TOWARDS A RELATIONAL MODEL OF WORKPLACE AGGRESSION

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In a national study of the prevalence of workplace aggression in the United States, Schat, Frone, and Kelloway (2006) found that 41% of workers experience some type of psychological aggression at work, and 6% of workers experience some form of physical violence at work. Clearly, experiencing aggression at work is an issue for many employees. Understanding the predictors and consequences of workplace aggression is critical to preventing and coping with this negative workplace behavior.

Over the past decade, a burgeoning literature has emerged that focuses primarily on two streams of workplace aggression research. The first stream of research examines the predictors of enacted workplace aggression; this literature considers aggressive acts to be a reaction to other organizational stressors (e.g., injustice, abusive supervision, role stressors, Bowling & Beehr, in press; Hershcovis et al., in press), or the outcome of individual dispositions (e.g., trait anger, negative affectivity, Douglas & Martinko, 2001).

The second stream of research studies the outcomes of experienced workplace aggression. Researchers who study the consequences of workplace aggression consider it to be a stressor that leads to a range of attitudinal, behavioral, and health-related strains. These include lower levels of job satisfaction, affective commitment, psychological and physical health, and higher levels of turnover intentions and counterproductive work behavior (Bowling & Beehr, in press; Lapierre, Spector, & Leck, 2005; Hershcovis & Barling, 2005).

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss existing conceptualizations of workplace aggression including five issues around which these

conceptualizations vary. The second section examines the predictors of enacted aggression, followed by the consequences of experienced aggression. In the third and final section we will examine some potential new directions for future research in workplace aggression, with an aim to widen the scope of research in this field.

Conceptualizing workplace aggression

Research in the field of workplace aggression has developed over the past 15 years, and during that time, several researchers have simultaneously conceptualized and examined overlapping forms of workplace aggression (Fox & Spector, 2005). Due to these different types of aggression, its definition varies widely (Neuman & Baron, 2005). For example, in some definitions, workplace aggression and violence are separated; workplace aggression refers to psychological harm inflicted on an individual (e.g., verbal and psychological abuse), while workplace violence refers to physical harm or a threat of physical harm (e.g., Greenberg & Barling, 1999). In other research, workplace aggression includes all intentional acts of harming another person within an organization, with both psychological aggression and physical violence subsumed under this definition (e.g., Latham & Perlow, 1996).

Multiple conceptualizations of similar phenomena have resulted in several variations on how researchers define and label workplace aggression. These variants likely derive from at least one or more of five sources: (1) the researchers' assumptions regarding workplace aggression; (2) the conceptualization of aggression; (3) the target and severity of aggression under examination; (4) the perspective under examination (i.e., actor versus victim/target); and (5) intentionality.

First, ideological assumptions about the act of workplace aggression have resulted in different conceptualizations across researchers. Many researchers (e.g., Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Fox & Spector, 2005; Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998) adopt a manager-centered perspective by presupposing that aggression is counternormative (Bies & Tripp, 2005). These researchers define workplace aggression as an act that threatens the well-being of the organization and its members, and therefore label their aggression construct as deviant, counterproductive, and anti-social. In contrast, Bies and Tripp (2005) adopt an employee-centered approach, and argue that workplace aggression is not necessarily counternormative in all circumstances. Rather, they suggest that aggression is often a result of negative situational factors within the organization, such as injustice and poor leadership, which lead employees to act out in an effort to eliminate these negative factors. Thus, Bies and Tripp (2005) argue that aggression can be pro-social, productive, and beneficial, and that a manager-centered label precludes this possibility.

A second and related variation in the definition of workplace aggression concerns its conceptualization. For example, Skarlicki and Folger (1997) conceptualize aggression as a form of retaliation against the organization and its members for an array of perceived injustices. By conceptualizing aggression as retaliatory, they measure the retaliation construct as aggressive acts against the organization, and the people within the organization (e.g., on purpose damaged equipment, disobeyed supervisors instructions, spread rumours about coworkers) in response to a particular provocation. In contrast, Robinson and Bennett (1995) defined workplace deviance as voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms and threatens the well-being of the organization and/or its members. In this conceptualization, the act of aggression is considered counternormative

rather than retaliatory, implicitly suggesting that workplace aggression may result more from a difficult employee than a particular provocation. The measurement of this form of aggression, however, largely overlaps with Skarlicki and Folger's (1997) measure, the primary difference being that Bennett and Robinson (2000) separated interpersonal aggression (targeted at a coworker or supervisor) from organizational aggression (targeted at the organization). Therefore, despite the variation in conceptualization, one might not necessarily appreciate this difference from the operationalization of these constructs.

