Workplace Bullying and Job Attitudes: The Moderating Role of Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT
There are few theoretical studies and hence very little understanding of the underlying mechanism through which workplace bullying impacts employee attitudes (job satisfaction and affective commitment), health and well-being, and behaviors. The current study adopted the stress-coping theory framework at the individual level, which casts workplace bullying as a negative stressor that motivates an individual to expend cognitive and behavioral energy in order to cope. When coping is not successful, the stress from workplace bullying continues and leads to negative consequences on affective states and attitudes. This study specifically examined the moderating role of coping strategies in the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and job attitudes. Findings suggest that exposure to workplace bullying negatively impacts job satisfaction and affective commitment. Coping strategies play a very limited moderator role in the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and job attitudes. Instead, coping strategies directly relate to job attitudes above and beyond the exposure to workplace bullying. Theoretical and intervention implications are discussed.

Keywords: Affective commitment, coping strategies, job satisfaction, stress-coping framework, workplace bullying
1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying is a prevalent, on-going, pressing social problem with devastating effects on individuals, organizations, and society at large (Agervold, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). It has become a core concern to organizations. It is a relational process in which one party intentionally or unintentionally engages in negative verbal and nonverbal behaviors repeatedly over an extended period, against which the other party is unable to defend (Einarsen, Mykletun, Einarsen, Skogstad, & Salin, 2017; Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015). Negative communicative actions often originate from superiors and, thus, is grounded in the imbalance of power between offender (perpetrator) and victim (target) (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011; Porhola, Karhunen, & Rainivaara, 2006). A 2014 survey by Workplace Bullying Institute shows that 27% of American employees were subjected to workplace bullying in recent years. Another 21% witnessed it. Workplace bullying adversely damages the work environment for some 65+ million American employees (Namie, 2014) and for workers all over the world (Chadwick & Travaglia, 2017).

Workplace bullying inflicts disturbing social, economic, physiological, and psychological effects on both victims and organizations (e.g., Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013; Einarsen et al., 2011; Hansen, Hogh, Garde, & Persson, 2014; Rai & Agarwal, 2016; Tehrani, 2012). Compared with non-victims, bullying victims typically suffer higher levels of stress, burnout, anxiety, sleep difficulties, resentment, depression and suicidal thoughts; report lower levels of job satisfaction, job performance, organizational identification, and morale; and indicate greater likelihood of absenteeism, early retirement, and turnover.

Previous studies point to a significant gap in theoretical understanding of how exposure to workplace bullying leads to negative effects or outcomes at the individual level. For example, in their meta-analytic reviews of different outcomes relating to the exposure to workplace bullying, Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) lamented that there are few theoretical models to account for the underlying process through which individuals come to experience workplace bullying and suffer from disturbing ill effects. The literature on workplace bullying lacks theoretical understanding, diagnosis, and management (Harvey, Treadway, Heames, & Duke, 2009). Perceptions and consequences of workplace bullying are relatively under-conceptualized and/or under-theorized, remaining largely descriptive in nature (Hershcovis, 2011; Hewett, Liefooghe, Visockaite, & Roongrerngsuke, 2018; Parzefall & Salin, 2010; Pheko, Monteiro, & Segopolo, 2017).
The current study explores the ways in which workplace bullying is linked to individual outcomes. In particular, following the individual stress-coping perspective, this study focuses on how workplace bullying experience is associated with affective and attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction and commitment (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). The following sections present a review of the literature on workplace bullying and the stress-coping theoretical framework (Section 2); hypotheses, research questions, and methodology (Section 3); results (Section 4); and discussion (Section 5).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature focuses on the definition of workplace bullying, employee exposure to workplace bullying, stress-coping theory framework, and job satisfaction and affective commitment.

2.1. Definition of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying occurs when one or more persons engage in socially hostile behaviors against another person in the organization (Einarsen, 2000). It is "the persistent exposure to interpersonal aggression and mistreatment from colleagues, superiors, or subordinates" (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009, p. 24). It epitomizes a potent form of destructive communication at work (Kassing & Waldron, 2014). Einarsen and his colleagues (2011) offered the following expansive definition of bullying behaviors and qualifying conditions:

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction, or process, the bullying behavior has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict. (p. 22)

Compared with other forms of aggressive behavior at work (e.g., social undermining, incivility, emotional abuse, violence, abusive supervision, and interpersonal conflicts), workplace bullying is highly intense, intentional, persistent, and frequent as negative behaviors are enacted between or among people with differential power (Einarsen et al., 2011; Hershcovich, 2011; Porhola et al., 2006). It is often an “insider” job; the perpetrator is typically one's boss, subordinate, or coworker. It is largely interpersonal transgression committed by
relational partners in the work environment (Einarsen et al., 2009). The offender typically has greater power than the victim. Such power ranges from "formal or social position, to age, job tenure, or gender" (Herschcovis, 2011, p. 503).

