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The Effects of Personality on Workplace Bullying

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Abstract

Bullying in the workplace is an issue that has received very little attention from researchers; however, the limited research that does exist clearly indicates that the phenomenon can have detrimental effects on an organization. Moreover, research examining how personality is related to bullying has focused only on the personality of the target and not the instigator. The aim of this study was to examine instigators of workplace bullying to determine whether there was a relationship between personality factors according to the Big Five and the incidence of bullying. The sample consisted of 129 individuals who completed an online survey via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Data was analyzed using a Pearson Product Moment correlation to determine the relationship between bullying and personality. The results of this study provided support for all hypotheses. It was found that conscientiousness had a negative relationship with bullying. Agreeableness was determined to be negatively related to bullying as well. Lastly, neuroticism was determined to have a positive relationship with bullying. These results have many implications, the most important of which may be that they provide support for using personality assessments as part of a screening procedure for organizations so that workplace bullying can be effectively eradicated, or at least severely limited.

Chapter 1

Review of Literature

It is likely that many people were subject to or witnessed bullying during their time in high school. Unfortunately, research on the incidence of bullying within the workplace has demonstrated that the behavior does not simply disappear when one leaves high school. Indeed, Glomb and Liao (2003) report that accumulating data indicates an increased prevalence of bullying within the work context. They explain that an increasing number of employees report being subject to mild forms of aggression, such as being talked about behind their backs.

With an increased prevalence of bullying in the workplace (Glomb & Liao, 2003), understanding this phenomenon is important. Although research has examined the personality of those who have been the target of workplace bullying (Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007), there has been little investigation into the personality of the perpetrators. Understanding the personality of both targets and instigators is crucial as these facets of workplace bullying may prove to have some predictive ability which would aid in understanding its occurrence. As research has found certain personality characteristics possessed by targets of workplace bullying (Glaso et al., 2007), this study seeks to determine whether the perpetrators of workplace bullying possess unique personality characteristics as well.

Workplace Bullying

Over the past several years, research has slowly come to identify workplace bullying as an increasingly potent threat to organizations (Berthelsen, Skogstad, Lau, & Einarsen, 2011; Privitera & Campbell, 2009) that needs to be confronted and, as a result, efforts have been taken to explicitly describe the phenomenon. Workplace bullying was defined by Vartia (2001) as “situations in which someone is subjected to long-lasting, recurrent, and serious negative or hostile acts and behaviors that are annoying and oppressing” (p. 63). Also critical to the definition, Vartia notes that the targets of bullies become unable to defend themselves against the attacks. Unfortunately, the definition of what qualifies as bullying in the workplace has not yet achieved standardization in the I-O literature and, therefore, has tended to be broad; however, it is worth noting that Vartia’s definition of workplace bullying is very similar to how bullying in schools has been defined (Berger, 2007). Zapf and Einarsen (2001) assert that while open verbal and physical attacks are certainly forms of bullying, bullies may utilize a more subtle approach, such as spreading gossip about a coworker. They also state that the most common forms of organizational bullying are isolating an individual, criticizing one’s work, insulting the individual, and teasing and ridiculing an individual. Zapf and Gross (2001) asserted that to be considered bullying, these acts of aggression must persist for at least six months. Another issue with the literature is a lack of standardized terminology. Research uses both the term “target” and “victim.” For this research, the choice has been made to use the term “target” as the term “victim” may have a disempowering connotation.

Similar to the challenge of defining bullying, Hershcovis (2011) notes that the measurement of aggression in the workplace has been difficult. In her research, Hershcovis asserts that the way in which we assess the various forms of workplace aggression result in significant overlap between the constructs. She identifies five constructs relating to aggression in the workplace, including: *social undermining*, which refers to the attempt to hinder a target's ability to maintain positive relationships at work; *incivility*, which refers to deviant acts that are low in intensity with an ambiguous intent to harm; *bullying*, which refers to consistent exposure to negative acts over a long period of time; *abusive supervision*, which refers to persistent hostility from a supervisor; and *interpersonal conflict*, which refers to stressors within the organization resulting from conflict between employees. In her meta-analysis, Hershcovis compares these constructs across five characteristics, which include intensity, frequency, intent (to harm), affected outcomes, and perpetrator power/position. The meta-analysis revealed that there is indeed significant overlap between the five constructs. Although the constructs are conceptually different, Hershcovis explained that the manner in which these constructs have been assessed does not adequately evaluate the five characteristics on which they are expected to differ, inhibiting researchers from drawing conclusions on how the distinctions actually affect the targets.

Despite this construct overlap, Glomb and Liao (2003) declare that reports of workplace bullying have been on the rise; however, a majority of the research has been conducted in Scandinavian countries and may not be generalizable to the United States. For instance, Ortega, Hogh, Pejtersen, and Olsen (2009) investigated the incidence of bullying in the workplace in Denmark and found that 8.3% of all respondents had been

bullied over the previous year. Specifically, 1.6% were subject to daily or weekly bullying, and 6.2% reported experiencing bullying “now & then.” Intriguingly, Ortega et al. asserted that bullying prevalence had previously been found to be comparatively lower in Scandinavian countries than in the U.S., though reasoning for this finding is not offered.

Indeed, of the very few studies investigating workplace bullying in the United States, research by Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts (2007) seems to confirm the assertion by Ortega et al. (2009) that prevalence of bullying in the United States is higher than in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark. In their assessment of the incidence of workplace bullying, Lutgen-Sandvik et al. had participants report how often they were subject to a list of negative acts. They found that 28% of the U.S. respondents indicated they had been subject to at least two negative acts per week for at least six months. When the threshold to qualify as bullying was lowered to only a single negative act per week for six months, the prevalence of workplace bullying for U.S. respondents increased to 46.8%, which is markedly higher than the 8.3% in Denmark who reported that they were bullied “daily to weekly” over the previous year (Ortega et al., 2008).

Yet other research seems to suggest that incidence of workplace bullying may not depend on geographic location. Rather it may depend upon the way in which the event is measured. Agervold (2007) asserted that the prevalence of bullying may be misrepresented as a result of how the phenomenon has been measured, such as the use of self-report questionnaires. In his study, participants first responded to a quasi-objective 10 item checklist asking if they had been subject to at least one negative act. The participants were defined as victims of bullying if they reported that they were subject to

negative acts either “daily,” or “2-3 times a week” during the past six months.

Participants next answered a subjective single item asking if they felt that they had been exposed to bullying in the past six months. Finally, participants were asked to indicate whether they had seen others bullied in the workplace. When responding to the single item asking if employees felt that they had been bullied, only 1.0% reported they had been bullied at least 2-3 times per week. When responding to the item assessing others witnessed being bullied, only 3.3% of the total sample indicated they had witnessed others being bullied at least a few times per week. However, according to the 10 item questionnaire measuring acts of aggression, 4.7% of the sample could “be defined as victims of bullying on the basis of the prevalence of at least one act of bullying” (p. 168). Moreover, Agervold asserted that simply changing the scale from “weekly” to “2-3 times a month” caused the prevalence of bullying to increase to 3.7% and 26.9%. Hence, Agervold effectively demonstrated that conclusions regarding the prevalence of bullying in the workplace can be affected by how the construct is measured.

Effects of Workplace Bullying. The effects of bullying in the workplace have been well documented and are certainly cause for concern as these can prove to be detrimental to an organization at both the individual and system level. First, Berthelsen et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study on how exposure to workplace bullying affects a target’s intent to leave an organization. Respondents were assessed twice, with two years between each assessment. Berthelsen et al. found that respondents who indicated they been subject to “some negative encounters,” as well as those who were subject to a high level of bullying reported a higher intention to leave their organization at time 1 and at time 2 compared to those who reported that they had not been bullied. The authors also

found that individuals who reported being exposed to bullying at time 1 had a significantly higher chance of indicating they had changed employers at time 2 compared to those who were not exposed to bullying.

