Workplace Bullying: Considering the Interaction Between Individual and Work Environment

Al-Karim Samnani[1] · Parbudyal Singh[2]

Abstract There has been increased interest in the "dark side" of organizational behavior in recent decades. Workplace bullying, in particular, has received growing attention in the social sciences literature. However, this literature has lacked an integrated approach. More specifically, few studies have investigated causes at levels beyond the individual, such as the group or organization. Extending victim precipitation theory, we present a conceptual model of workplace bullying incorporating factors at the individual-, dyadic-, group-, and organizational-levels. Based on our theoretical model, a number of propositions are offered which emphasize an interactionist, multi-level approach. This approach provides a valuable stepping stone and framework to guide future empirical research. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords Workplace bullying · Bullying antecedents · Dark side of organizations

✉ Al-Karim Samnani
asamnani@uwindsor.ca

Parbudyal Singh
singhp@yorku.ca

[1] Odette School of Business, University of Windsor, 401 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, ON N9B 3P4, Canada

[2] School of Human Resource Management, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada

Introduction

Workplace bullying has received increased attention in organizational research over the past two decades (Aquino and Thau 2009). In the United States, as well as in other countries around the world including Southern Europe (e.g., Escartín et al. 2011; Giorgi et al. 2011; Harvey et al. 2009) and Asia (e.g., Abe and Henly 2010; D'Cruz and Noronha 2011; Giorgi et al. 2013; Meek 2004; Takaki et al. 2010), researchers have reported the presence of bullying behavior in the workplace (e.g., D'Cruz and Noronha 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, and Alberts, Lutgen-Sandvik et al. 2007). In a U.S.-based study, Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) reported that 47 percent of employees have experienced some form of bullying over a 2-year period. These findings suggest a pressing need for further investigation. This need is further exacerbated by reports of reduced job satisfaction and increased stress for both targets and witnesses (Giorgi 2010; Giorgi et al. 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik et al. 2007; Schieman and Reid 2008), as well as serious consequences for the target's physical and mental health (Escartin et al. 2009; Hoel et al. 2004).

While a number of researchers have attempted to identify antecedents of workplace bullying, they have typically focused solely on either individual factors (e.g., Baillien et al. 2011; Notelaers et al. 2010) *or* environmental factors (e.g., Bulutlar and Unler Oz 2009; Einarsen et al. 1994; Salin 2003). Douglas et al. (2008) define an interactionist approach as one that examines the interaction between individual and environmental factors in predicting the presence of workplace aggression. While a few key exceptions of interactionist studies can be noted (e.g., Aquino and Bradfield 2000; Inness et al. 2005; Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly 1998), researchers have nonetheless pointed to the lack of simultaneous analysis in the workplace

aggression, and specifically workplace bullying, literature (e.g., Bowler et al. 2011; Herschcovis et al. 2007; Hodson et al. 2006). We extend this to include multi-level models. Notably, we believe that a fundamental factor in predicting whether bullying will occur at the individual-level is the group and organizational contexts that may punish, allow, or even encourage bullying behaviors (Sloan 2012).

The theoretical contributions of this paper are threefold. First, we present a conceptual model that is developed based on an extensive review of the literature. We draw upon victim precipitation theory, the frustration–aggression–displacement theory, and the approach-avoidance framework to explain the relationships advanced in the model. This model illustrates key mediating and moderating conditions across multiple levels within the organization. Second, we bring the dyad to the forefront of our model while illustrating how the simultaneous examination of *both* sides of the dyad (perpetrator and target) can play a critical role in predicting workplace bullying. With few exceptions (e.g., Baillien et al. 2011), bullying research has largely focused on either the target or the perpetrator and we shift our focus to a dual approach. Finally, we propose that the work climate can play an important role in potentially explaining some of the conflicting findings reported in the literature.

In the following section, we discuss current conceptualizations of workplace bullying. Thereafter, we review the extant bullying literature, which we use to develop and present a conceptual model. Based on the conceptual model, we advance several testable propositions in accordance with an interactionist, multi-level approach. Finally, we conclude by discussing the implications for research and practice, while offering avenues for future research.

Workplace Bullying: An Overview

Overview and Definition

A definition that has been commonly used in the workplace bullying literature was developed by Einarsen et al. (2003, p. 15) and included in Einarsen et al. (2011, p. 22):

> Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction, or process, it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months). Bullying is an escalated process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts (p. 22).

Based on this definition, researchers commonly extract four features to define bullying in the workplace: frequency (e.g., at least once a week), persistency (e.g., at least 6 months in duration), intensity (hostile in nature), and power imbalance (not necessarily hierarchical) (Baillien et al. 2011; Samnani and Singh 2012). Furthermore, workplace bullying can take a variety of forms. An individual who is persistently insulted or criticized represents one form of bullying (Fox and Stallworth 2005). Bullying can also take subtle forms such as unmanageable workloads from a supervisor (Nielsen et al. 2010; Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly 1998). Other common forms reported include the removal of responsibilities, criticizing and insulting, and excluding and isolating an individual (Samnani 2013).