Empirical findings from one study suggest that peer or coworker bullying is most typical, constituting up to 71.5% of all bullying in Danish organizations (Ortega et al., 2009). Other studies have found that the majority of the bullies are leaders, managers, or supervisors in other cultural settings (Einarsen, 2000; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011; Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002). For example, it was found that 75% or more of the offenders in the United Kingdom are organizational leaders (Hoel, Cooper, & Fragher, 2001). Namie (2000) found that 81% of the bullies in the USA are bosses of the persons bullied. Indeed, power imbalance in the supervisory relationship fits the typical profile of a superior as the prime perpetrator (Lee, Lim, & Heath, 2017).

2.2. Types of Employee Exposure to Workplace Bullying

Employees face workplace bullying subjectively (Niedl, 1996) in two ways: prevalence (e.g., occurrence, frequency/recurrence, intensity/severity, and/or length/persistence) and patterns of bullying behaviors (e.g., work-related, personal-related, and physically intimidating). Prevalence concerns:

(a) whether an employee was personally subjected to socially negative behaviors or witnessed such behaviors (occurrence);
(b) if there was an occurrence of such behaviors (victim or witness), how often the negative behaviors took place, ranging from daily, weekly (2-3 times a week), monthly (2-3 times a month), now and then, to rarely/never (frequency);
(c) the severity of negative acts an individual reported (intensity); and/or
(d) how long socially negative behaviors were experienced, with somewhat varied minimum duration of exposure, from 2-3 months, 6 months, or a year (length) (Agervold, 2007; Einarsen et al., 2011; Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007; Samnani & Singh, 2012).

Einarsen and his colleagues (2009) further suggested that employees encounter three patterns of bullying behaviors: work-related, person-related, and physically intimidating. Work-related bullying involves manipulation of information and opinions, task deadline, monitoring of work, and workload. Person-related bullying includes humiliation, trivialization, gossips and rumors, being ignored, insults, offensive remarks, reminders of errors and mistakes, and
persistent criticism. Physically intimidating bullying consists of shouting, anger, finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking one's way, and threats of physical violence or actual abuse.

Another way to describe how employees suffer workplace bullying is the directness of aggressive behaviors. For example, Bjokqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) found that direct bullying takes place when the perpetrator attacks his or her victim verbally and/or physically face to face, whereas indirect bullying occurs when the victim is excluded from social events. Zapf (1999) showed that employees are subjected to five different types of bullying behavior:

(a) assigning difficult or impossible-to-handle tasks to his or her victim (e.g., tasks that may not be in the victim’s job description);
(b) making personal attacks on the victim’s life (e.g., making rude remarks or attacking the way he or she looks);
(c) humiliating the victim publicly (e.g., screaming, yelling or criticizing him or her in public);
(d) gossiping and spreading rumors about the victim; and
(e) excluding the victim from any social events purposely.

Workplace bullying takes place universally (Einarsen et al., 2011; Power et al., 2013; Chadwick & Travaglia, 2017). Its prevalence is verified globally (Power et al., 2013). Although workplace bullying was initially explored in European organizations (Einarsen, 2000), the recognition of this problem is spreading fast to other countries (Agverold, 2007). Workers worldwide are exposed and impacted adversely (Chadwick & Travaglia, 2017; Namie, 2014).

2.3. Description of the Stress-Coping Theory Framework

In an extensive review of the literature on individual consequences of workplace bullying/mobbing, Hogh, Mikkelsen, and Hansen (2011) suggested that workplace bullying operates as a potent social or occupational stressor that damagingly affects health and well-being, attitudes, and behaviors of the target employee. Drawing from a transactional view of stress (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, 1985), cognitive activation theory of stress (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004), and affective events theory (Glaso, Vie, Holmdal, & Einarsen, 2011), Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) proposed a theoretical model (Figure 1) to account for the underlying process through which exposure to workplace bullying leads to stress activation and finally various outcomes at the individual level of analysis.
The model assumes that workplace bullying is a stressor that demands a significant amount of time and efforts to manage and control (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Further, bullying behaviors are perceived as threatening the normal state or balance in the relationship between the offender and the target (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). When subjected to workplace bullying for an extended period, employees are alarmed and begin to appraise the situation critically (i.e., cognitive activation) and expend cognitive and behavioral energy to cope with or overcome such socially negative acts (Dehue, Bolman, Vollink, & Pouwelse, 2012; Porhola et al., 2006). When coping is successful, cognitive activation will subside, and negative consequences will be minimal. On the other hand, when coping is not successful with the unmanageable discrepancy between what one expects and what actually happens, cognitive activation will remain high and lead to negative consequences in affective states and attitudes (Glaso et al., 2011), physical health, and psychological well-being. Affective/attitudinal outcomes include: job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to leave. Health and well-being outcomes include mental
health problems, physical health problems, somatization, post-traumatic stress, burnout, sleep, strain, and core self-evaluations.