In addition to intent to leave, Berthelsen et al. (2011) also investigated the relationship between workplace bullying and sick leave. The authors uncovered a systematic relationship between a high level of exposure to bullying at time 1 and sick leave at time 2, indicating that those who reported being exposed to bullying at work had a significantly higher chance of reporting to be on sick leave than those who were not exposed to bullying. Furthermore, Berthelsen et al. found that self-labeled victims of workplace bullying at time 1 were significantly more likely to be on disability or on rehabilitation pension at time 2 as opposed to non-victims.

Furthermore, Tehrani (2003) conducted a study examining the relationship between workplace bullying and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Tehrani defined PTSD as an anxiety disorder characterized by high levels of arousal and flashbacks to a traumatic event when in the presence of a reminder of a traumatic situation. In a study consisting of 67 targets of bullying, Tehrani found that 44% were experiencing a diagnosable level of PTSD, according to a post traumatic stress questionnaire, in which individuals exhibited increased levels of arousal and re-experience simply from being in an environment where they were bullied, suggesting that workplace bullying may in fact lead targets to experience PTSD.

Research has also shown that bullying leads to negative effects on physical and emotional health. Specifically, Kivimaki, Virtanen, Vartia, Elovainio, Vahtera, and Keltikangas-Jarvinen (2003) found a clear cumulative relationship between bullying and

depression. The longer an individual was exposed to bullying in the workplace the higher his or her risk of developing depression. In addition to adverse effects on mental health, Kivimaki et al. also found that prolonged exposure to workplace bullying was associated with an increased risk in developing cardiovascular disease.

Hauge, Skogstad, and Einarsen (2010) investigated the effects workplace bullying had on employee health and found bullying to have a moderately strong correlation with anxiety, which is similar to the findings by Tehrani (2003) regarding PTSD. In addition, the authors also found a moderately strong correlation between workplace bullying and depression, which corroborates findings by Kivimaki et al. (2003).

Finally, Vie, Glaso, and Einarsen (2010) also examined the relationship between workplace bullying and target health. Their study concluded that workplace bullying can increase an employee's level of distress, leading to increased psychological strain. This finding was supported by previous research by Lee and Brotheridge (2006) who found that workplace bullying can increase a target's self-doubt. Lee and Brotheridge go on to claim that increased self-doubt leads to increased psychological strain, which in turn increases the manifestation of ill-health symptoms and decreases emotional well-being.

In addition to the negative effects of being a target of workplace bullying, research suggests that simply witnessing bullying may also have adverse impacts on organizations. Privitera and Campbell (2009) asserted that research has demonstrated that the mere existence of any form of bullying in the workplace can lower employee morale, job satisfaction, reduce commitment, and lead to a breakdown of interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

With a plethora of research demonstrating the negative outcomes of bullying in the workplace, the issue is certainly worthy of a closer examination by researchers in the field. The identification of potential antecedents could prove invaluable as they may allow organizations to prevent bullying, effectively circumventing the aforementioned detrimental effects. Research has suggested that one potential contributor to the occurrence of bullying in the workplace is personality (Glaser et al., 2007; Mathisen, Einarsen, & Mykletun, 2011).

Personality

Merriam-Webster (2012) defines personality as "the totality of an individual's behavioral and emotional characteristics." Moreover, according to Jensen-Campbell, Knack, Waldrip, and Campbell (2007), personality influences the way in which individuals interact with one another. Jensen-Campbell et al.'s findings regarding personality were based on the Five Factor Model. This approach to assessing personality typically consists of an inventory of traits which individuals mark as characteristic or uncharacteristic of themselves. In their research, McCrae and Costa (1987) demonstrated the validity of the Five Factor Model, reinforcing its utility in personality research and assessment. They describe these five factors as extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. Extraversion refers to an individual's sociability, such as how comfortable they are with striking up a conversation in an unfamiliar social group. Those scoring high on extraversion likely have little difficulty engaging in new activities or talking to strangers. Agreeableness refers to an individual's likability, or how easily he or she can get along with others. Persons scoring high on agreeableness are unlikely to be abrasive and are likely to be very courteous. Neuroticism

(referred to as “emotional stability” by Glaso et al., 2011) refers to how relaxed and emotionally stable an individual is. A person scoring high on a scale of may exhibit a high level of stress and anxiety. Openness to experience (“openness”) refers to how likely an individual is to have broad interests and a willingness to seek new experiences. Those scoring high on openness are likely unhappy with repetitive experiences and seek to try new things, such as new restaurants. Lastly, Conscientiousness refers to an individual’s level of self-control. People scoring high on conscientiousness are likely diligent and timely in their tasks, and take on a high level of responsibility in all engagements.

Target Personality. A majority of research regarding the relation between workplace bullying and personality has examined the personality of targets, rather than bullies. For example, Glaso et al. (2007) conducted research examining the personality differences between targets of workplace bullying and non-bullied individuals to see if there was such a thing as a general personality profile for targets that made them particularly susceptible to bullying. They drew upon existing literature which had found targets of workplace bullying to be neurotic, have low self-esteem, and have high conscientiousness. The authors recruited two separate samples in two phases. First, they recruited 221 members of two Norwegian support associations that were against workplace bullying as participants, having them self-report exposure to negative acts. Two years later, 96 individuals from multiple groups of mature part-time students were recruited from various locations in Norway. This sample was used as a non-bullied control group, and, according to demographic variables, these individuals were matched with the bullied sample. Glaso et al. (2007) found significant differences between targets of workplace bullying and non-targets on four of the five personality dimensions.

Individuals who were targets of workplace bullying scored significantly higher on neuroticism than non-targets, and significantly lower on conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness than non-targets.

Research by Bowling, Beehr, Bennett, and Watson (2010) corroborates some of the findings by Glaso et al. (2007), indicating that personality plays a role in the incidence of bullying in the workplace. The authors examined the role of negative affectivity and how it relates to interpersonal aggression. According to Bowling et al. (2010), negative affectivity refers to an individual's disposition of subjective distress, and is very similar to neuroticism. Bowling et al. also found negative affectivity to be positively related to victimization in interpersonal conflicts, lending credibility to the notion that personality plays an important role in the occurrence of workplace bullying.

Furthermore, Milam, Spitzmueller, and Penney (2009), investigated the role that targets' personality plays in conjunction with acts of incivility and found that individuals who were low on agreeableness tended to report more incivility. This is likely because those who are low on agreeableness tend to exhibit unfriendly behaviors, suggesting that coworkers may retaliate against these behaviors with actions and behaviors that fall in the category of incivility. Of course, this could potentially lead to bullying as a tit for tat spiral could quickly escalate to more overt actions over an extended period of time.

Perpetrator Personality. These findings of personality characteristics that tend to be indicative of targets of bullying raise the question of whether perpetrators of bullying also possess unique personality characteristics. Though the examination of the personality characteristics of those who engage in bullying in the workplace strictly by use of self-reports has not yet been done, there are studies that serve as forerunners for

the current investigation. Mathisen et al. (2011) conducted a study investigating the personality of supervisors who engaged in workplace bullying. In their study, supervisors were given a personality assessment that measured their personalities on the Big Five dimensions. The subordinates of these supervisors were given a self-report measure in which they indicated the frequency with which they were exposed to a variety of negative acts carried out by their supervisors. The authors then investigated the relationship between subordinate's reports of being subjected to negative acts and their supervisor's personality. Mathisen et al. found that, among supervisors, conscientiousness had a significant negative relationship with bullying. Neuroticism in supervisors was also found to have a significant positive correlation with bullying when conscientiousness was low. These findings indicate that careless and shoddy (i.e., low conscientiousness), as well as vulnerable and anxious (i.e., highly neurotic) supervisors, tend to engage in more bullying type behaviors in the workplace. Furthermore, Mathisen et al. found an interaction between agreeableness and stress. While supervisors under high levels of stress were more likely to bully than those under low levels of stress regardless of agreeableness, the authors report that supervisors who were identified as low on the personality dimension of agreeableness and had low levels of stress were more likely to bully than those who had low levels of stress and were high on agreeableness. This was rationalized by the assertion that leaders who are under high levels of stress were likely to engage in bullying; however, only those who have an unfriendly disposition (i.e., low agreeableness) are likely to engage in bullying in low stress situations.