In addition, the predictors investigated in studies examining these two conceptualizations are largely similar, and results suggest that these factors predict both retaliation and deviance. To add to the confusion, similar conceptualizations of deviant behavior have been given different labels such as anti-social (e.g., Robinson and O'Learly-Kelly,1998), counterproductive (e.g., Fox & Spector, 2005), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 2001; Lim & Cortina, 2005), and organizational misbehavior (Vardi & Weiner, 1996). In short, while there are many diverse labels given both to substantively different and substantively similar conceptualizations of aggression, the measurement and indeed the predictors and outcomes are largely the same. We argue that researchers should not conceptualize workplace aggression a priori as either retaliatory or deviant. Workplace aggression may occur for multiple reasons, and confounding the construct with its potential predictors adds to the conceptual ambiguity.

The third difference in definition and label concerns the target and severity of aggression. Robinson and Bennett (1995) found that workplace aggression varied on two dimensions, namely target (i.e., interpersonal vs. organizational), and severity (minor vs.

major). Interpersonal aggression refers to aggression targeted at a particular person within the organization (e.g., yelling at someone, spreading gossip), whereas organizational aggression refers to aggression aimed to harm the organization (e.g., damaging equipment, taking long breaks). Some researchers disregard these distinctions, while others acknowledge them. For example, Skarlicki and Folger's (1997) retaliation measure includes both interpersonal and organizational targets, as does Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly's (1998) anti-social behavior measure. In contrast, both the counterproductive work behavior (Fox & Spector, 2005) and the deviance measures separate interpersonal from organizational targets. Furthermore, some researchers (e.g., Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005; Vigoda, 2002) combine more severe forms of aggression (e.g., violence), and less sever forms such as psychological aggression within the same measure, while others (e.g., Aquino & Douglas, 2003) examine only psychological aggression.

Recent research has demonstrated the importance of separating different targets when examining workplace aggression (e.g., Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999; Hershcovis et al., in press). For example, a meta-analysis of the predictors of workplace aggression found that interpersonal and organizational aggression have different predictors (Hershcovis et al., in press). Interpersonal conflict was related to interpersonal aggression, while job dissatisfaction and situational constraints was related to organizational aggression). Further, this research showed that the interpersonal target should be further refined to explicitly separate different targets of aggression. The meta-analysis found that within the interpersonal dimension, there were different predictors of aggression towards supervisors than of aggression towards coworkers.

The fourth difference in the conceptualization of workplace aggression relates to the perspective taken by the researcher. As noted earlier, workplace aggression research is bifurcated into the predictors of aggression and the outcomes of aggression. Therefore, researchers often take an actor's perspective (i.e., enacted aggression) to investigate the predictors of aggression (e.g., Inness et al., 2005), or a target's perspective (i.e., victims of aggression) to examine the outcomes (e.g., Lim & Cortina, 2005). Research on mobbing, bullying, victimization, and incivility all tend to focus on the target (or victim) of aggression. In contrast, deviance, counterproductive work behavior, and anti-social behavior tend to focus on enacted aggression. As these streams of research developed largely independent of each other, the labels do not converge. However, the label of workplace aggression encompasses both enacted and experienced aggression.

A final variation related to the conceptualization of aggression is whether intent on the part of the aggressor is considered. There is disagreement among researchers about the use of intention as a defining feature of aggression. Neuman and Baron (2005) argue that intentionality refers to the actual intent of the aggressor, rather than perceived intentionality by the victim. They argue that the exclusion of intent would permit harmful behavior such as pain caused by dentists to be considered aggression. Other researchers (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999) argue that many acts of aggression are ambiguous as to their intent, suggesting that the definition should not include intent as a defining feature. While it is reasonable to argue that those who infer intent from a perpetrator of aggression may experience stronger deleterious consequences, it is still conceivable that aggression without intent will be harmful. For instance, a psychiatric patient who harms a doctor, or an employee who harms a coworker while under the

