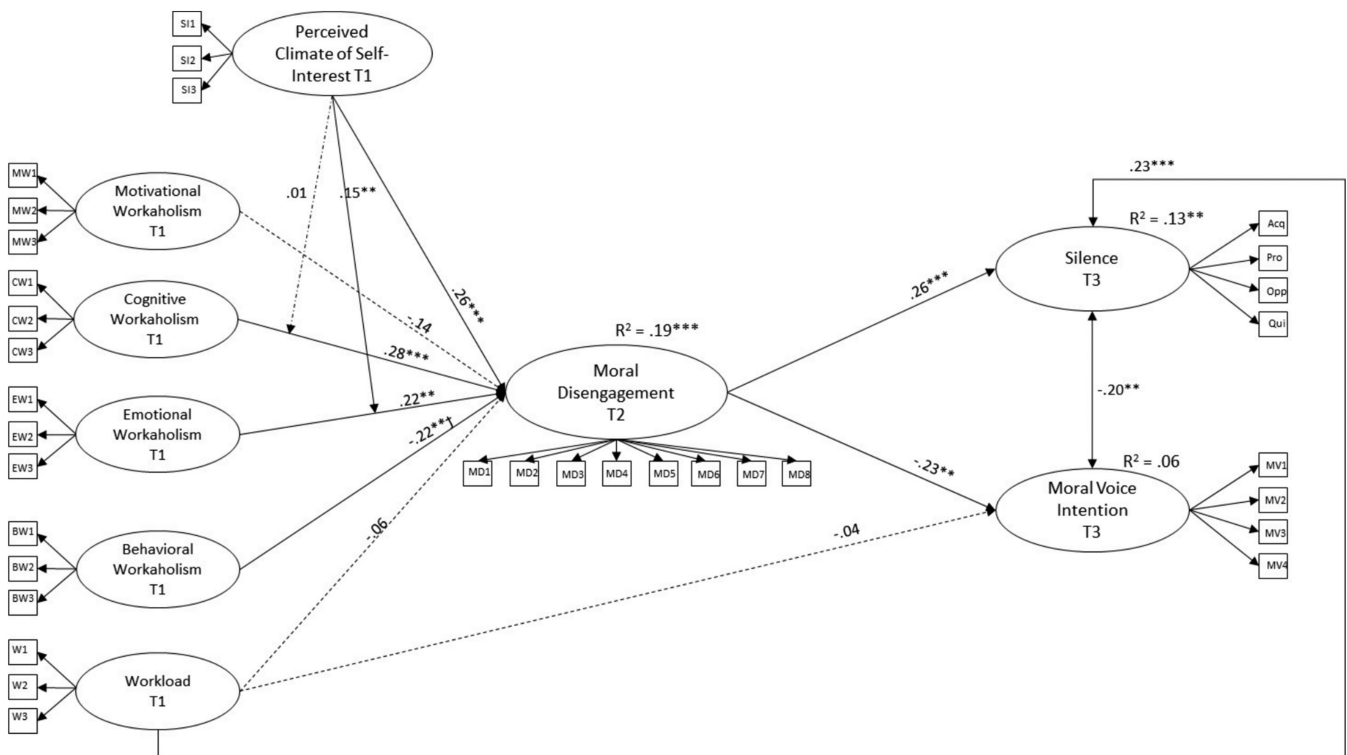


FIGURE 4 | Results of the final moderated-mediation model (Study 2). Note: $N = 1046$. All the factor loadings are significant for $p < 0.001$ ranging from 0.52 (Item 5 of moral disengagement) to 0.95 (quiescent silence). Correlations among workaholism dimensions, workload, and perceived climate of self-interests were all significant and ranged from 0.13 (correlation between motivational workaholism and perceived climate of self-interest, $p < 0.01$) to 0.73 (correlation between motivational and behavioral workaholism, $p < 0.001$); T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3; dotted lines denote non-significant paths; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$. †: possible spurious effect, please see the discussion of the results.

TABLE 4 | Conditional indirect effects of the path from emotional workaholism at T1 to moral voice intention and silence at T3 through moral disengagement at T2.