As previously stated, there is a lack of research on the topic of the personality of workplace bullies; however, there is research available on this topic in schools. Tani,

Greenman, Schneider, and Fregoso (2003) conducted an investigation into the personality of children who participated in bullying at school. The authors found emotional instability (neuroticism) to be one of the strongest correlates of bullying behaviors. In addition, the authors found agreeableness to have an inverse relationship with engagement in bullying behaviors. Also, it was uncovered that bullies tended to score higher on the dimension of extraversion.

Lastly, Jensen-Campbell et al. (2007) investigated the relationship between the five personality factors and the regulation of anger and aggression in schools. Their study supported aspects of the research by Tani et al. (2003) in that conscientiousness moderated the link between anger and aggression, meaning that individuals who were low on the dimension of conscientiousness were more likely to engage in aggression when they became angry than those high on conscientiousness, which again suggests that this facet of personality may be related to instigated bullying.

Although not explicitly workplace bullying, Blau and Andersson (2005) conducted research investigating instigated incivility in the workplace. Andersson and Pearson (1999) described workplace incivility as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (p. 457). Essentially, uncivil behaviors refer to actions that are rude and show a lack of respect. Though these behaviors may not be explicitly labeled “bullying,” they are very closely related, and one could argue that these behaviors, over time, could constitute bullying (Hershcovis, 2011). In their study, Blau and Andersson asked participants to respond to a measure asking how often they had engaged in various uncivil behaviors, such as making “demeaning, rude or derogatory remarks about someone,” using a four point scale with 1

meaning *hardly ever*, and 4 meaning *frequently*. Interestingly, participants who responded to each of these items willingly revealed how often they engaged in these negative behaviors. This study indicates the utility of using self reports to assess the frequency with which one engages in workplace incivility, and, by extension, the appropriateness of using self-reports to measure workplace bullying.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a deficiency of research regarding the personality of the perpetrators of workplace bullying. A high reported prevalence of bullying in U.S. workplaces (Lutgen-Sandvick et al., 2007), in light of the negative consequences of its occurrence, such as turnover and use of sick time (Berthelsen et al., 2011; Hauge et al., 2010; Kivimaki et al., 2003; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Tehrani, 2003; Vie et al., 2010), warrant further investigation into the phenomenon as an increased understanding will better prepare organizations to deal with the problem. This study aims to utilize personality inventories, as well as self-report measures to assess workplace bullying, so that an investigation into the personality of workplace bullies may be conducted.

Chapter II

Rationale and Hypotheses

As explicated in the literature, workplace bullying can be a serious problem both at the organizational and individual level. Being a target of bullying at work was shown to increase an employee's intent to leave an organization (Berthelsen et al., 2011). Research also indicated that simply witnessing bullying in the workplace can decrease employee satisfaction, morale, commitment, and dissolve teams (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). Furthermore, the literature has decisively shown that workplace bullying can lead to a plethora of adverse effects on the health of the targets, such as PTSD (Fehrani, 2003), depression, cardiovascular disease (Kivimaki et al., 2003), increased anxiety (Huage et al., 2010), and psychological distress (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006).

The limited research on the personality of workplace bullies indicates that they exhibit unique personality characteristics. Through questionnaires administered to both supervisors and subordinates, Mathisen et al. (2011) found that supervisors who engage in bullying behavior tended to score low on the personality dimension of conscientiousness and high on the dimension of neuroticism. These researchers also found that, under low levels of stress, agreeableness was negatively correlated with bullying.

Furthermore, Tani et al. (2003) found that neuroticism was one of the strongest correlates of bullying for children who engaged in bullying behavior at school. These

researchers also found agreeableness to be negatively related to bullying. In addition, research by Jensen-Campbell et al. (2007) found that individuals who scored low on the dimension of conscientiousness were more likely to engage in aggression, lending credibility to the claim that conscientiousness is strongly correlated to engagement in bullying.

Consequently, based on the current research regarding bullying, the following were hypothesized:

H1: There will be a significant negative relationship between participants' engagement in bullying and the personality dimension of conscientiousness.

H2: There will be a significant negative relationship between participants' engagement in bullying and the personality dimension of agreeableness.

H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between participants' engagement in bullying and the personality dimension of neuroticism.

Chapter III

Methods

Participants

This study consisted of a sample of 129 individuals (63 males, 64 females, and 2 who chose not to respond) who worked in an organization for at least six months. The sample was not industry or organization specific as the survey was open to participants from any organization; however, the sample was limited to US residents only. Participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and the survey data was collected via SurveyGizmo to ensure anonymity. According to Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011), MTurk samples are significantly more diverse than college samples, potentially increasing the generalizability of the research findings. Furthermore, the authors report that data collected from the site are at least as reliable as data collected using traditional methods. Also, in the interest of anonymity, participants were prompted to enter a worker identification number at the beginning of the survey, and then entered this number at the end to receive payment.

Measures

International Personality Item Pool. The first measure this study utilized was the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; see Appendix A). This measure determines an individual's personality by assessing his/her score on five dimensions. These include extraversion (which refers to sociability), agreeableness (which refers to the extent to

which an individual is likeable and diplomatic), emotional stability (which refers to how relaxed and stable one is; the opposite of which is also known as neuroticism), intellect (which refers to creativity; otherwise known as openness), and conscientiousness (which refers to how organized and dependable an individual is; Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007). The measure consisted of 50 statements to which participants responded using a five-point scale, ranging from 1 to 5, with 10 items assessing each personality dimension. This study found the coefficient alpha for each of the personality dimensions in this measure to be: Extraversion ($\alpha = 0.93$), Agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.75$), Emotional Stability ($\alpha = 0.92$), Intellect ($\alpha = 0.84$), and Conscientiousness ($\alpha = 0.88$; see Table 1).

Lim and Ployhart (2006) compared the IPIP to the NEO-FFI, a well established measure of personality. Their findings showed evidence of both convergent and discriminant validity for the IPIP scales with the NEO-FFI. Furthermore, the authors examined descriptive analytics for the IPIP and found the alpha coefficients to range from .74 to .90, with a mean of .82, which was in line with Glaso et al.'s (2007) findings.

Negative Acts Questionnaire - Revised. The second measure utilized in this study was the Negative Acts Questionnaire - Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; see Appendix A), which is a revised edition of one of the most widely used measures in research investigating workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). The NAQ-R is a 22 item self-report measure which assesses the frequency that an individual experiences bullying behaviors. Items in the scale are written in behavioral terms which make no reference to the term "bullying." In this study, however, the language of the NAQ-R was modified to assess how frequently an individual engages in negative acts, as opposed to how often one is the target of these acts. For example, one

item asked participants how frequently they engaged in “spreading gossip and rumors about others.” This method of modifying the language of the scale has been utilized by Blau and Andersson in their research on workplace incivility (2005), in which they used the same items to measure incivility, but changed the respondents’ perspective from a target to an instigator when assessing workplace incivility. Hence, the measure was used in the study to assess participants’ engagement in bullying behaviors. It employed a five point frequency scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). This study found the measure to have strong reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .96.