A Conceptual Model of Workplace Bullying

Aquino and Lamertz (2004) offered two victim archetypes: the vulnerable and the provocative. The vulnerable target is one who draws bullying because he/she appears weak and helpless, while the provocative target is one who draws bullying because he/she is felt to have provoked the perpetrator. Our model is inclusive of both archetypes. In developing a conceptual model of workplace bullying, we build on the following statement by Zapf and Einarsen (2011):

> On no account do we deny that organizational issues have to be considered in the discussion of bullying causes. However, our own standpoint is that *no comprehensive model of workplace bullying would be satisfactory without also including personality and other individual factors of both perpetrators and victims* (emphasis added) (p. 178).

The conceptual model in Fig. 1 is developed based on a review of the workplace bullying literature. This model presents direct, mediating, and moderating relationships, illustrating an interactionist, multi-level approach. While other models (e.g., Aquino and Lamertz 2004; Barclay and Aquino 2010; Einarsen et al. 2003; Harvey et al. 2007, 2009) focus largely on general processes, we theorize interacting relationships between factors across different levels. An understanding of how factors at multiple levels interact can provide more intricate and nuanced knowledge about the phenomenon. Moreover, bullying not only affects the individual, but also the group and organization (Cortina 2008; Samnani and Singh 2013). We believe it is important to understand the influence of the work climate on bullying. We first review and explain the roles of the target and perpetrator.
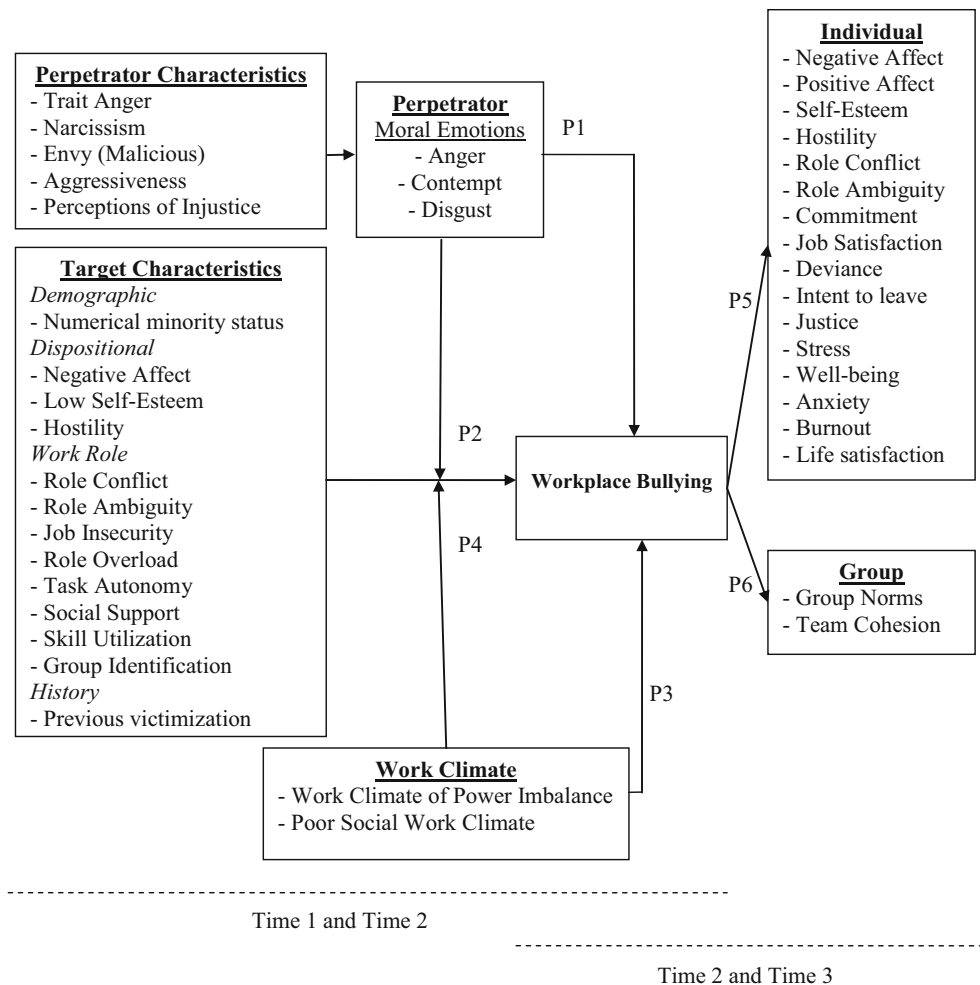
Fig. 1 A multi-level, interactionist approach to workplace bullying

Antecedents of Workplace Bullying

In this section, we review the antecedents of workplace bullying. In doing so, we discuss those antecedents that have received consistent support along with those that have produced mixed findings. Before our review, we discuss victim precipitation theory and its basic tenets since this framework provides key insights into the findings on target characteristics.

Victim Precipitation Theory

Victim precipitation theory (Elias 1986) has been widely used and applied in the field of criminal victimology. In the theory's early stages, victim precipitation theory entailed the provocation of victimizing behaviors from one or more individuals (Elias 1986). For example, an individual who starts an argument with another person can be viewed as precipitating the victimizing behaviors. The theory has been since extended from direct provocations from victims

to include victims possessing or exhibiting certain characteristics that place themselves at greater risk of experiencing victimizing behaviors (Aquino 2000; Tepper et al. 2006). Moreover, Tepper et al. (2006) contend that targets who elicit victimizing behaviors from others often do so unconsciously. In their study, they investigated the role of negative affect, which measures an employee's general tendency to experience negative emotions such as fear and anxiety, as an individual characteristic that elicits abusive behaviors from others. In the childhood bullying literature, Olweus (1978) similarly explains the role of negative emotions such as anxiety and insecurity in eliciting bullying through victim precipitation.