		Emotional workaholism → moral disengagement → silence			Emotional workaholism → moral disengagement → moral voice intention		
		Unstandardized			Unstandardized		
		beta	95% CI	p	beta	95% CI	p
Perceived climate of self-interest	Low (−1 SD)	0.033	−0.038, 0.104	0.36	−0.013	−0.043, 0.017	0.39
	Medium	0.107	0.022, 0.191	0.01	−0.043	−0.084, −0.002	0.04
	High (+1 SD)	0.180	0.049, 0.311	0.01	−0.072	−0.136, −0.009	0.03

Note: $N = 1046$.

Our research is also relevant in relation with what we did not find. While moral self-(dis)regulation mediated the relation between workaholism and silence and moral voice intention, this relationship was not significant for workload. Moreover, while the emotional and cognitive elements of workaholism had significant positive effects on moral disengagement, the motivational and behavioral components did not. This pattern further supports our reasoning that cognitive and emotional processes that are associated with workaholism—and not the mere behavioral aspect of working extensively—make employees prone to morally disengage.

6.1 | Theoretical Implications

Drawing on social-cognitive theory of morality (Bandura 1991, 2016) and recent research on the motivational foundations of moral behavior (Cornwell and Higgins 2015), we developed a framework for examining employee silence and voice as moral issues (Harlos 2016; Hershcovis et al. 2021). Specifically, we conceptualize employee silence and lacking moral voice as unethical acts of omission (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, and Hepp 2009) that employees are prone to show when their inhibitory and proactive moral self-regulation processes are

disengaged, eventually leading to the behavioral inhibition system being facilitated (silence) and the behavior activation system being subdued (lacking moral voice). Due to its foundation in basic processes of moral motivation and action, our framework can integrate existing research that linked voice or silence to single moral concepts (e.g., moral efficacy, identity, (un)ethical leadership; J. Cheng et al. 2022; He et al. 2019; Lee et al. 2017) and research examining omission in a broader sense (e.g., on bystander effects and third-party responses to unethical events or behaviors, perceived injustice, and safety issues; O'Reilly and Aquino 2011; Skarlicki and Kulik 2004).

In two ways, our research highlights the potential of moral disengagement in further developing the second pathway of unethical organizational behavior—specifically, the reasons why and under which conditions employees omit doing what would be morally right (an area which has received less attention compared to the processes that explain why employees commit unethical acts, e.g., destructive leadership, bullying, and corruption; De Cremer and Moore 2020). First, our finding that moral disengagement is linked to both higher silence and less moral voice intention—both indicators of moral omission—complements prior organizational studies that linked moral disengagement to the commission of unethical acts (e.g., Moore et al. 2012; Paciello et al. 2023; Probst et al. 2020). Second, the (negative) relationship between moral disengagement and moral voice intentions shows that moral disengagement also affects the proactive process of moral self-regulation. While similar effects have been identified in the context of teenagers' reduced propensity to offer help when required (Paciello et al. 2013) and a lower tendency to defend others against bullying (Thornberg and Jungert 2013), we confirm this effect in two empirical studies of employees.

Our consistent finding that workaholism, but not workload (that we included as control variable), was related to moral disengagement suggests that it is workaholics' cognitive and emotional disposition to working, rather than simply the fact that they are working extensively, that makes them more prone to morally disengage. The links between workload and voice/silence can be explained by traditional approaches referring to resource depletion or conservation, exhaustion, or stress (Ng and Feldman 2012). The fact that the direct link between workaholism and moral voice and silence (for silence only in Study 2) disappeared when moral disengagement was included as a mediator, however, strongly supports workaholics' implicit need (and propensity) to engage in moral self-regulation. This argument is further supported by the moderation effects that we found. Working in an environment that justifies a narrow focus on achievement (i.e., perceived climate of self-interest) makes workaholics even more prone to mechanisms of moral disengagement. This, in turn, increases their likelihood of conducting unethical acts of omission without self-condemnation.

Because the mediation and moderation effects were specific to the cognitive and emotional processes associated with workaholism, our research points at the value of looking into the incremental contribution of single dimensions to workaholism's effects (e.g., Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020; Ng and Feldman 2012). While single dimensions are supposed to be insufficient to represent workaholism as a whole (Clark, Smith,

and Haynes 2020; Taris and de Jonge 2024), specifying their specific contributions may sharpen the conceptualization of the workaholism phenomenon (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 2016). The pattern we found in Study 2 resonates with prior studies which found that the cognitive and emotional dimension of workaholism might pair as working compulsively whereas the behavioral and motivational dimension represent working excessively (Di Stefano and Gaudiino 2019). Of interest, in light of the dimensions' relationships with moral disengagement, is that prior research found the cognitive and emotional dimensions to be weakly related (compared to the behavioral and motivational dimensions) to work engagement (Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020) and negatively related to awareness (and to varying degrees, other facets of mindfulness at work; Howard et al. 2022). Although the evidence from existing studies examining dimension-specific effects of workaholism is not strong, and our dimension-specific findings are based on exploratory research, the current picture suggests that it is not working extensively (as previously suggested) that makes workaholics prone to moral disengagement but rather the cognitive and emotional processes associated with workaholism.⁷