Social Desirability Scale-17. The third and final measure used in this study was the Social Desirability Scale-17 (SDS-17; Stober, 2001), which is an assessment used to determine whether a participant may purposely respond to questions in a way that would depict him or her in a favorable manner (see Appendix A). This enabled this study to detect whether there are any individuals who gave socially favorable responses on the NAQ-R, as opposed to giving honest responses. The SDS-17 consisted of 17 true or false responses. For example, one item presented to participants was “I sometimes litter.” This study found the scale to have good reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82. It was also found to have a 0.82 test-retest correlation by Stober (2001). Furthermore, Stober found the SDS-17 to have a correlation of 0.74 with the well-known Marlowe-Crowne Scale (1960), indicating considerable convergent validity. However, Stober’s updated items received significantly higher ratings on a scale of social desirability than items in the Marlowe-Crowne Scale. There was an effect size of $d = 0.64$ found between the scales, suggesting that the SDS-17 is a valid alternative measurement of social desirability.

Procedure

Approval for this study was acquired by submitting this research study to Xavier University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B). Data for this research was collected online through MTurk and SurveyGizmo. The average time it took to complete this survey was approximately 10 minutes. In an attempt to prevent the purpose of this research from affecting participant responses, the intent of this study was not fully disclosed to subjects and there was no mention of bullying. Rather, respondents were given an informed consent form (Appendix C) telling them only that they were partaking in a study on attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. Participants were informed that they could choose not to answer any question, and that they could quit the study at any time; however, participants only received compensation if they completed the entire survey and answered every question. Furthermore, the survey included three quality checks to ensure that the participants were paying attention to and reading all of the survey items. These appeared as part of the assessments, but were not actually scored. The quality checks simply instructed the user to answer the question in a specific way, such as "The correct answer to this question is '1.' Please select '1.'" In addition to completing the survey, the participant was required to pass these quality checks to receive compensation. After participants completed and submitted all assessments they received a more in-depth description of the intent of the study, and were thanked for their participation (see Appendix D). Participants also received a monetary compensation of twenty-five cents. This compensation was appropriate as Buhrmester et al. (2011) report that users of MTurk are typically awarded "nickels and dimes for 5-10 minute tasks" (p. 3). Participant protection was ensured by keeping individual data and information

completely confidential. Furthermore, by asking a limited number of demographic questions, it was nearly impossible to trace responses back to participants.

Chapter IV

Results

The hypotheses were tested by analyzing the data using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation (see Table 1). Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be a negative relationship between engagement in bullying and conscientiousness. Indeed, a negative correlation was found between the participants' engagement in bullying and conscientiousness, $r(124) = -.38, p < .001$, thus supporting *H1*. Likewise, *H2*, which posited that engagement in bullying would be negatively related to agreeableness, was also supported, as the relationship between engagement in bullying and agreeableness was significant and negative, $r(124) = -.41, p < .001$. Lastly, it was revealed that neuroticism was significantly and positively correlated with engagement in bullying, $r(124) = .28, p = .002$, supporting *H3*.

Next, bullying was correlated with social desirability in order to determine if social desirability may have influenced the results. Indeed, the two measures were found to be significantly correlated, $r(124) = -.22, p = .01$. In order to determine how this may have influenced the results, the analyses were computed a second time with a partial correlation, controlling for the social desirability. The correlations were slightly decreased; however, their significance was maintained. Still in support of *H1*, the partial correlation between engagement in bullying and conscientiousness was significant and negative, $r(124) = -.33, p < .001$. The partial correlation between engagement in bullying

Table 1

Personality and Bullying Correlations.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Bullying	30.55	12.30	(.96)						
2. Conscientiousness	37.94	7.83	-.38†	(.88)					
3. Agreeableness	37.25	5.99	-.40†	.32†	(.72)				
4. Neuroticism	25.98	9.47	.27**	-.26**	-.22**	(.92)			
5. Extraversion	29.02	9.96	.04	.17	.29**	-.34†	(.93)		
6. Openness	39.19	6.25	-.22*	.31†	.33†	-.35†	.33†	(.84)	
7. Social Desirability	8.98	4.00	-.21*	.39†	.31†	-.41†	.12	.04	(.82)

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

† Correlation is significant at the .001 level.

and agreeableness was also significant and negative, $r(124) = -.37, p < .001$, supporting *H2*. Finally, support for *H3* was maintained as the partial correlation between engagement in bullying and neuroticism was significant, $r(121) = .21, p = .02$.

Supplemental Analyses

An interesting question may be to ask whether there was a significant difference in scores on the personality constructs of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism between those who scored above the median and those who scored below the median score on the construct of bullying. In order to address this inquiry, a median split was conducted on bullying scores, creating a high scoring group (high bullying) and low scoring group (low bullying). A *t* test was used to examine the difference between each factors' two groups. The analysis found a statistically significant difference between the scores of the high bullying ($M = 36.23, SD = 8.14$) and low bullying ($M = 39.97, SD = 6.99$) groups on conscientiousness ($r = .25$), $t(127) = -2.77, p = .006$, indicating that those engaging in more bullying had lower conscientiousness scores. The analysis also found a significant difference between high bullying ($M = 35.36, SD = 5.67$) and low bullying ($M = 39.49, SD = 5.62$) group scores on agreeableness, $t(127) = -4.14, p < .001$, again indicating that those engaging in more bullying had lower agreeableness scores. Finally, a significant difference was found between high bullying ($M = 28.16, SD = 8.97$) and low bullying ($M = 23.41, SD = 9.47$) group scores on neuroticism ($r = -.24$), $t(127) = 2.92, p = .004$, revealing that those with participating in high bullying had higher neuroticism scores.

An analysis was also conducted to determine, based on the median split, whether there was a difference on bully scores between the high and low scoring groups. Indeed, a

t test revealed that there was a significant difference between the high bullying ($M = 36.59$, $SD = 13.79$) and low bullying ($M = 23.00$, $SD = 1.07$) group scores, $t(124) = 7.35$, $p < .001$.

In addition to analyzing bullying data with a median split, the data was also split into thirds, creating a high bullying, medium bullying, and low bullying group. Using these three levels, an ANOVA was conducted to evaluate differences between the groups on conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Significant differences were found within conscientiousness ($\eta^2 = .06$), $F(2, 128) = 8.51$, $p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons revealed a significant difference between the high bullying ($M = 34.27$, $SD = 8.33$) and medium bullying ($M = 39.23$, $SD = 7.07$) groups ($p = .005$) and between the high bullying and low bullying ($M = 40.58$, $SD = 6.64$) groups ($p = .001$), but not between the middle and low scoring group ($p = .68$). Significant differences were also found between the groups on agreeableness ($\eta^2 = .12$), $F(2, 128) = 12.34$, $p < .001$, with pairwise comparisons demonstrating significant differences between high bullying ($M = 34.48$, $SD = 6.08$) and low bullying ($M = 40.55$, $SD = 5.63$) groups ($p < .001$) and the medium bullying ($M = 37.17$, $SD = 4.85$) and low bullying groups ($p = .016$), but not between the high bullying and medium bullying groups ($p = .056$). Finally, the ANOVA was significant for neuroticism ($\eta^2 = .06$), $F(2, 128) = 8.83$, $p < .001$. Follow up pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between the high bullying ($M = 30.04$, $SD = 8.49$) and medium bullying ($M = 25.59$, $SD = 8.79$) groups ($p = .05$) and the high bullying and low bullying ($M = 21.76$, $SD = 9.59$) groups ($p < .001$), but not between the medium bullying and low bullying groups ($p = .125$).

Similar to what was done before, an analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a difference on bullying scores between the high, medium, and low scoring groups. Again, statistically significant differences were found, $F(2, 125), p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons revealed a significant difference between the high bullying ($M = 42.34, SD = 14.61$) and medium bullying ($M = 25.84, SD = 1.39$) groups ($p < .001$). A significant difference was also found between the high bullying and low bullying ($M = 22.34, SD = .48$) groups ($p < .001$).

Furthermore, an additional analysis was conducted to determine whether there was an interaction effect between neuroticism and conscientiousness on bullying. The analysis failed to find any interaction effect between the two factors indicating that neuroticism is related to bullying regardless of conscientiousness, $\Delta R^2 = .00$.