Hence, victim precipitation theory suggests that individuals possess or exhibit certain characteristics that provoke or elicit negative behaviors from others (Elias 1986). These characteristics may be dispositional or situational. For example, Olweus (1978) suggests that situational factors such as feelings of vulnerability or helplessness that emanate from low levels of perceived support can also

draw victimizing behaviors from others. We now review the literature to identify target and perpetrator characteristics.

Individual, Dyadic, and Work Climate-Level Antecedents

Target Characteristics

When developing an interactionist model of bullying, we first review *who* is likely to become a target of bullying (Douglas et al. 2008). Researchers of workplace bullying have devoted significant attention toward identifying target characteristics (Aquino and Thau 2009). However, many studies have largely been plagued by inconsistent and conflicting findings (Aquino and Thau 2009; Hoel et al. 1999). We discuss demographic, dispositional, and work role characteristics for the target.

While some researchers have found that women experience more bullying in the workplace than men (e.g., Lewis and Gunn 2007; Salin 2003), other researchers have found little to no differences (e.g., Einarsen and Skogstad 1996; Leymann 1996). There have also been conflicting results for age, with some researchers finding that older employees are more likely to be bullied than young employees (e.g., Einarsen and Skogstad 1996), while others being unable to support these findings (e.g., Vartia 1996). Finally, researchers have found mixed results for ethnicity. To illustrate, while Lewis and Gunn (2007) found that ethnic minorities are more likely to experience bullying than White employees, Fox and Stallworth (2005) found no significant differences between White, Black, and Asian employees. Victim precipitation theory may provide an explanation for the relationship between demographic characteristics and workplace bullying. As mentioned, victim precipitation theory suggests that employees who appear vulnerable or provocative will tend to precipitate bullying behavior from others. When an employee is a numerical minority within his/her work group, he/she may then tend to appear vulnerable due to this numerical minority status (Karakowsky and Siegel 1999; Randel 2002).

Research has also reported the following constructs to be related to workplace bullying: high negative affect, low self-esteem, high role conflict, high role ambiguity, and high job insecurity. These five findings can similarly be explained through this common theoretical thread. The childhood (e.g., Olweus and Limber 2010) and workplace (e.g., Baillien et al. 2009; D'Cruz and Noronha 2011; Strandmark and Hallberg 2007) bullying literatures have both consistently found that individuals will typically target those who appear unlikely to defend themselves. It should then be unsurprising that the two constructs that researchers have most consistently found to be associated

with targets of bullying are negative affect and self-esteem (Aquino and Thau 2009).

Aquino et al. (1999) contend that individuals tend to be targeted because they exhibit certain victim-type characteristics. These can include fear, anxiety, tension, sadness, among others (Harvey et al. 2007). The construct of negative affect encompasses these traits as negative emotions (Watson and Clark 1984). A number of studies have found that negative affect is associated with becoming a target (e.g., Coyne et al. 2000; Vartia 1996). Extending victim precipitation theory, employees who display negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and sadness will tend to be perceived by others as weak, vulnerable, and less able to defend themselves (Coyne et al. 2000; Vartia 1996). On the other hand, the manifestation of anxiety or tension in their exchanges with others may provoke bullying; thus, also suggesting the provocative archetype.

Employees who have low self-esteem are more likely to be targeted than those with high self-esteem (Einarsen et al. 1994; Matthiesen and Einarsen 2001). This relationship can also be explained by others' perceptions that employees who have low self-esteem will be perceived as weak and less able to defend themselves (Hoel et al. 1999). In addition, research also suggests that low self-esteem can cause employees to become provocative toward others through attempts to protect feelings of inferiority (Einarsen et al. 2011). Finally, research has also found that hostility can predict an employee's likelihood of being targeted (Lee and Brotheridge 2006). In such instances, an employee's hostile disposition and reactions can provoke others to bully them.

Employees who have high levels of role conflict and role ambiguity tend to experience greater confusion and espouse lower confidence in their actions (Agervold and Mikkelsen 2004). Role conflict refers to an employee's feelings of conflicting role demands (Rizzo et al. 1970), while role ambiguity refers to an employee's lack of clarity about his/her task requirements and responsibilities (van Sell et al. 1981). Many researchers have found that employees who experience role ambiguity and role conflict are more often subjected to bullying behaviors (Agervold and Mikkelsen 2004; Jennifer et al. 2003; Notelaers et al. 2010). The bullying behaviors will often be perpetrated by group members or supervisors who may recognize, and take advantage of, the employee's uncertainty in such situations (Notelaers et al. 2010). Supervisors and group members may also blame problems in the group on an employee with high role ambiguity or role conflict.