influence of alcohol may not intend to be aggressive, but the consequences may still be damaging. The question of whether intent is a defining factor of aggression is therefore an empirical question. We suggest that research should not assume that intent is as a defining feature of aggression. In many cases, perpetrators may not be acting with intent, although the act itself is indeed aggressive. For instance, caregivers in hospitals and psychiatric wards are often victims of aggression from patients who arguably have diminished personal responsibility. Rather, we suggest that *perceived* intent by the victim is a more important consideration for future research, as perceived intent may affect the outcome experienced by the victim. Table 1 provides a summary of these five factors in relation to key aggression variables (see also Raver & Barling, in press).

Defining workplace aggression

We have outlined five issues that are the subject of debate and confusion when conceptualizing workplace aggression. We argue that some of these preceding issues are empirical rather than conceptual in nature. For instance, intent to commit harm may or may not have a greater effect on the outcomes of aggression, but it need not be a defining factor. In addition, it is not useful to define workplace aggression in terms of either its target, or its actors, because it unnecessarily narrows the aggressive act to contextual factors. These factors are all aspects of the way aggression may operate in organizations, rather than necessary conditions of the workplace aggression definition.

Our definition of workplace aggression is necessarily broad and can be applied to different workplace contexts, actors, and targets. Workplace aggression is:

Any negative act, which may be committed towards an individual within

the workplace, or the workplace itself, in ways the target is motivated to

avoid.

This definition deviates from existing definitions (e.g., Neuman and Baron, 2005; O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997) by removing (1) intent, (2) specific targets, (3) harm, and (4) specific actors. Instead of implicitly incorporating these into the definition, future research should examine each of these factors empirically.

Predictors and outcomes of workplace aggression

Predictors of workplace aggression

Three broad categories of predictors have been examined in relation to workplace aggression. First, studies have focused on predictors that have variously been labeled situational, organizational or perceptual predictors. These include predictors that result from conditions within the organization and include, for example, workplace injustice, role stressors, and abusive supervision (e.g., Berry, Ones, & Sackett, in press; Bowling & Beehr, in press). Second, researchers have examined the individual difference predictors of workplace aggression (e.g., Douglas & Martinko, 2001). These antecedents include factors specific to the individual perpetrator, such as demographic variables, as well as perpetrator dispositional traits such as trait anger, negative affectivity, and the Big 5 personality traits. Finally, a few studies have examined characteristics of the victim that might make them more likely to become targets of aggression. These antecedents include the sex, age, and organizational status of the victim.

Situational factors. Research has generally shown that all three categories are related to workplace aggression, although situational factors seem to be the strongest (in

magnitude) predictor. Meta-analytic evidence has shown that distributive and procedural, and interpersonal injustice have weak to moderate relationships with workplace aggression when considering main effects only (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, in press). However, Hershcovis et al. (in press) found that when situational constraints, interpersonal conflict, and job satisfaction were included in a path model together with distributive and procedural justice, the justice variables were not significant predictors of workplace aggression. However, this does not rule out the likelihood that these variables interact to predict aggression. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) found that distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice interacted to predict workplace aggression. That is, when an individual feels that their rewards are unfair in relation to a comparative other, and when the procedures used to arrive at the rewards are also unfair, individuals were more likely to retaliate. Similarly, when rewards were unfair and were communicated to employees with disrespect, individuals were also more likely retaliate. Finally, Skarlicki and Folger also found a three-way interaction between all three justice variables and retaliation.

In addition to the aforementioned situational predictors, Bowling and Beehr (in press) conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between workplace stressors and aggression. They found that role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity and job autonomy were all significantly related to workplace aggression, with role conflict being the strongest predictor.

Individual differences. In terms of individual differences, Berry et al. (in press) found that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability had the strongest relationship with workplace aggression of the Big 5 personality traits. Hershcovis et al.

(in press) also found that trait anger had a strong relationship with workplace aggression, while sex of the perpetrator had a weak but significant relationship, with men being more likely to aggress than women.