Chapter V

Discussion

Bullying in the workplace is a serious issue that has not yet received adequate attention. The detrimental effects of this behavior to organizations have been explicated in this paper and should serve as a red flag to both researchers and practitioners that this is a problem that cannot be ignored. The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the limited research on bullying in the workplace by investigating the personality of those who engage in workplace bullying and determining whether their personality differed from those who did not engage in bullying.

The results of this study found support for *III*, which stated that there would be a negative relationship between engagement in bullying and conscientiousness. This finding makes sense in light of McCrae and Costa's (1987) definition of conscientiousness, in which they state that this dimension of personality refers to self-control. In support of McCrae and Costa's definition, Jensen-Campbell et al. (2007) found that conscientiousness acted as a moderator between anger and aggression, indicating that levels of conscientiousness may affect an individual's likelihood to bully his or her peers as a result of frustration that may or may not be related to the organization. As a result, those scoring high on conscientiousness are likely to exhibit higher levels of self-control, and therefore refrain from lashing out at others as a result of their anger. Conversely, this also suggests that individuals who score low on

conscientiousness are likely to have a lower threshold for dealing with stress or anger and exhibit lower levels of self-control. In the case of these individuals, minor irritants that may or may not be related to the organization can serve as a catalyst for engagement in the bullying of coworkers.

Support was also found for *H2*, which confirmed that there was a negative relationship between engagement in bullying and agreeableness. This finding is also logical as agreeableness, by definition, essentially refers to how well a person can get along with others, and one low on this dimension may not build positive relationships. This notion is confirmed by Tani et al. (2003) who reported finding an inverse relationship between agreeableness and bullying. In addition, Mathisen et al. (2011) asserted that leaders low on agreeableness, in low stress situations, tend to be more cynical and engage in and promote bullying. The authors explain that this sometimes happens as a result of the fact that low agreeableness individuals are apt to be more task-oriented than others, and therefore are not concerned about building or maintaining relationships with their coworkers. On the contrary, the data suggests that individuals who are high on agreeableness may prioritize maintaining positive relationships with their contacts, and this prioritization ultimately serves as a powerful deterrent against engagement in bullying behaviors.

Lastly, support was found for *H3*, indicating positive relationship between engagement in bullying and neuroticism. McCrae and Costa (1987) described neuroticism as the extent to which an individual is emotionally stable, and explain that an individual high on neuroticism is likely to exhibit elevated levels of stress and anxiety, and thus lower levels of emotional stability. In their research, Tani et al. (2003) found

neuroticism to be one of the strongest correlates of bullying behaviors. Mathisen et al. (2011) also found neuroticism to be positively correlated to bullying, but only when conscientiousness was low. This finding makes sense in light of the aforementioned relation between conscientiousness and self-control. Those high in neuroticism already have heightened levels of stress, and low conscientiousness would indicate a lower threshold for restraining inappropriate behaviors. However, additional analyses of the data collected in this study failed to find an interaction effect between neuroticism and conscientiousness.

Implications

Understanding the dynamics of how an individual's personality can affect the incidence of workplace bullying is crucial in addressing this phenomenon because, whereas changing organizational structures may be relatively simple, changing an employee's personality is likely to prove very difficult, if not impossible due to its relative stability over time (Allemand, Steiger, & Hill, 2013). This research offers knowledge that can be used in an effort to reduce bullying in the workplace. First and foremost, it is the hope of this author that this research will help draw attention to bullying in the workplace, and that researchers will begin investigating new methods by which bullying can be managed and even eradicated.

Another implication is that this research gives credence to the use of personality assessments as a screening tool. To elaborate, the use of personality as a general assessment for entry into an organization may not have as much utility when compared to other selection approaches, such as general cognitive ability, works samples, or structured interviews (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). However, when used in conjunction with these

methods, personality can increase the validity of the overall selection process, as discovered by Ryan, Ployhart, and Friedel. (1998) while evaluating how personality screening affects adverse impact. Also, when hiring a limited number of individuals to work as part of a highly cohesive team, the value of personality assessments may become significant as any bullying in that group could lead to a gradual dissolution of work relationships and teams (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). Furthermore, the value of using a personality assessment in the selection process for leadership positions may be even greater as leaders' actions may guide departmental and organizational norms. A leader who engages in bullying behaviors may inadvertently validate and encourage similar behaviors in his or her subordinates and/or peers, which ultimately would lead to greater incidents of bullying.

To elaborate on the notion of using personality assessments, if an organization focuses heavily on collaborative work, high value should be placed on scores on measures of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. For example, for a job position that is based around operating in a small to medium sized team, scores on these personality facets could serve as qualifiers or disqualifiers for team membership, as research has shown that bullying can lead to a breakdown of relationships and workgroups (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). In a case such as this, an entire team could dissolve and a project fail based on a single employee's bullying behavior. If this were to happen, the cost to the organization could be significant. By simply incorporating a personality assessment into the screening process, an organization can potentially identify and avoid selecting those individuals who are most likely to bully others. In doing so, the organization is likely to preserve their level of productivity and employee satisfaction (Privitera & Campbell,

2009), which could potentially save the organization money by reducing turnover that could come as a result of low job satisfaction.

It should be noted that any efforts toward organizational improvement based on personality and its relationship with bullying may be met with legal challenges. In particular, it would need to be shown that selecting employees based in part on their propensity to avoid engaging in bullying is related to a job performance measure. Perhaps future research could show that less bullying is related to improved team performance. If that were the case, then using personality assessments to help reduce bullying in order to enhance team performance would meet such legal challenges.

Furthermore, these findings may prove valuable in deciding the most effective way to delegate work. Understanding conscientiousness as a sort of threshold for self-control has implications for determining who is best suited to handle the most stressful components of a project. Assigning excessively taxing parts of a project to an individual low in conscientiousness may lead to more stress than he or she can handle which in turn could result in bullying coworkers. The ability to prevent bullying by understanding how to allocate tasks related to a project could improve relations among coworkers, which would ultimately lead to improved productivity.

Building on the idea of viewing conscientiousness as a stress threshold which, once violated, increases the likelihood of bullying occurring, organizations may determine that it is in their best interest to attempt to manage the stress levels of their employees. Managing stress may be accomplished by encouraging employees to exercise (Scully, Kremer, Meade, Graham, & Dudgeon, 1998) by offering incentives, or by changing work policies to be more time-flexible for employees (Halpern, 2005). Though

some methods of reducing stress may be initially more difficult to implement than others, doing so may reduce the incidence of bullying within an organization. These are not new ideas to reduce stress; however, their utility may be even broader than previously thought if they can be shown to reduce bullying in the workplace.

Next, the finding of a negative relationship between agreeableness and bullying provides even more opportunity to combat negative behaviors in the workplace. As Mathisen et al. (2011) explained, those scoring high on the dimension of agreeableness are likely to be more relationship-oriented whereas those scoring low tend to be task-oriented. Organizations could use this research when choosing whom to hire for management positions that require frequent contact with subordinates. Individuals high in agreeableness are likely to strive to build strong relationships with his or her direct reports, and by doing so not only potentially build a cohesive and effective team, but also serve as a model for how the organization values civil and courteous behavior.

Lastly, the finding of a positive correlation between engagement in bullying and neuroticism could have implications for organizational effectiveness. Again, an individual high in neuroticism is likely to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety more frequently and more easily (McCrae & Costa, 1987). This raises the question of whether their engagement in bullying behaviors actually comes as a result of their level of neuroticism, or if it is simply a side effect of the perceived levels of stress. If it turns out that bullying behaviors are a result of stress, then organizations would be well served to craft cultures that create welcoming work environments of relatively low stress. For example, an organization could fashion a culture that promotes openness to all employees' ideas as well as mutual respect, which in turn may eliminate a certain amount

of unnecessary stress. Stress will always be present in workplaces, but if an organization can reduce needless stress, it may also succeed at reducing bullying. On the other hand, if bullying is a result of high levels of neuroticism, then a change in selection methods, such as marking an individual low in neuroticism as a more adequate job candidate, is likely the best way to deal with bullying based on this dimension.