An employee's perceptions of job insecurity can similarly entail confusion and a lack of confidence, which can draw bullying behaviors from those who come to perceive the employee as unable to defend him/herself (Zapf and Einarsen 2011). Perceptions about an

employee's inability to defend him/herself can be taken as a signal by perpetrators that the employee is safe to target (Tepper et al. 2006). Interestingly, job insecurity may also generate competition between employees that can provoke bullying situations. Hence, while feelings of job insecurity may make some employees feel weak, other employees may use job insecurity as a reason for engaging in deviant behavior. Nevertheless, employees who engage in deviance as a result of greater competition may provoke bullying from others who may view the former as putting themselves before the team.

In terms of work role situations, overt signs of frustration that are rooted in employees' feelings of role conflict, role ambiguity, or job insecurity could be interpreted by others as being provoked. Employees who report a high workload or feel role overload are also more likely to experience workplace bullying (Baillien et al. 2011). Employees who feel that they frequently have too much work to complete and are responsible for too many roles may outwardly appear overworked (Bowling and Beehr 2006). It may become easier to blame employees who are responsible for a wide variety of tasks of not being focused on those tasks that specific co-workers may be primarily concerned about, which may result in bullying behavior.

A low level of job resources may also increase an employee's likelihood of experiencing workplace bullying. In particular, researchers have found that employees who have low task autonomy, perceive low social support, and low skill utilization are more likely to be bullied (e.g., Baillien et al. 2011). Co-workers may notice certain employees' perceptions of low job resources and may consequently view them as less likely to defend themselves (Skogstad et al. 2011). Employees who identify less with the group may also be more likely to experience workplace bullying, particularly from group members (Escartín et al. 2013a). Employees who identify less with the group may fall out of favor within the group and become more easily blamed by group members when mistakes happen. Group members may also perceive employees who have low group identification as easy targets since there is a lower likelihood of other group members coming to the target's aid.

Finally, employees who have reported previous victimization are more likely to experience workplace bullying in the future (Escartín et al. 2013b). The literature suggests that bullying can widen the power distance between the perpetrator and the target (Hoel et al. 1999), which can make it increasingly difficult for targets to defend themselves in subsequent bullying attempts. Therefore, consistent with victim precipitation theory, employees who possess or exhibit characteristics that make them vulnerable to, or provocative toward, others will elicit bullying behavior from potential perpetrators.

Perpetrator Characteristics

Most studies on workplace bullying have focused solely on the target while investigating which characteristics increase an employee's likelihood to be targeted (e.g., Notelaers et al. 2010; Vartia 1996). However, approaches that solely focus on the target overlook the dynamics and interaction between the characteristics of the target and the perpetrator. Investigating these dynamics is important because a bullying situation will always involve both a target and a perpetrator; hence, neglecting one side provides only partial explanations for the bullying. Our discussion and model demonstrates the importance of considering both simultaneously. Furthermore, similar to our investigation of target characteristics, we also conducted a review of characteristics associated with perpetrators of bullying. While there has been a lack of research on the perpetrator in workplace bullying (Einarsen et al. 2011), researchers have investigated perpetrator characteristics in the broader workplace victimization literature (Barling et al. 2009). As a result, we focused our review on this broader literature as well as studies within the workplace bullying literature. Consistent with our approach of only identifying and including findings that are consistent, we do not include a range of work role factors into the model including role conflict, job insecurity, role overload, task autonomy, social support, and skill utilization because of results reported by Baillien et al. (2011) in which they did not find support for the relationship between these factors and workplace bullying enactment using a cross-lagged study.

While certain dispositional and situational factors have been supported as predictors of employees enacting aggressive behaviors, we believe that an important intermediate link between these factors and the actual aggressive behavior has been missing in empirical research. More specifically, we contend that these dispositional and situational factors are likely to result in aggressive behavior *through* emotions (Douglas et al. 2008). In other words, when an employee possesses certain dispositional characteristics or experiences certain adverse situations, these dispositions and situations will spark certain emotions that then lead to aggressive behavior (Douglas et al. 2008). While we acknowledge that some research has found certain demographic factors such as gender (e.g., Hauge et al. 2009) to be related to enacting bullying behavior, we focus on dispositional and situational factors given the potential links with moral emotions.

These emotions have been referred to as *moral emotions* (or *other-condemning emotions*) and include anger, contempt, and disgust (Haidt 2003). These emotions tend to cloud individuals' thoughts, making them less likely to consider the consequences of their actions (Berkowitz 1994). Moreover, referring to them as "other-condemning"

highlights the channeling of these emotions toward others in the form of aggression (Douglas et al. 2008). Indeed, Zillmann (1988) argues that moral emotions such as anger can be sufficiently powerful as to dominate individual behavior.

Based on our review, we identified five characteristics that tend to predict the enactment of aggressive behavior: trait anger, narcissism, envy, aggressiveness, and perceptions of injustice. We believe, however, that these characteristics will stimulate perpetrator's moral emotions, which will then lead them to engage in bullying behaviors. We describe these relationships in turn. First, researchers have found that trait anger can push employees into enacting aggressive acts toward others (e.g., Douglas and Martinko 2001; Glomb and Liao 2003; Herschcovis et al. 2007). Trait anger suggests a dispositional tendency toward experiencing anger (Barling et al. 2009). Hence, employees with high trait anger tend to engage in bullying behaviors through the actual experience of anger, which represents one of the moral emotions described earlier. Similarly, trait anger can also stimulate feelings of disgust or contempt toward another individual when they experience a negative event (Douglas et al. 2008). Moreover, these proposed relationships can be explained by the frustration–aggression–displacement theory (Dollard et al. 1939), which suggests that certain negative emotions such as anger can result in employees displacing their negative emotions onto others (Mitchell and Ambrose 2007). Thus, trait anger will tend to result in bullying behavior when it manifests into actual feelings of anger, contempt, and disgust toward another employee.