In addition to this meta-analytic evidence, a number of individual studies have attempted to determine the relationship between additional individual differences and workplace aggression. Douglas and Martinko (2001) found individual differences explained 62% of the variance in workplace aggression. In addition to trait anger, they found that attitude towards revenge, attribution style, and previous exposure to aggressive cultures were related to workplace aggression and accounted for significant additional variance after accounting for the effects of demographic variables.

Interactions between situational and individual differences. Folger and Skarlicki's (1998) popcorn model of aggression suggests that while situational predictors may be a necessary condition for workplace aggression, it may not be a sufficient condition. It is therefore critical to also consider the interaction between the person and the situation. Some individuals will choose to exit the organization or to improve workplace conditions, while others will react to the negative environment in such a way that they "explode" and become aggressive. Inness, Barling, and Turner (2005) conducted a study to examine this interactionist perspective. They studied individuals who worked at two different jobs to determine whether it was the individual, the situation, or both that predicted workplace aggression. Their within-person, between-jobs design enabled them to separate the person from the situation allowing for a unique test of these two different predictors, and they found that individual differences - self-esteem and history of aggression - explained a similar level of variance across jobs, whereas situational factors

were job specific and explained more variance than individual differences. In particular, abusive supervision was a very strong job-specific situational predictor of workplace aggression targeted at the supervisor.

   Characteristics of the victim. Few studies have examined the characteristics of the victim of workplace aggression, because doing so suggests a possible "blame the victim" argument. Nevertheless, certain factors such as victim status, gender, and age may help shed light on those individuals most at risk of experiencing workplace aggression. This research can improve an organization's ability to protect higher risk employees. Using meta-analysis, Bowling and Beehr (in press) examined five victim characteristics that have been studied in the past: victim positive affectivity, victim negative affectivity, victim gender, victim age, and victim tenure. They found that only victim negative affectivity was a significant and moderate predictor of workplace aggression. However, it is unclear based on these results whether individuals with high negative affectivity are more likely to be the target of aggression, or whether these individuals are more likely to perceive themselves as victims. Future research needs to tease these plausible explanations apart.

Outcomes of workplace aggression

   The primary framework used to examine the outcomes of workplace is known variously as the stressor framework or the process model of work stress (e.g., Barling, 1996; Bowling & Beehr, in press; Schat & Kelloway, 2000; Spector & Fox, 2005; Schat & Kelloway, 2003). This framework suggests that workplace aggression is an organizational stressor (i.e., an aversive environmental stimulus), that leads to stress - a person's immediate affective or cognitive perception of the stimulus - followed by a

range of strains - the attitudinal, psychological, physical, and behavior consequences (Barling, 1996).

Many existing models of workplace aggression examine some variation of this stressor framework, sometimes drawing on other theories to build on this model. For example, Schat and Kelloway (2000) drew on the stressor framework to posit that fear would mediate the relationship between workplace aggression, and emotional and somatic well-being, and further that emotional well-being would mediate the relationship between fear and somatic health and neglect of one's work. Similarly, Barling, Rogers, and Kelloway (2001) drew on the stressor framework to test a structural model that posited that fear and negative mood mediates the relationship between workplace aggression and organizational and health related outcomes.

Two recent meta-analyses found that workplace aggression leads to a wide range of adverse health, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes. We now describe each of these three categories of outcomes in more detail:

Health outcomes. The most widely researched outcome of workplace aggression is the psychological and physical health of the victim. A range of psychological well-being outcomes have been examined, including depression, anxiety, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, and life satisfaction. Bowling & Beehr (in press) meta-analytically examined each of these outcomes, and found that workplace aggression was moderately related to all these outcomes. Similarly, Hershcovis and Barling (2005) examined a composite of all psychological well-being outcomes, which are highly related (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999) and found a corrected mean correlation of .41 with workplace aggression.

In addition to psychological well-being, researchers have also examined the physical health outcomes of workplace aggression, including doctor's visits and somatic symptoms such as gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and sleeping disorders. Bowling and Beehr (in press) found a comparable moderate relationship between workplace aggression and physical symptoms.

Attitudinal outcomes. In addition to the health outcomes for individuals, researchers have examined the attitudinal outcomes of workplace aggression to determine how workplace aggression impacts employees' attitudes about the organization for which they work. Meta-analytic evidence shows that workplace aggression leads to lower levels of affective commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational justice, and higher intentions to leave the organization (Bowling & Beehr, in press).