6.2 | Practical Implications

Our research indicates that workaholism and moral self-regulation are mechanisms that managers and Human Resource departments could address to reduce silence and increase moral voice. While their direct influence on the personal preconditions of an employee's workaholism may be limited, they can create context conditions that inhibit both the manifestation of workaholism and the workaholism–moral disengagement link.

The closer monitoring of those who excessively ruminate about work, or who indicate that they are anxious and upset when not working (Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020), could identify those who are more susceptible to morally disengage (as our findings regarding the link between workaholism, particularly its emotional and cognitive dimensions, and moral disengagement show). In addition to identifying employees who are prone to workaholism, managers could deploy strategies to prevent its manifestation. These strategies could include establishing explicit and implicit norms and systems that reward effective rather than compulsive working, because the latter potentially primes and reinforces workaholism (Taris and de Jonge 2024). Training and organizational development strategies could offer the means to create efficient work processes and workflow management, reducing the reliance on excessive hours of work to compensate for inefficient processes (Burke 2009).

Our findings regarding the moderating role of perceived climate of self-interest furthermore suggest that shaping work environments can prevent the manifestation of workaholism's negative effects (here: moral disengagement). The role of workaholism on moral disengagement diminished in a context that does not support self-interest (i.e., low perceived self-interest climate; Simha and Cullen 2012). Instead of promoting bottom-line mentality and moral muteness (Bird and Waters 1989) among managers—which appear to be common features in today's workplaces (Greenbaum, Mawritz, and Zaman 2023; Verhezen 2010)—organizations should establish policies and

practices which have been found to reduce tendencies to morally disengage, for example, that recognize and reward moral voice (Huang and Paterson 2017; D. Wang et al. 2015), and develop employees' moral awareness and moral self-efficacy (Butterfield, Treviño, and Weaver 2000; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh 2013; Paciello et al. 2023).

6.3 | Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Consistent findings from both studies suggest that an approach based on moral self-regulation has the potential to complement existing theoretical lenses (e.g., social exchange theory, conservation of resources, concerns of psychological safety, voice instrumentality and engagement) to explain silence and moral voice. While our studies support moral disengagement's value, future research could examine to what extent moral disengagement explains variance in voice and silence when examined jointly with other potential predictors and mediating processes such as exhaustion, resource limitations and psychological safety. Ideally, such research would use longitudinal data to examine alternative explanations. Our studies' potential to examine psychosocial processes and make rigorous claims regarding causality is constrained as our variables were not all measured at each time points.

Longitudinal studies could advance the debate concerning the state- or trait-like nature of moral disengagement. Although Bandura conceptualized moral disengagement as a psychosocial process, some scholars conceived it as a trait, rather than a situationally induced mechanism (Moore 2015; Moore et al. 2012). Research from developmental psychology (e.g., Paciello et al. 2008, 2020) has reconciled these two perspectives by showing that moral disengagement can become crystalized as a habitual way of thinking and shown that moral disengagement tendencies may fluctuate over time. Longitudinal studies conducted over a longer period and with more waves of data would advance understanding the existence of workaholic trajectories and their association with moral disengagement. For some workaholics, moral disengagement may become trait like, especially in contexts that facilitate moral dysregulation.

Longitudinal and (quasi)experimental study designs could also provide the means to test the viability of our suggestions for practical implications. Drawing on ethical climate theory (Victor and Cullen 1988), we suggested that creating a climate in which workaholics have to anticipate social sanctions and other adverse consequences from neglecting ethical issues could enhance their engagement in moral voice. However, given that workaholism is associated with addiction (Clark, Smith, and Haynes 2020; Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman 2007), such social engineering attempts may be overly optimistic. Instead, workaholics may choose an easier way to enhance compatibility between self-standards and social standards: They may move to workplaces where their narrow work focus is supported and so avoid complicated ethical considerations that threaten their need to for control (Schneider 1987). Future research thus could examine whether workaholics are attracted to climates of self-interest, and whether they adapt to a changing work climate

(e.g., an ethical climate that is oriented towards benevolence instead of self-interest) or move to a better fitting organization (Schneider 1987).