Second, researchers have consistently found that narcissism is associated with interpersonal aggression (e.g., Duffy et al. 2006; Judge et al. 2006; Penney and Spector 2002). Narcissism involves excessive admiration of one's self and a strong sense of entitlement (Judge et al. 2006). Moreover, narcissists tend to be coercive (Baumeister et al. 2002), lack empathy toward others (Judge et al. 2006), and are interpersonally exploitative (Penney and Spector 2002). A strong sense of entitlement suggests that these employees will tend to experience anger and disgust when things do not go their way (Reidy et al. 2008), while a general lack of empathy toward others can suggest feelings of contempt (Nordgren et al. 2007). Hence, the relationship between narcissism and aggressive behavior can be more closely explained through moral emotions such as anger, contempt, and disgust.

Third, researchers have found that feelings of envy that involve negative social comparisons (i.e., malicious envy) can predict interpersonal aggressive behaviors (e.g., Cohen-Charash and Mueller 2007; Vartia 1996). Since envy involves feelings of inferiority (Cohen-Charash and Mueller 2007), such feelings can produce anger, disgust, and contempt toward the source of the maliciously envied (Fox and Spector 1999). This suggests an intermediate link of moral emotions between feelings of envy and bullying behaviors.

Fourth, researchers have also found that employees who have high levels of aggressiveness and interpersonal conflict with others (Hauge et al. 2011; Leon-Perez et al. 2014) are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors toward others (Douglas and Martinko 2001; Hauge et al. 2009; Herschcovis et al. 2007). Similar to trait anger, aggressiveness has typically been measured as a dispositional tendency (Glomb and Liao 2003). A dispositional tendency toward aggressiveness will tend to give arousal to emotions such as anger (Douglas and Martinko 2001), contempt, and disgust toward others (Douglas et al. 2008). Researchers similarly contend that individuals who are generally more aggressive will tend to experience negative emotions, such as the three moral emotions, that they then channel into actual aggressive behavior (Douglas and Martinko 2001).

Fifth, researchers have found that perceptions of injustice can stimulate aggressive behaviors toward others (e.g., Herschcovis et al. 2007; Inness et al. 2005; Starlicki et al. 1999). These perceptions of injustice can be caused by events that stimulate feelings of unfairness (Starlicki et al. 1999). Before perceptions of injustice translate into aggressive behavior, these perceptions will tend to arouse feelings of anger, contempt, and disgust that may be initially felt toward one's supervisor or organization.

Proposition 1 *Moral emotions (anger, contempt, and disgust) will mediate the relationship between perpetrator characteristics (trait anger, narcissism, envy, aggressiveness, and perceptions of injustice) and workplace bullying.*

Dyadic Level: The Interaction Between Target Characteristics and Perpetrator Moral Emotions

Frustration–aggression–displacement theory helps provide a theoretical explanation for why some employees who experience one or more moral emotions may bully co-workers (Mitchell and Ambrose 2007). However, this theory does not explain which co-worker(s) the frustrated employee will likely target. Victim precipitation theory offers insight into *who* will likely be targeted. As mentioned earlier, victim precipitation theory suggests that certain employee characteristics can draw or precipitate victimizing behaviors from others.

The biological model of approach/avoidance motivation suggests that individuals will derive approach motivation to those situations that present benefits to them, while deriving avoidance motivation to situations that they perceive will result in negative consequences (Ferris et al. 2011). This may explain why perpetrators tend to target

those who appear unlikely to defend themselves. When potential perpetrators feel that they can unload their feelings of anger onto someone else without retaliation from the target, they will tend to perceive benefits in doing so. Such displacement of anger allows the potential perpetrator to cope with his/her negative emotions (Dollard et al. 1939). Provocative targets may also stimulate approach motivations from potential perpetrators since the latter may feel that bullying represents a way in which they can intimidate those who provoke them. Alternatively, bullying provocative targets may allow the perpetrator to rationalize their behavior toward the target along the lines of being "provoked" into bullying (Detert et al. 2008).

As discussed earlier, a number of target characteristics have been identified based on our review of the literature. On the one hand, vulnerable target types tend to possess low confidence in their actions, feel helpless in their situations, and appear less likely to defend themselves. While, on the other hand, provocative target types tend to provoke others into targeting them. As a result, researchers contend that these characteristics precipitate bullying behaviors from others (Einarsen et al. 2011). When co-workers (potential perpetrators) report the presence of anger, contempt, and/or disgust, they will become likely to displace these emotions onto others. Drawing on victim precipitation theory, these potential perpetrators will tend to displace their emotions onto those who appear weak and vulnerable or provocative (Aquino 2000). Thus, employees who possess target characteristics will be more likely to be bullied when co-worker reports indicate high moral emotions.