Behavioral outcomes. Limited research has examined the behavioral outcomes of workplace aggression. Only five studies have examined the performance outcomes of workplace aggression, and the results are inconclusive. Bowling and Beehr (in press) found no relationship between workplace aggression and job performance or organizational citizenship behaviors across five studies. However, they found a moderate relationship between workplace aggression and counterproductive work behavior, which is consistent with prior research that suggests that aggression begets aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Looking ahead: new directions in workplace aggression

The growing literature on the predictors and outcomes of workplace aggression has resulted in at least four recent meta-analyses related to this area (Bowling & Beehr, in press; Berry, Ones, & Sackett, in press; Hershcovis et al., in press; Lapierre, Spector, &

Leck, 2005). The results of these meta-analyses, summarized in the preceding section, suggest that we now have a good understanding of the predictors and outcomes of workplace aggression. However, previous research has tended to focus on workplace aggression as though the prediction and experience of aggression is the same, regardless of the target or perpetrator of such aggression. The relational aspect of workplace aggression has therefore received limited research or theoretical attention. In the remainder of this chapter, we suggest future research needs to extend the focus of past research on the quality of the relationship between perpetrator and victim, and consider the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim, when examining the predictors and outcomes of workplace aggression.

Target-specific workplace aggression.

In the domain of aggression, existing theories lend support to the notion that aggression is target-specific (i.e., perpetrators aggress against a particular target). In particular, cognitive neo-association theory (Berkowitz, 1989) proposes that negative events such as provocations elicit cognitive processes and affective responses that are linked together in memory, and lead to attributions of wrong-doing and ultimately to aggressive responses. This theory suggests that aggression is often *reactive*. That is, it results from a cognitive assessment of a negative event or provocation, and a subsequent attribution about the event.

Along a similar vein, Martinko, Gundlach, and Douglas (2002) argued that attributions about the cause of workplace events motivate the attitudinal and behavioral response to that event. In particular, the experience of negative events leads to an attribution of blame for the event, and such attributions lead to targeted behavioral

responses. This is consistent with Aquino, Lewis, and Bradfield (1999) who argued that attributions of blame lead to differential predictions for procedural and distributive justice. They argued that because employees are likely to blame the person responsible for their unfair distributions (i.e., raises, promotions), distributive injustice will be associated with interpersonal-targeted aggression. In contrast, Aquino et al. (1999) suggest that procedural injustice will lead to organization-targeted aggression because individuals will blame the organization for its irresponsible institutional policies and practices.

Examining these theoretical approaches suggests key consistencies between them. First, each of the theories argues that a trigger, stressor, or provocation initiates the subsequent responses. Second, attributions are an underlying mechanism that may lead individuals to aggress against a particular target.

Some research has examined the target-specific nature of workplace aggression. In particular, as mentioned previously, Bennett and Robinson (2000) found that workplace aggression consists of interpersonal- and organizational-targeted aggression. Hershcovis et al. (in press) and Berry et al. (in press) examined these two forms of aggression meta-analytically to determine whether the separation of these two forms of aggression is justified. In both these meta-analyses, the predictors of interpersonal and organizational aggression differed for some variables, supporting the notion of target separation.

While researchers are starting to separate interpersonal and organizational targets, much less research has considered whether the predictors differ for various interpersonal targets (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates). Attributional arguments

described earlier suggest that assailants target aggressive behavior at those individuals who are responsible for transgressions against them (Martinko et al., 2002). That is, if individuals assign blame for perceived injustice, as suggested by several researchers (e.g., Aquino et al., 1999; Berkowitz, 1989; Martinko et al., 2002), then the assignment of blame will be as specific as possible. In particular, if a supervisor treats employees badly, employees are likely to aggress against the supervisor and not their coworkers. Similarly, if a coworker treats a colleague with disrespect or incivility, the colleague will react against the coworker and not against their supervisor. In other words, assignment of blame is likely to be directed towards the person perceived to be responsible for the transgression. With one known exception (i.e., Greenberg & Barling, 1999), research has not examined within the same study whether there are different predictors across targets; however, because some research has focused on either supervisor- or coworker- targeted aggression, and others have used a combined measure, researchers have used meta-analytic techniques to determine whether the predictors differ for each target.