Multilevel studies would allow us to examine whether workaholics not only act differently in a particular context but also perceive their work context differently than their coworkers. The substantial correlations between workaholism and climate perceptions that we found (see Table 2) indicate that workaholism may influence perceptions, but because we were reliant on individual-level data, we could not examine this promising avenue to advance understanding of workaholism and its effects. While individual perceptions of workplace climate are the legitimate starting point for climate specification (see James, Joyce, and Slocum 1988), they may be biased as they are the result of social construction which involves person and environmental stimuli (Ostroff, Kinicki, and Tamkins 2003). Examining indices of within-group variation in group-level data could reveal whether workaholics (compared to team members with low workaholism scores) perceive their workplace climate consistent with their disposition.

If team-level data are not available, vignette studies (Aguinis and Bradley 2014) could be used to examine whether higher scores in workaholism and moral disengagement systematically bias perceptions, for example, with regard to how employees perceive their role (e.g., not seeing themselves as responsible to engage in voice), the situation they face (e.g., less likely to notice ethical issues once they occur), and the harm that might be done to the people who are affected by the critical issue that participants did not address (including possible justificatory narratives that morally disengaged individuals might use when omitting to share concerns about misconduct).

Another limitation of our studies is that the situations that we asked participants about did not specify the content of the critical issues and who might be affected by them. Further evidence for our contention would be provided if workaholics were to be found to engage in voice in cases where their own progress was affected and remained silent when it was not. Asking for voice/silence responses to specific situations (e.g., such that give them an advantage vs. such that make it more difficult to fulfill their tasks) would shift the focus from examining whether workaholism is positively related to silence and negatively to voice to whether voice/silence are consistent or interfere with workaholics' approach to working. Further insights could be gained with a more detailed analysis of the motives that workaholics may have for withholding or expressing their views. A limitation of our study is that we assessed differentially motivated silence, but we did not use the same approach for voice intentions. While we related the silence motives to moral disengagement post hoc as additional analyses, a more rigorous test that either assesses motives for silence and voice or both at a behavioral level appears promising.

7 | Conclusion

Neglecting potential for improvement and remaining passive in the face of harm can be costly for organizations and societies (Beamish 2000; Hershcovis et al. 2021; Morrison 2023).

Furthermore, as these withheld ideas and concerns are often only known to the individual employee, such acts of omission are difficult to detect and address (Kelloway and Barling 2000; Mueller 1996). Drawing on Bandura's (1991, 2016) social-cognitive theory of morality, our two studies showed that a contemporary form of individual adaption to modern work demands and affordances—workaholism—can, particularly in a climate of self-interest, lead to moral disengagement. This propensity to morally disengage, in turn, makes workaholic employees refrain from moral interventions that are critical for sustainable organizational and societal development (Morrison and Milliken 2000; Noort, Reader, and Gillespie 2021).

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Endnotes

¹ IPSOS is a multinational market research and consulting firm (<https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk>) similar to Gallup and Nielsen. They conduct national and global level research (e.g., the European Company Survey [ECS] conducted on the behalf of Eurofound, the UK National Student Survey on the behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies—the Department for the Economy [Northern Ireland], the Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales; the GP patient survey run on behalf of NHS England; the research on violence in Italy on behalf of Save the Children).

² To further validate our findings, as additional analysis, we tested an alternative structural model, treating individual silence motives as the dependent variables instead of the composite score. These results are reported in Endnote 4.

³ We did not have theoretical reasons for including further control variables (Bernierth and Aguinis 2016), and meta-analyses do not suggest links between age or gender and silence, voice, or moral disengagement (Chamberlin, Newton, and Lepine 2017; Hao et al. 2022; A. Newman et al. 2020; Ogunfowora et al. 2022). However, following the suggestions of two anonymous reviewers, we performed additional analyses to identify (a) whether there were potential contextual effects and (b) whether working remotely had an influence on silence and moral voice intention. The result of the MANOVA showed that while industry was significant ($F(4, 296) = 5.18, p < 0.001$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.873$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.06$) in relation to both silence and moral voice intention, working remotely was significant ($F(2, 149) = 3.26, p < 0.05$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.958$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$) only in relation to moral voice intention. Post hoc tests with Bonferroni correction revealed that employees in the retail sector reported higher silence and those in the service sector reported higher moral voice intention. In addition, those who worked remotely reported higher moral voice intention. To further corroborate our results of the posited mediational model, we tested it including industry and working remotely as additional control variables. Results of this model were fully consistent with the model without the covariates.