Limitations

As with all studies, the current investigation is not without limitations. First, one possible drawback to this study is the potential effect of common method variance (CMV). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) explain CMV as “variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent” (p. 879). The authors suggest that there may be error in the measurements in this study because the two self-report surveys that are being correlated will share variance. However, Spector (2006) effectively argues that the notion of shared variance in our methods is an exaggeration, and even goes so far as to call CMV an “urban legend” (p. 222). Regardless, as previously stated, and as suggested by Podsakoff et al., this study employed a measure to control for social desirability. However, even when controlling for the effects of social desirability, the correlations between personality and bullying were still significant, indicating that CMV had little overall impact on this study’s findings. Furthermore, the existence of moderate correlations between the five personality factors should not necessarily be cause for concern. The values of these intercorrelations are relatively similar with other research and thus provide further evidence that CMV may have had little impact on this findings in this study (Linden, Nijenhuis, & Bakker, 2010).

In addition to the limitations presented by the use of self-report measures, the measure used to assess personality may also present further limitations to this study. Although there are other, more researched personality inventories, those assessments are costly, whereas the IPIP is free to use. As previously mentioned, Lim and Ployhart (2006) did find convergent and discriminant evidence for the IPIP when comparing it to the NEO-FFI. In addition, the scales for conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism all had high alpha levels, .88, .75, and .92, respectively. This indicates that the scales were reliable. Furthermore, as shown in Table 1, the correlations between conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism were all significant, yet no correlation coefficient was so high as to cause concern, with the highest correlation being .33 between conscientiousness and agreeableness. These correlations provide additional support that the subscales for each personality factor are measuring a distinct construct. As a result of this evidence, this author deemed the psychometric properties of the IPIP adequate for the research study.

Future Directions

The research on personality and how it affects bullying in the workplace is by no means complete; further research on the examined personality constructs would add great value to their utility. In addition to confirming the results of this study, researchers should focus efforts on determining how this knowledge can be utilized. The aforementioned implications of the results outlined several ways in which the findings can be applied; however, a plethora of both relevant and extraneous factors could render these suggestions fruitless. For example, as previously mentioned, researchers should determine whether it is the level of neuroticism that correlates with bullying, or if the

relationship is a result of perceived levels of stress that an individual experiences.

Investigators need to examine the effectiveness of personality-based solutions in order to provide practitioners with a framework for application.

Researchers should also focus on validating the use of personality assessments as a selection method. As previously stated, basing the use of a personality assessment on its causal link between workplace bullying may not be legally defensible. Instead, in order to validate the use of personality assessments, researchers should focus on finding those performance measures that have a direct link with a decrease in bullying in the workplace.

Another direction for the research on personality and workplace bullying is an examination of the Dark Triad. Baughman, Dearing, Giammarco, and Vernon (2012) describe the Dark Triad as “a combination of three socially-undesirable [personality] traits” (p. 572). These traits include Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. The authors built off previous research linking the Dark Triad to childhood aggression and investigated its relationship to bullying in adulthood. Indeed, the authors found each of the personality traits to be correlated with bullying in adulthood. With this knowledge, a logical next step would be examine the Dark Triad personality traits in the workplace to determine whether they can provide increased utility in screening out potential bullies.

Finally, in addition to more research on the three personality factors examined in this study, researchers should further examine the two remaining personality factors of the Big Five: openness and extraversion. Though they were not part of this research, data on these two factors were collected. A look at Table 1 reveals that openness had a significant negative correlation with bullying, potentially creating more possibilities for

the use of personality based initiatives to combat workplace bullying. This significant correlation, along with this entire study, warrants further research on personality and how it relates to bullying in the workplace.

Conclusion

Bullying in the workplace is a topic that has received far too little attention, especially given the detrimental effects it can have on an organization. The lack of research on this topic seems to imply that researchers have yet to truly acknowledge the need to investigate this issue. This study, according to the author's knowledge, is the first to investigate the personality of the perpetrators of workplace bullying. It is the hope of the author that this research can serve as a call for increased attention to this topic and the need to find methods to manage the phenomenon, be it through personality assessments or some other method.

This study found support for all hypotheses, indicating that engagement in bullying is negatively related to conscientiousness and agreeableness, and positively related to neuroticism. These results validate the utility of considering personality when dealing with bullying in the workplace. It is not the purpose of this research to insist that personality is the only, or the most important factor in understanding workplace bullying; rather, personality should be viewed only as a piece of a larger issue. Even still, understanding how certain personality types in specific situations can lead to bullying provides a greater ability to effectively manage and prevent these behaviors, making this research worthwhile. A primary implication of these findings is that by incorporating a personality assessment as part of a screening process, organizations that focus heavily on teamwork can eliminate those who are likely to engage in bullying behaviors from the

applicant pool, ultimately leading to the construction of highly cohesive work teams that are more productive and have a higher level of commitment to the organization (Privitera & Campbell, 2009).

Future studies will ideally build on this current understanding of the relationship between bullying and personality dynamics, enabling organizations to integrate these findings into policies and procedures in a way that will diminish the incidence of bullying. Although personality research may not seem to be the most potent method of addressing bullying in the workplace, it is certainly an important starting point for understanding and addressing a destructive workplace behavior.

Chapter VI

Summary

With an increased prevalence of bullying in the workplace (Glomb & Liao, 2003), understanding this phenomenon is important. Although research has examined the personality of those who have been the target of workplace bullying (Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007), there has been little investigation into the personality of the perpetrators. Understanding the personality of both targets and instigators is crucial to the research as these facets of workplace bullying may prove to have some predictive ability which would aid in understanding its occurrence. As research has found certain personality characteristics possessed by targets of workplace bullying (Glaso et al., 2007), this study seeks to determine whether the perpetrators of workplace bullying possess unique personality characteristics as well.

Over the past several years, research has slowly come to identify workplace bullying as an increasingly potent threat to organizations (Berthelsen, Skogstad, Lau, & Einarsen, 2011; Privitera & Campbell, 2009) that needs to be confronted and, as a result, efforts have been taken to explicitly describe the phenomenon. Workplace bullying was defined by Vartia (2001) as “situations in which someone is subjected to long-lasting, recurrent, and serious negative or hostile acts and behaviors that are annoying and oppressing” (p. 63).). Zapf and Einarsen (2001) assert that while open verbal and physical attacks are certainly forms of bullying, bullies may utilize a more subtle

approach, such as spreading gossip about a coworker. They also state that the most common forms of organizational bullying are isolating an individual, criticizing one's work, insulting the individual, and teasing and ridiculing an individual, though these incidents must last at least six months to be considered bullying.

The effects of bullying in the workplace have been well documented and are certainly cause for concern as these can prove to be detrimental to an organization at both the individual and system level. First, Berthelsen et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study on how exposure to workplace bullying affects a target's intent to leave an organization. Respondents were assessed twice, with two years between each assessment. Berthelsen et al. found that respondents who indicated they been subject to "some negative encounters," as well as those who were subject to a high level of bullying were more likely intend to, or to actually leave their organization compared to those who reported that they had not been bullied. Furthermore, the authors found that employees who were subject to bullying were more likely to take sick leave from work.

Tehrani (2003) conducted a study examining the relationship between workplace bullying and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Tehrani defined PTSD as an anxiety disorder characterized by high levels of arousal and flashbacks to a traumatic event when in the presence of a reminder of a traumatic situation. In a study consisting of 67 participants, Tehrani found that 44% were experiencing a diagnosable level of PTSD, indicating serious psychological side effects of bullying. Similar findings were reported by Hauge, Skogstad, and Einarsen (2010).