For example, Hershcovis et al. (in press) examined meta-analytically target-specific workplace aggression and found that abusive supervision and interpersonal injustice were strong predictors of supervisor-targeted aggression, while they were much weaker predictors of coworker-targeted aggression. With the exception of Greenberg and Barling (1999), who found different predictors for supervisor-, coworker-, and subordinate-targeted aggression, no published research has focused explicitly on coworkers as a target; therefore, we have limited knowledge of the predictors of coworker-targeted aggression. Similarly, virtually no other research has examined subordinate-targeted aggression.

Another related avenue for future research on the predictors of workplace aggression concerns the notion of displaced aggression, which has been examined in social psychology but not in organizational research. Limited findings suggest that aggression is at least partially target-specific; however, recent findings in the social psychology literature suggests that in some instances, workplace aggression may be displaced. Displaced aggression occurs when a perpetrator enacts aggression against an unfortunate third party who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939) first suggested that displaced aggression is likely to occur when circumstances prevent or deter the enactment of direct aggression. They argued that a given frustration is likely to give rise to the strongest form of direct aggression. That is, when an individual becomes frustrated, they may respond to that frustration by directing aggression towards the source of the frustration. However, in addition to their anger towards the source of their frustration, individuals are also likely to be more aggravated with the world in general (Dollard et al., 1939). This may include any person or object that the aggrieved may encounter between the moment the frustration occurs, and the time in which the person has a chance to calm down.

Research in experimental social psychology has suggested that sometimes aggression is indeed displaced (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Bushman, Bonacci, Pedersen, Vasquez, & Miller, 2005; Dollard et al., 1939). For example, in a meta-analysis of 49 experimental studies, Marcus-Newhall, Pedersen, Carlson, and Miller (2000) found a moderate effect for the presence of displaced aggression under certain conditions. The findings related to target-specificity (Aquino et al., 1999, Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Berry et al., in press; Greenberg & Barling, 1999; Hershcovis et al., in

press) combined with other recent findings in social psychology, could ignite an interesting conversation about the moderators and mediators that may lead to displaced versus target-specific aggression within the workplace. For example, by integrating the notion of blame attributions, one can hypothesize that when an individual is provoked, but cannot identify and blame a particular provoker, displaced aggression may be more likely to occur. Certainly, these seem like fruitful issues for further research.

Outcomes of aggression by different perpetrators

While research on the predictors of aggression has paid limited attention to target-specificity, even less attention has been given to the perpetrators of aggression in research examining the outcomes of workplace aggression. While this is not surprising given the natural compassion and empathy on the part of researchers for victims of aggression, this has resulted in a truncated body of knowledge on workplace aggression. Employees experience workplace aggression from various sources, including insiders to the organization (such as coworkers and supervisors), and outsiders (such as customers and clients). With one published exception (e.g., LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002), studies that examine these different perpetrators of aggression tend to focus on only one perpetrator, without considering why or whether outcomes might differ depending on who enacted the aggression. In addition, workplace aggression research tends to focus on aggression from within the organization, to the exclusion of aggression from organizational outsiders such as customers and members of the public. Since workplace aggression research is concerned with damaging behaviors towards employees and organizations, aggression from outsiders should not be excluded from the definition. Employees in a vast number

of organizations have direct interaction with members of the public, a more thorough examination of aggression from outside perpetrators is necessary.

As each relationship differs in such factors as the degree and type of power held by the perpetrator, and the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim of aggression, it is likely that the experience of aggression from one perpetrator might have a different meaning and subsequently different outcomes than the experience of aggression from another perpetrator. A greater understanding of how aggression from supervisors, coworkers, and outsiders affects employees is needed. The limited evidence that exists suggests that individuals may experience aggression from these sources in different ways (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002), leading to attitudinal and behavioral responses that may not be the same for each perpetrator.

For example, LeBlanc and Kelloway (2002) conducted a study that examined the perpetrators of aggression from organizational employees and members of the public. This research found that public- and insider-initiated aggression was differentially related to both organizational and individual outcomes. While LeBlanc and Kelloway (2002) examined two types of aggression, public and "coworker" (which combined supervisor and coworker aggression and therefore would be more appropriately called "insider"), Schat (2004) extended LeBlanc and Kelloway's (2002) work by separating coworker and supervisor aggression. Schat (2004) hypothesized and found that fear would mediate both public aggression and supervisor aggression, but not co-worker aggression.