⁴ While we did not expect distinct relationships between moral disengagement and the four differentially motivated silence types, our reviewers suggested that a motives-based analysis might add value. Specifically, it was proposed that relationships between moral disengagement and opportunistic silence should be stronger than relationships with quiescent or prosocial silence. We conducted additional analyses in which all four silence motives were included as dependent variables. Results ($\chi^2(411) = 601.896, p < 0.001$) revealed that moral disengagement was significantly related to all the four silence types (prosocial silence: $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$; acquiescent silence $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$; quiescent silence: $\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$; opportunistic silence $\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$). Although the relationship of opportunistic silence with moral disengagement appears to be larger than the others, the model in which these four paths were constrained to be equal did not change the model fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 2.11, df = 3; p = 0.55$). Thus, any differences in the beta coefficients cannot be treated as substantial.

⁵ As done in Study 1, we explored the potential influence of industry and working remotely on silence and moral voice intention. The results of the MANOVA showed that while industry was not significant ($F(4, 576) = 1.96, p = 0.099$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.973$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$), working remotely was significant ($F(2, 289) = 8.99, p < 0.001$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.941$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.06$) only for moral voice intention (higher levels for those who worked remotely). Results of the posited moderated-mediation model, including working remotely (no, yes) as additional control variable, supported the results without this control variable: Cognitive workaholism ($0.28, p < 0.001$), emotional workaholism ($0.22, p < 0.001$), and perceived climate of self-interest ($0.26, p < 0.001$) were significantly associated with moral disengagement, which in turn was associated with silence ($0.26, p < 0.001$) and moral voice intention ($-0.20, p < 0.01$). Workload was associated with silence ($0.23, p < 0.001$). Finally, perceived climate of self-interest moderated the association between emotional workaholism and moral disengagement ($0.15, p < 0.01$).

⁶ As done in Study 1, we explored potentially distinct relationships between moral disengagement and the four differentially motivated silence types. Results ($\chi^2(778) = 1166.39, p < 0.001$) revealed that moral disengagement was significantly related to all the four silence types (prosocial silence: $\beta = 0.15, p < 0.05$; acquiescent silence $\beta = 0.20, p < 0.001$; quiescent silence: $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$; opportunistic silence $\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$). As in the case of Study 1, constraint analyses revealed that fixing these paths to be equal did not change the model fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 7.47, df = 3; p = 0.06$). Thus, any differences in the beta coefficients cannot be treated as substantial.

⁷ Notably, the behavioral dimension of workaholism was not correlated to moral disengagement but was negatively related to it in our SEM analysis. Based on recommendations from the psychometrics literature, we interpret this as a suppression effect (Cohen et al. 2003). A suppression effect can happen when one predictor eliminates irrelevant variance from the criterion, causing the beta coefficient of another predictor to become larger than the simple correlation between that predictor and the criterion (Nickerson 2008; Paulhus et al. 2004). In the current case, because the behavioral dimension was not significantly correlated with the criterion variable (i.e., moral disengagement), but showed high positive correlations with the other predictors included in the SEM analysis (i.e., the other workaholism dimensions and workload), it is possible that these predictors removed irrelevant variance in the criterion which, in turn, inflated the amount of variance explained by the behavioral dimension. Previous studies using the same workaholism dimensional approach showed similar, unexpected results in some cases. For example, in Clark, Smith, and Haynes (2020), the motivational dimension was not associated with emotional exhaustion and depression symptoms in bivariate correlations but negatively associated with them in the hierarchical regression analyses (after controlling for working excessively and compulsively). If one would want to interpret the findings irrespective of the strong indicators of a suppressor effect, one might draw upon suggestions that the

behavioral component of workaholism potentially reflects a deep commitment to professional or personal goals (see Di Stefano and Gaudiino 2019), which may serve as a buffer against moral disengagement. Thus, individuals who score high on the behavioral dimension of workaholism may find it harder to justify unethical behavior, as it could compromise the dedication they put into work, or damage professional reputations.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.