Proposition 2 *Co-worker moral emotions will moderate the relationship between target characteristics and workplace bullying, whereby target characteristics (numerical minority status, high negative affect, low self-esteem, high hostility, high role conflict, high role ambiguity, high job insecurity, role overload, task autonomy, social support, skill utilization, group identification, and previous victimization) will result in increased bullying behavior when co-worker moral emotions (anger, contempt, and disgust) are high (relative to low).*

Work Climate and Workplace Bullying

There have been few attempts to examine the role of the work climate in facilitating (or reducing) bullying behavior (Samnani 2013). The work climate may play an important role in explaining the conflicting findings in the literature (Giorgi 2009). We focus on two work climate types. First, the work climate may represent a poor social work climate for employees. There are a number of psychological,

social, and leadership-related aspects that may determine a poor social work climate. Second, an important feature of workplace bullying is that there is a perceived power imbalance between the target and perpetrator (Einarsen et al. 2011; Samnani and Singh 2012). A work climate that directly or indirectly encourages power disparities between employees may facilitate bullying behavior, which we refer to as a "work climate of power imbalance." We first discuss a poor social work climate.

Researchers have found that various aspects of the work environment could influence workplace bullying. In particular, researchers have reported that a poor psychosocial safety climate predicted workplace bullying perpetration (Escartín et al. 2013b; Law et al. 2011). When organizations have poor policies, practices, and procedures to protect worker psychological health and safety, employees were more likely to experience bullying. This lack of protection from the organization can make it increasingly difficult for employees to resist and respond to bullying behavior from co-workers (Law et al. 2011).

Furthermore, the absence of fair and supportive leadership can also predict instances of workplace bullying (e.g., Hauge et al. 2011; Skogstad et al. 2011). When leadership does not demonstrate support toward employees, the latter may perceive low protection and support from the organization when victimized (Giorgi 2009). This is because employees tend to interpret leadership in the organization as reflecting the intentions of the organization. Finally, an environment that consists of high role demands such as role conflict and role ambiguity among employees can also stimulate bullying situations (Skogstad et al. 2011). Hence, on the one hand, a poor social work climate that is driven by a low psychosocial safety climate, the absence of leadership support, and high role demands can stimulate bullying behavior. On the other hand, power imbalance that is embedded within the work environment can also provoke bullying situations.

A work climate may directly or indirectly encourage power disparity through a number of ways. For example, the stringency of organizational policies and practices regarding discrimination, harassment, and equal opportunities may influence whether employees develop approach motivations toward bullying others who they perceive to be weak or disadvantaged. The centralization of organizational structure and hierarchical relationships can also entail a work climate of power imbalance. While research has examined the work climate in the form of perceived organizational sanctions against victimizing behaviors (Inness et al. 2008), a work climate of power imbalance speaks more closely to social and formal power relationships in the organization.

Employees in organizations that are characterized by a work climate of power imbalance may feel that it is

appropriate to exact power over others given the climate. Moreover, employees who have greater social or formal power over a co-worker or subordinate may feel justified in engaging in bullying behavior since the work climate may be perceived to legitimize their actions. Since power disparities represent a prominent feature of the work climate, employees may tend to "learn" to exert their power over others to reinforce the climate (Bandura 1986).

Proposition 3a *A poor social work climate will result in increased workplace bullying among employees.*

Proposition 3b *A work climate of power imbalance will result in increased workplace bullying among employees.*

The Interaction Between Target Characteristics and Work Climate

Numerical minority status of an employee suggests that the employee may be perceived as having less social power within his/her group. In such cases, this numerical minority status will more likely result in bullying behavior when a work climate of power imbalance is high, since such a climate will tend to facilitate power away from the numerical minority (e.g., fewer equal opportunities, lenient policies toward discrimination, etc.). It will also more likely result in bullying behavior when there is a poor social work climate since those with less social power within the group may become increasingly targeted by other group members who hold greater social power.

As discussed earlier, employees who have high negative affect and low self-esteem may be viewed as vulnerable by others given their lack of confidence. A work climate of power imbalance will tend to increase their risk of experiencing bullying since potential perpetrators, such as supervisors or group members, may view them as "safe" targets (Tepper et al. 2006), while not perceiving significant sanctions from the work environment. We would expect similar patterns in a poor social work climate for employees with high negative affect and low self-esteem. In a poor social work climate, employees who have high negative affect and low self-esteem may be viewed as weak and employees may feel greater latitude in victimizing co-workers for these perceived weaknesses. An employee who has high hostility may also become more likely to experience bullying in a work climate of power imbalance since those who feel provoked and possess greater formal or social power than the former will tend to feel enabled by the environment to bully. Employees with high hostility may also become increasingly likely to experience bullying in a poor social work climate since such an environment may encourage hostile responses toward hostility.

Work role characteristics such as role conflict, role ambiguity, job insecurity, role overload, task autonomy, social

support, and skill utilization may also result in increased bullying in the presence of a work climate of power imbalance since employees who demonstrate concern about their work role, such as an uncertainty about their work tasks and responsibilities, may tend to become perceived as vulnerable by supervisors and team members. Such employees may then become easier to blame when work problems arise and a work climate that supports power imbalance can facilitate bullying behavior from those who are perceived to hold higher social or formal power in the organization. Similarly, if employees become easier to blame as a result of their work role concerns, a poor social work climate may facilitate bullying behavior toward such employees. Furthermore, employees who do not identify with their group may also be viewed to have less power within the group and thus a work climate of power imbalance as well as a poor social work environment may make those with less perceived power vulnerable to bullying. Finally, employees who have experienced previous victimization will be more likely to experience workplace bullying when the work climate facilitates bullying toward those who are perceived weak (i.e., a work climate of power imbalance) and a work climate in which employees have poor social relations (i.e., a poor social work climate) since employees may become accustomed to resolving conflicts with aggressiveness.