Based on this initial evidence, we propose that future research should consider the perpetrator-victim relationship when trying to understand the outcomes of workplace aggression. Hershcovis and Barling (2005) argued that the nature of this relationship

could mitigate or exacerbate the experience of aggression. They suggested that at least three different relational factors are likely to affect the outcomes of experienced workplace aggression. We discuss briefly each of these in turn.

Relational power refers to the level of power held by the perpetrator of aggression relative to the victim. Power - defined as the capacity to produce intended effects and influence the behavior of individuals (Dunbar & Bargoon, 2005) - has received limited consideration in the workplace aggression literature. However, in the related area of sexual harassment, researchers have begun to examine the effects of perpetrator power on the victim. For example, Cortina et al. (2002) found that victims who experienced sexual harassment from individuals who have greater power, experienced more negative outcomes of the sexual harassment than victims harassed by those in non-power positions.

This has implications for research on aggression because different types of perpetrators may vary in their degree of power. For example, supervisors generally have greater formal power than employees and customers in that they can control important resources and outcomes for employees. Therefore, one would expect the outcomes of aggression from supervisors to be worse than outcomes of aggression from coworkers and outsiders. In a meta-analysis of the outcomes of workplace aggression by different perpetrators, Hershcovis and Barling (2005) found that victims of aggression from supervisors had significantly lower job satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological well-being, and significantly higher intentions to turnover, than victims of aggression from coworkers and outsiders.

Task interdependence refers to the degree to which the perpetrator and victim influences the performance of each other. Task interdependence is often examined as a moderating factor that may exacerbate or attenuate the relationship between variables (Duffy, Shaw, & Stark, 2000). However, to date, research in workplace aggression has not considered this factor. The degree to which the perpetrator and victim are task interdependent is likely to affect the outcomes of aggression for the victim, because the meaning of the aggressive act extends beyond the incident of aggression to possible outcomes for the victim's job performance.

There is some empirical evidence to support the moderating role of task interdependence on the outcomes of workplace aggression. For example, research in the interpersonal aggression research has found that under conditions of low task interdependence, the negative effects of conflict are lower (Jehn, 1995). However, this has not been explicitly tested on victims of workplace aggression.

Relational Connectedness consists of two factors: 1) the degree to which the perpetrator and victim work within close physical proximity with one another, and 2) the endurance or length of the working relationship (Hershcovis & Barling, 2005). The greater the physical closeness within the work environment, and the longer the expected endurance of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim, the worse the effects of aggression on the victim are likely to be. The reason for this expected outcome is because victims who are forced to work with perpetrators in close proximity and for an indeterminate length may anticipate continued aggression in the future.

Methodological impediments to the relational model

In the preceding section, we argued that future research should consider the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim when examining the outcomes of workplace aggression. However, conventional research methods in the area of workplace aggression preclude investigations of this type. Most existing workplace aggression research relies on cross-sectional survey methods and asks the participant about their experience of aggression from "someone at work." This design cannot easily accommodate the question of whether and how the relationship between the perpetrator and victim might affect the victim's experience of workplace aggression because it would require the victim to identify or refer to a particular perpetrator in some way when filling out the survey. That is, to determine whether task interdependence between a perpetrator and victim affects a victim's experience of aggression, one would have to match the experience of aggression to a particular perpetrator to assess the task interdependence with that perpetrator.

Most research questions of this type can be examined using an experimental method in which the researcher could directly manipulate or assess the relationship between the perpetrator and victim relationship by using an experimental design. An experimenter would be able to control, for example, the level of task interdependence, power, and relational connectedness between the perpetrator and victim. However, experiments examining the outcomes of workplace aggression are difficult for ethical reasons, because they would require the participant to experience workplace aggression. This presents obvious ethical concerns that preclude experimental research in on the outcomes of workplace aggression; therefore, to assess questions of this type, researchers need to explore different methods from those typically used.