Research has also shown that bullying leads to negative effects on physical and emotional health. Specifically, Kivimaki, Virtanen, Vartia, Elovainio, Vahtera, and

Keltikangas-Jarvinen (2003) found a clear cumulative relationship between bullying and depression. The longer an individual was exposed to bullying in the workplace the higher his or her risk of developing depression.

Finally, Vie, Glaso, and Einarsen (2010) also examined the relationship between workplace bullying and target health. Their study concluded that workplace bullying can increase an employee's level of distress, leading to increased psychological strain. This finding was supported by previous research by Lee and Brotheridge (2006) who found that workplace bullying can increase a target's self-doubt.

In addition to the negative effects of being a target of workplace bullying, research suggests that simply witnessing bullying may also have adverse impacts on organizations. Privitera and Campbell (2009) asserted that research has demonstrated that the mere existence of any form of bullying in the workplace can lower employee morale, job satisfaction, reduce commitment, and lead to a breakdown of interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

According to Jensen-Campbell, Knack, Waldrip, and Campbell (2007), personality influences the way in which individuals interact with one another. Jensen-Campbell et al.'s findings regarding personality were based on the Five Factor Model. This approach to assessing personality typically consists of an inventory of traits which individuals mark as characteristic or uncharacteristic of themselves. In their research, McCrae and Costa (1987) demonstrated the validity of the Five Factor Model, reinforcing its utility in personality research and assessment. They describe these five factors as extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. Extraversion refers to an individual's sociability, such as how comfortable they are with

striking up a conversation in an unfamiliar social group. Agreeableness refers to an individual's likability, or how easily he or she can get along with others. Neuroticism (referred to as "emotional stability" by Glaso et al., 2011) refers to how relaxed and emotionally stable an individual is. Openness to experience ("openness") refers to how likely an individual is to have broad interests and a willingness to seek new experiences. Lastly, Conscientiousness refers to an individual's level of self-control.

Personality

Target Personality. A majority of research regarding the relation between workplace bullying and personality has examined the personality of targets, rather than bullies. Research by Bowling, Beehr, Bennett, and Watson (2010) examined the role of negative affectivity and how it relates to interpersonal aggression. According to Bowling et al. (2010), negative affectivity refers to an individual's disposition of subjective distress, and is very similar to neuroticism. Bowling et al. also found negative affectivity to be positively related to victimization in interpersonal conflicts, lending credibility to the notion that personality plays an important role in the occurrence of workplace bullying. These findings were partially supported by Glaso et al. (2007).

Furthermore, Milam, Spitzmueller, and Penney (2009), investigated the role that targets' personality plays in conjunction with acts of incivility and found that individuals who were low on agreeableness tended to report more incivility. This is likely because those who are low on agreeableness tend to exhibit unfriendly behaviors, suggesting that coworkers may retaliate against these behaviors with actions and behaviors that fall in the category of incivility. Of course, this could potentially lead to bullying as a tit for tat spiral could quickly escalate to more overt actions over an extended period of time.

Perpetrator Personality. Though the examination of the personality characteristics of those who engage in bullying in the workplace strictly by use of self-reports has not yet been done, there are studies that serve as forerunners for the current investigation. Mathisen et al. (2011) conducted a study investigating the personality of supervisors who engaged in workplace bullying. The authors examined the relationship between subordinate's reports of being subjected to negative acts and their supervisor's personality. Mathisen et al. found that, among supervisors, conscientiousness had a significant negative relationship with bullying. Neuroticism in supervisors was also found to have a significant positive correlation with bullying when conscientiousness was low.

As previously stated, there is a lack of research on the topic of the personality of workplace bullies; however, there is research available on this topic in schools. Tani, Greenman, Schneider, and Fregoso (2003) conducted an investigation into the personality of children who participated in bullying at school. The authors found emotional instability (neuroticism) to be one of the strongest correlates of bullying behaviors. In addition, the authors found agreeableness to have an inverse relationship with engagement in bullying behaviors.

Lastly, Jensen-Campbell et al. (2007) investigated the relationship between the five personality factors and the regulation of anger and aggression in schools. Their study supported aspects of the research by Tani et al. (2003) in that conscientiousness moderated the link between anger and aggression, meaning that individuals who were low on the dimension of conscientiousness were more likely to engage in aggression when they became angry than those high on conscientiousness.

The aforementioned studies definitively show that bullying can be a serious problem in the workplace. The limited research on the personality of workplace bullies indicates that they exhibit unique personality characteristics. Through questionnaires administered to both supervisors and subordinates, Mathisen et al. (2011) found that supervisors who engage in bullying behavior tended to score low on the personality dimension of conscientiousness and high on the dimension of neuroticism. These researchers also found that, under low levels of stress, agreeableness was positively correlated with bullying.

Furthermore, Tani et al. (2003) found that neuroticism was one of the strongest correlates of bullying for children who engaged in bullying behavior at school. These researchers also found agreeableness to be negatively related to bullying. In addition, research by Jensen-Campbell et al. (2007) found that individuals who scored low on the dimension of conscientiousness were more likely to engage in aggression, lending credibility to the claim that conscientiousness is strongly correlated to engagement in bullying.

Consequently, based on the current research regarding bullying, the following are hypothesized:

H1: There will be a significant negative relationship between participants' engagement in bullying and the personality dimension of conscientiousness

H2: There will be a significant negative relationship between participants' engagement in bullying and the personality dimension of agreeableness.

H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between participants' engagement in bullying and the personality dimension of neuroticism.

Methods

Participants

This study consisted of a sample of 129 individuals (63 males, 64 females, and 2 who chose not to respond) who worked in an organization for at least six months. The sample was not industry or organization specific as the survey was open to participants from any organization; however, the sample was limited to US residents only. Participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and the survey data was collected via SurveyGizmo to ensure anonymity.

Measures

International Personality Item Pool. The first measure this study utilized was the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; see Appendix A). This measure determines an individual's personality by assessing his/her score on five dimensions. These include extraversion (which refers to sociability), agreeableness (which refers to the extent to which an individual is likeable and diplomatic), emotional stability (which refers to how relaxed and stable one is; the opposite of which is also known as neuroticism), intellect (which refers to creativity; otherwise known as openness), and conscientiousness (which refers to how organized and dependable an individual is; Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007).

Negative Acts Questionnaire - Revised. The second measure utilized in this study was the Negative Acts Questionnaire - Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; see Appendix A), which is a revised edition of one of the most widely used measures in research investigating workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). The NAQ-R is a 22 item self-report measure which assesses the frequency that an

individual experiences bullying behaviors. Items in the scale are written in behavioral terms which make no reference to the term “bullying.” In this study, however, the language of the NAQ-R was modified to assess how frequently an individual engages in negative acts, as opposed to how often one is the target of these acts.

Social Desirability Scale-17. The third and final measure used in this study was the Social Desirability Scale-17 (SDS-17; Stober, 2001), which is an assessment used to determine whether a participant may purposely respond to questions in a way that would depict him or her in a favorable manner (see Appendix A). This enabled this study to detect whether there are any individuals who gave socially favorable responses on the NAQ-R, as opposed to giving honest responses. The SDS-17 consisted of 17 true or false responses.

Results

The hypotheses were tested by analyzing the data using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation (See Table 1). Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be a negative relationship between engagement in bullying and conscientiousness. Indeed, a negative correlation was found between the participants' engagement in bullying and conscientiousness, $r(124) = -.38, p < .001$, thus supporting *H1*. Likewise, *H2*, which posited that engagement in bullying would be negatively related to agreeableness, was also supported, as the relationship between engagement in bullying and agreeableness was significant and negative, $r(124) = -.41, p < .001$. Lastly, it was revealed that neuroticism was significantly and positively correlated with engagement in bullying, $r(124) = .28, p < .01$, supporting *H3*.