Proposition 4a *A Work Climate of Power Imbalance will moderate the relationship between target characteristics and experienced workplace bullying, whereby target characteristics (numerical minority status, high negative affect, low self-esteem, high hostility, high role conflict, high role ambiguity, high job insecurity, high role overload, low task autonomy, low social support, low skill utilization, low group identification, and high previous victimization) will result in increased bullying behavior when a Work Climate of Power Imbalance is high (relative to low).*

Proposition 4b *A Poor Social Work Climate will moderate the relationship between target characteristics and workplace bullying, whereby target characteristics (numerical minority status, high negative affect, low self-esteem, high hostility, high role conflict, high role ambiguity, high job insecurity, high role overload, low task autonomy, low social support, low skill utilization, low group identification, and high previous victimization) will result in increased bullying behavior when a Poor Social Work Climate is high (relative to low).*

Consequences of Workplace Bullying

Individual-Level Consequences

Researchers have questioned the causality of the relationship between workplace bullying and dispositional factors

such as negative affect, self-esteem, and hostility (Aquino and Thau 2009; Samnani and Singh 2012). While we drew upon victim precipitation theory to explain how these dispositional factors, as well as role stressors, predict workplace bullying, we also posit that workplace bullying can produce subsequent negative effects on these constructs. To illustrate, workplace bullying can increase many of the emotions encompassed within negative affect such as anxiety, tension, and sadness due to the negative nature of such behaviors. Conversely, workplace bullying also tends to reduce positive affect (Bowling and Beehr 2006). Similarly, bullying behavior may also reduce self-esteem among targets as research has found that targets tend to feel belittled and perceive reduced self-worth following exposure to bullying (Strandmark and Hallberg 2007). Finally, research that reports an escalation of conflict between targets and perpetrators would also suggest that targets' hostility may tend to increase after experiencing bullying behavior (Mitchell and Ambrose 2007). More specifically, as targets experience workplace bullying, they may seek to retaliate or reciprocate, which can produce increased feelings of hostility toward the perpetrator(s) (Mitchell and Ambrose 2007).

In addition to the concerns about causality between workplace bullying and dispositional factors, there have also been recent questions about the causality between role stressors (role conflict and role ambiguity) and workplace bullying (Hauge et al. 2011). In particular, bullying behaviors such as withholding important information and being subjected to unmanageable workloads (Einarsen et al. 2011) may increase the extent to which employees feel unclear about their work and the work expectations set for them (Hauge et al. 2011). Therefore, employees who experience workplace bullying will tend to experience greater role conflict and role ambiguity over time.

In terms of work-related outcomes, researchers have found significant relationships between workplace bullying and commitment, job satisfaction, workplace deviance, turnover intentions, and perceptions of justice (e.g., Bowling and Beehr 2006; Hershcovis and Barling 2010; Nielsen and Einarsen 2012). Conversely, there have been mixed findings and weak associations found for job performance, absenteeism, and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Bowling and Beehr 2006; Nielsen and Einarsen 2012). Finally, researchers have found that workplace bullying can result in a wide range of physical and psychological consequences for targets. To illustrate, researchers have found that workplace bullying is associated with increased stress, poorer well-being, increased anxiety, greater burnout, and reduced life satisfaction (e.g., Bowling and Beehr 2006; Hershcovis and Barling 2010; Law et al. 2011; Nielsen and Einarsen 2012; Nielsen et al. 2012).

Proposition 5 *Workplace bullying will lead to (a) high negative affect, (b) low positive affect, (c) low self-esteem, (d) high hostility, (e) high role conflict, (f) high role ambiguity, (g) low organizational commitment, (h), low job satisfaction, (i) high workplace deviance, (j) high intentions to leave, (k), low perceptions of organizational justice, (l) high stress, (m) low psychological well-being, (n) high anxiety, (o) high burnout, and (p) low life satisfaction.*

Group-Level Consequences

The presence of bullying can influence group norms and team cohesion (Cropanzano et al. 2011; Salin 2003; Stein and Pinto 2011). Group norms refer to a set of unwritten rules that each member is expected to abide by Salin (2003). Team cohesion refers to the level of satisfaction that group members have with one another and effective communication between members at the group-level (Algesheimer et al. 2011). According to social learning theory (Bandura 1986), employees who observe bullying resulting in rewards for the perpetrator may imitate such behaviors within the group (Hoel et al. 1999). Indeed, Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly (1998) found that victimizing behaviors perpetrated by one group member led to other members engaging in those behaviors. This can result in group norms that become accepting of bullying behavior (Salin 2003).