We propose two potential methods for examining this research question. First, a diary study approach would enable researchers to examine (1) specific incidents of workplace aggression within person, (2) the relationship between the perpetrator and victim, and (3) the participants' behavioral, affective, and attitudinal responses. Such methods can use an event study approach to ask participants to answer a series of questions on a pocket computer (or using pen and paper surveys) to answer a series of questions when they experience an act of aggression. For example, when participants experience aggression at work (as defined by the researcher), they are asked to answer a series of short questions related to the severity of the aggression, the power of the perpetrator, the task interdependence, and the relational connectedness with the perpetrator. At the end of each day in which an aggression event occurred, participants are asked to answer a short questionnaire to assess the behavioral, attitudinal, and/or health outcomes of the aggressive experiences.

The benefits of a diary study are that it enables researchers to conduct a within-person, longitudinal study of how dynamic relationships affect aggression, and the responses to such aggression. This method enables researchers to assess aggression from a particular perpetrator, whereas existing methods ask about their experience of aggression more generally, without identifying a specific perpetrator. In addition, because participants answer questions about aggressive events as they occur, cognitive or affective responses can be examined without the potential biases associated with retroactive recall of an event (Robinson & Clore, 2002). The pitfalls of this approach are that the participants are interrupted during their workday since they are asked to fill out the survey after an event occurs. Therefore, it is essential that the surveys are very short

to enable the participant to fill out their survey with minimal disruption to their work. In addition, it may be difficult to obtain large samples since organizations may be less inclined to authorize participation in a study that requires repeated disruptions.

A second method for examining this question is to use a critical incident technique by asking participants to recall a time when they experienced aggression at work. Once the participant recalls the incident, they are then asked a series of questions related to the incident, including information about the perpetrator/victim relationship, and the attitudinal, behavioral, and health-related responses. While this method allows for lengthier questionnaires, it introduces potential recall biases into the study, particularly if the researcher is attempting to assess any cognitive or affective responses from the experience of workplace aggression.

Summary and conclusion

In this chapter we provided an overview of existing research on the predictors and outcomes of workplace aggression, and we proposed that future research focus on a relational perspective on workplace aggression. We noted the constraints of existing methods that prevent workplace aggression research from taking this relational approach, and provided some initial suggestions for techniques that can help move us towards a more relational perspective.

Workplace aggression occurs between people and victim responses to such aggression are at least partially a function of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. Therefore, understanding how these factors exacerbate or mitigate aggression at work is key to understanding both the phenomenon of aggression at work, and to developing strategies to cope with and prevent workplace aggression.

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Defining Features of Aggression Variables

Aggression Variable	Assumption/ Conceptualization	Target/Victim	Severity	Perspective	Intent
Abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000)	Destructive but not necessarily deviant	Subordinate	Moderate and persistent psychological	Target	No
Anti-social behavior (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998)	Destructive counternormative	Combined supervisor, coworker or organization	Moderate psychological	Actor	No
Bullying (Rayner, 1997)	Destructive and persistent	Coworker	Moderate to severe psychological and potentially physical	Target	Unstated
Counterproductive work behavior (Fox & Spector, 2005)	Destructive counternormative	Separate interpersonal and organizational targets	Moderate psychological	Actor	Yes
Deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000)	Destructive and counternormative	Separate interpersonal and organizational targets	Moderate psychological	Actor	Yes
Emotional abuse (Keashly & Harvey, 2005)	Destructive and counternormative	Subordinate	Moderate to severe psychological	Target	Yes
Mobbing (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005)	Destructive and persistent	Coworker	Severe psychological and potentially physical	Target	No
Retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997)	Constructive justice-restoring behaviors	Combined supervisor, coworker and organization	Moderate psychological and some physical	Actor	Yes
Revenge (Bies & Tripp, 2005)	Constructive justice-restoring behaviors	Combined supervisor, coworker and organization	Unstated (i.e., I got back at them)	Actor	Yes
Workplace aggression (e.g., Greenberg & Barling, 1999)	Varies	Varies (insiders and outsiders)	Psychological and physical	Actor and target	Varies
Workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al. 2001)	Constructive and destructive	Interpersonal (implied coworkers)	Minor psychological	Target	Ambiguous
Social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002)	Destructive	Interpersonal (implied coworkers)	Minor to severe, persistent, psychological and physical	Target	Yes