Next, bullying was correlated with social desirability in order to determine if social desirability may have influenced the results. Indeed, the two measures were found to be significantly correlated, $r(124) = -.22, p < .001$. In order to determine how this may have influenced the results, the analyses were computed a second time with a partial correlation, controlling for the social desirability. The correlations were slightly decreased; however, their significance was maintained. Still in support of *H1*, the partial correlation between engagement in bullying and conscientiousness was significant and negative, $r(124) = -.33, p < .001$. The partial correlation between engagement in bullying and agreeableness was also significant and negative, $r(124) = -.37, p < .001$, supporting *H2*. Finally, support for *H3* was maintained as the partial correlation between engagement in bullying and neuroticism was significant, $r(121) = .21, p < .05$.

Discussion

The results of this study found support for *III*, which stated that there would be a negative relationship between engagement in bullying and conscientiousness. This finding makes sense in light of McCrae and Costa's (1987) definition of conscientiousness, in which they state that this dimension of personality refers to self-control. In support of McCrae and Costa's definition, Jensen-Campbell et al. (2007) found that conscientiousness acted as a moderator between anger and aggression, indicating that levels of conscientiousness may affect an individual's likelihood to bully his or her peers as a result of frustration that may or may not be related to the organization. As a result, those scoring high on conscientiousness are likely to exhibit higher levels of self-control, and therefore refrain from lashing out at others as a result of their anger.

Support was also found for *H2*, which confirmed that there was a negative relationship between engagement in bullying and agreeableness. This finding is also logical as agreeableness, by definition, essentially refers to how well a person can get along with others, and one low on this dimension may not build positive relationships. This notion is confirmed by Tani et al. (2003) who reported finding an inverse relationship between agreeableness and bullying.

Lastly, support was found for *H3*, indicating positive relationship between engagement in bullying and neuroticism. McCrae and Costa (1987) described neuroticism as the extent to which an individual is emotionally stable, and explain that an individual high on neuroticism is likely to exhibit elevated levels of stress and anxiety, and thus lower levels of emotional stability.

Implications

Understanding the dynamics of bullying in the workplace is very important. This research offers knowledge that can be used in an effort to reduce bullying in the workplace. First and foremost, it is the hope of this author that this research will help draw attention to bullying in the workplace, and that researchers will begin investigating new methods by which bullying can be managed and even eradicated.

Another implication is that this research gives credence to the use of personality assessments as a screening tool. To elaborate, the use of personality as a general assessment for entry into an organization may not have as much utility when compared to other selection approaches, such as general cognitive ability, work samples, or structured interviews (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). However, when used in conjunction with these methods, personality can increase the validity of the overall selection process, as

discovered by Ryan, Ployhart, & Friedel, (1998) while evaluating how personality screening affects adverse impact.

Furthermore, these findings may prove valuable in deciding the most effective way to delegate work. Understanding conscientiousness as a sort of threshold for self-control has implications for determining who is best suited to handle the most stressful components of a project. Assigning excessively taxing parts of a project to an individual low in conscientiousness may lead to more stress than he or she can handle which in turn could result in bullying coworkers. The ability to prevent bullying by understanding how to allocate tasks related to a project could improve relations among coworkers, which would ultimately lead to improved productivity.

The finding of a negative relationship between agreeableness and bullying provides even more opportunity to combat negative behaviors in the workplace. As Mathisen et al. (2011) explained, those scoring high on the dimension of agreeableness are likely to be more relationship-oriented whereas those scoring low tend to be task-oriented. Organizations could use this research when choosing whom to hire for management positions that require frequent contact with subordinates.

Lastly, the finding of a positive correlation between engagement in bullying and neuroticism could have significant implications for organizational effectiveness. Again, an individual high in neuroticism is likely to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Of course, highly neurotic individuals are likely to experience stress more frequently and easily. This raises the question of whether their engagement in bullying behaviors actually comes as a result of their level of neuroticism, or if it is simply a side effect of the perceived levels of stress. If it turns out that bullying

behaviors are a result of stress, then organizations would be well served to craft cultures that create welcoming work environments of relatively low stress.

Limitations

As with all studies, the current investigation is not without limitations. First, one possible drawback to this study is the potential effect of common method variance (CMV). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) explain CMV as “variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent” (p. 879). However, as previously stated, and as suggested by Podsakoff et al., this study employed a measure to control for social desirability, the most probable source of potential CMV.

Another limitation to this study is the use of the IPIP. Although there are other, more researched personality inventories, those assessments are costly, whereas the IPIP is free to use. As previously mentioned, Lim and Ployhart (2006) did find convergent and discriminant evidence for the IPIP when comparing it to the NEO-FFI. In addition, the scales for conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism all had high alpha levels, .88, .75, and .92, respectively. This indicates that the scales were reliable. Furthermore, as shown in Table 1, the correlations between conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism were all significant, yet no correlation coefficient was so high as to cause concern, with the highest correlation being .33 between conscientiousness and agreeableness. These correlations provide additional support that the subscales for each personality factor are measuring a distinct construct.

Future Directions

In addition to confirming the results of this study, researchers should focus efforts on determining how this knowledge can be utilized. The aforementioned implications of the results outlined several ways in which the findings can be applied; however, a plethora of both relevant and extraneous factors could render these suggestions fruitless. Investigators need to examine the effectiveness of personality-based solutions in order to provide practitioners with a framework for application.

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Appendix A

Measures

The International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) is available online at ipip.ori.org/.

The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) is available online by request at www.uib.no/rg/bbrg/projects/naq.

The Social Desirability Scale-17 (SDS-17) is available online at <http://www.erzwiss.uni-halle.de/gliederung/paed/ppsych/scsds17.pdf>.

Appendix B

IRB Letter of Approval

May 30, 2013

Christopher Wilson
4424 Ashland Ave. #2
Cincinnati, OH 45212

Re: Protocol #1299-1, *The Effect of Personality on Workplace Bullying*

Dear Mr. Wilson:

The IRB has reviewed the materials regarding your study, referenced above, and has determined that it meets the criteria for the Exempt from Review category under Federal Regulation 45CFR46. Your protocol is approved as exempt research, and therefore requires no further oversight by the IRB. We appreciate your thorough treatment of the issues raised and your timely response.

If you wish to modify your study, including the addition of data collection sites, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

Please contact our office if you have any questions. We wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Morell E. Mullins, Jr.", followed by a stylized "JAD" monogram.

Morell E. Mullins, Jr., Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University

Appendix C

Informed Consent

You are being given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a project conducted through Xavier University by Christopher Wilson, in fulfillment of the requirements for his Masters degree.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between personality and workplace behaviors. Volunteers will complete three surveys which will take approximately 20 minutes. You may only take this survey once. There are no known risks associated with this project and data will be collected anonymously. Information gained through this survey will be used to advance scientific knowledge on workplace behaviors. All information will be recorded anonymously and will be maintained on a computer hard drive for three years. Participants will be given a monetary compensation of \$0.25. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty; however, compensation will not be awarded unless you have fully completed all of the surveys and passed all quality checks.

If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact C. Jacob Wilson at wilsonc19@xavier.edu, or Dr. Mark Nagy at nagyms@xavier.edu or (513) 745-1958. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University's Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870.

Appendix D

Debriefing

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The purpose of this study is gain more information on how an employee's personality affects his/her engagement in bullying in the workplace ("workplace bullying"). Research on potential antecedents of workplace bullying is very important as the effects of workplace bullying have been shown to be detrimental to organizations (Berthelsen et al., 2011; Hauge et al., 2010; Kivimaki et al., 2003; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Tehrani, 2003).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact C. Jacob Wilson at wilsonc19@xavier.edu or Dr. Mark Nagy at nagyms@xavier.edu or (513) 745-1958.