When bullying behaviors occur within the group, this increases interpersonal conflict. While recent research suggests that third party observers may often develop feelings of moral anger toward the perpetrator (O'Reilly and Aquino 2011; Umphress et al. 2013), other research based on accounts from observers suggests that they also often develop fear of the perpetrator (D'Cruz and Noronha 2011). During interpersonal conflict, observers (i.e., team members) often feel pressured to take sides between the perpetrator(s) and the target(s) (D'Cruz and Noronha 2011). As a result, this can reduce the level of cohesion within the team (Salin 2003). Nevertheless, while some team members take the side of the target(s), and other members take the side of the perpetrator(s), this could result in the presence of sub-teams. The support within these sub-teams that is offered to the perpetrators or targets could result in high sub-team cohesion within the larger group. Members may work more effectively with those whom they have sided with and offer greater support to one another within these sub-teams.

Proposition 6 *Workplace bullying will lead to (a) group norms that are accepting of bullying, (b) low overall team cohesion, and (c) high sub-team cohesion among supporters of the target(s) and perpetrator(s).*

Discussion

We develop a conceptual framework that builds on prior models (see Einarsen et al. 2003; Harvey et al. 2009), while illustrating the importance of understanding how factors at multiple levels may interact to explain workplace bullying and its consequences. In this paper, we draw upon victim precipitation theory to explain target characteristics, dyadic interactions, and the role that the work climate can play in stimulating bullying behavior. Through the inclusion of a time component to our model, we suggest that several dispositional characteristics and role stressors can represent both antecedents and outcomes. Indeed, our model seeks to address causality issues by drawing upon theory to explain how these factors can be conceptualized as antecedents as well as outcomes. Finally, we suggest that workplace bullying can also have negative implications for teams in the form of group norms that become accepting of bullying and reduced overall team cohesion. In the following, we discuss the theoretical contributions of our model, identify avenues for future research, and highlight key implications for practice.

Theoretical Contributions and Avenues for Future Research

Moving toward viewing both sides of the bullying relationship (target and perpetrator) suggests the need for theory that explains the interaction. In this paper, we used victim precipitation theory to explain target characteristics, while drawing upon approach/avoidance motivation to explain perpetrator motivations toward those who seem unlikely to defend themselves or appear provocative. In doing so, we extend our theoretical understanding of the dynamics between targets and perpetrators and the psychological factors that guide their behaviors. Moreover, we enrich our understanding of these dynamics by exploring the ways in which the work climate may influence the presence of bullying behavior. In particular, we theorized that a work climate of power imbalance and a poor social work climate will increase the likelihood of employees with 'target characteristics' to experience workplace bullying. This work climate construct was also used to address conflicting findings related to demographic factors and explaining the role of a work climate of power imbalance and a poor social work climate in enabling perpetrators to bully those with numerical minority status.

We encourage future research to test our proposed model. In order to test our model, we believe that longitudinal research designs would be most appropriate, along with analytical techniques that mirror social network analysis or sociometric analysis (Coyne et al. 2004). For example, perpetrator characteristics such as narcissism and envy will evolve into moral emotions that then result in bullying behaviors on targets. Our model also suggests that bullying behaviors can alter group norms and team cohesion over time. To date, workplace bullying studies have largely used cross-sectional research designs (Aquino and Thau 2009), which is a challenge for identifying causality. While our examination of group-level factors was limited to the consequences of workplace bullying, group norms that are accepting of bullying and low team cohesion may also predict workplace bullying behavior. Hence, future research should use longitudinal research designs to examine whether these group-level consequences also predict subsequent bullying behavior. Researchers should also examine how changes in the work climate may be a consequence of bullying behavior within the organization (Giorgi 2012; Hauge et al. 2011b). Finally, researchers may extend our conceptual model to investigate factors at broader levels such as legal and societal/cultural-levels. In other words, legislation and national culture may also play a role in influencing whether perpetrators engage in bullying. Culture may be a particularly interesting construct to examine in future research. For example, employees who have certain cultural characteristics such as collectivism may view bullying differently from those with other cultural characteristics (e.g., Einarsen et al. 2011; Giorgi et al. 2013; Samnani et al. 2013). The role of bullying acceptability can become an important factor to understand (Power et al. 2011).

Implications for Managerial Practice

Our conceptual model suggests that certain factors such as work climate may interact with target characteristics to facilitate bullying behavior. The potential adverse effects of bullying for the individual and group demonstrate the need for management to counteract forces that may be supporting bullying. Managers, along with human resource management, can flag situations in which employees with certain characteristics (e.g., high aggressiveness) are working alongside employees with potentially conflicting characteristics (e.g., low self-esteem). Moreover, managers should pay close attention to the work climate, along with the organization's policies and practices related to power, equal opportunities, and discrimination to ensure that bullying behavior is not being indirectly encouraged. We hope that our model provides organizational practitioners and managers with a broad framework illustrating the interconnectedness between various factors that surround the bullying context.

Conclusion

The interactionist approach taken in this paper broadens the scope of workplace bullying and integrates multiple levels into a conceptual model. This conceptual model illustrates the importance of understanding phenomena within its broad context. To date, the majority of research on workplace bullying has focused on the targeted employee. However, it is also important to understand the perpetrator of bullying, how the characteristics of the target and perpetrator interact, and the work climate in the form of organizational policies and practices. We believe that this more complex and integrated approach to exploring workplace bullying sets a strong foundation for future research. Indeed, future research that tests such models can also lead to increased precision and better explanatory power. Moreover, we encourage future research to empirically investigate the critical role that the work climate can play in facilitating, encouraging, or deterring bullying behavior.

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