In other words, Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) asserted that individual health and affective/attitudinal outcomes of workplace bullying depend on the severity of bullying and individual's coping behaviors and other available coping resources (e.g., locus of control, self-efficacy, optimism, support); the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and various outcomes is moderated by coping and personality. Further, initial health and affective/attitudinal outcomes will then impact the secondary behavioral outcomes such as performance and absenteeism.

2.4. Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment

This study explores part of the proposed comprehensive theoretical framework, focusing on the key claim: coping activities moderate the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment. *Job satisfaction* refers to "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job's experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1304). It is "one's affective attachment to the job viewed either in its entirety (global satisfaction) or with regard to particular aspects (facet satisfaction; e.g., supervision)" (Tett & Meyer, 1993, p. 261). Overall job satisfaction is the general positive feelings of the employee toward his or her job.

*Affective commitment* is the emotional attachment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984). It concerns "the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). A number of studies, in particular, meta analyses (e.g., Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Lapierrre, Spector, & Leck, 2005; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012) and literature reviews (e.g., Hogh et al., 2011) consistently reported that workplace bullying negatively impact job satisfaction ($r = -0.22$ to $-0.41$) and (affective) commitment ($r = -0.19$ to $-0.30$). Recent findings showed a substantial negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction as well, $r = -0.44$ (Carroll & Lauzier, 2014) and $r = -0.55$ (Giorgi, Leon-Perez, & Arenas, 2015). Likewise, workplace bullying/mobbing was negatively correlated with overall job satisfaction ($r = -0.41$) and affective commitment ($r = -0.39$) (Ertureten, Cemalcilar, & Aycan, 2013). Therefore, the following hypotheses are advanced:

*H1*: Exposure to workplace bullying will negatively relate to job satisfaction.

*H2*: Exposure to workplace bullying will negatively relate to organizational commitment.
As noted earlier, the stress-coping theoretical perspective (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012) proposed that the failure to cope with the work stressor, workplace bullying, leads to the high sustained state of cognitive activation on the part of the victim, eventually triggering negative and long-term affective and attitudinal responses. Thus, coping behaviors are postulated to moderate the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and affective and attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment.

Coping typically refers to cognitive appraisal of (e.g., harm/loss, threat, challenge, or distress) and behavioral response to demands or stressors of specific kinds of situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). In the context of workplace bullying, coping is realized through strategic cognitive and behavioral endeavors that the target enacts to master or overcome repetitive and persistent socially negative acts (Dehue et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2017; Porhola et al., 2006). Kwan and her colleagues (2016) observed that surprisingly few studies have examined coping behaviors that the victims use to confront bullying. Nonetheless, several studies identified response and reaction patterns among bullying victims (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2010; Kwan et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Rayner, 1997; Van den Brande, Baillien, DeWitte, Elst, & Godderis, 2016; Zapf & Gross, 2001). For example, Van den Brande and her colleagues (2016) indicated that employees tend to engage in problem-focused and/or emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping (i.e., dealing with the problem in the stressor) includes reappraisal, confrontive, practical, direct, active, and social support. Emotion-focused coping (i.e., managing emotions relating to the stressor) includes wishful thinking, emotional, avoidance, self-care, recreation, and social support and suppression.

Modeling after Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (EVLN), Lee and his colleagues (2017) delineated a set of five specific coping strategies: exit, voice, acquiescence, neglect, and retribution. Exit is avoiding the conflict scene of workplace bullying (e.g., a temporary assignment at a new location, turning over, calling in sick, or taking time off). Voice strategy is to seek solutions by engaging in direct and indirect conversations with the offender, supervisor, and others. Quite similar to the notion of loyalty (Kwan et al., 2016), acquiescence strategy is yielding to demands from the bullying situation and hoping for the best. Neglect is do little mentally and otherwise (e.g., not caring about bullying, not being serious about it, ignoring it, and doing nothing). Retribution strategy is fending off with similar behaviors or becoming revengeful.
Few studies actually examine the extent to which the use of coping strategies directly impact job attitudes. Further, we have little knowledge of whether the use of coping strategies changes in the direction or strength of the negative consequences of workplace bullying on job satisfaction or affective commitment. In a study of Chinese employees, Jiang, Dong, and Wang (2012) reported that workplace bullying impacted job satisfaction negatively. Further, when employees used more "self-improvement" coping strategies, they had less decrease in job satisfaction; all other coping strategies (e.g., anti-bullying, problem-solving, and avoiding) did not moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. Among Pakistani doctors, Malik and Bano (2016) found that no individual coping strategy (e.g., problem-focused, active emotional, and avoidant emotional) moderated the negative relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction. These empirical findings, while limited, suggest that coping behaviors may play no role or a limited moderator role in the link from exposure to workplace bullying to job satisfaction and affective commitment. On the other hand, the stress-coping framework theorizes compellingly that the successful or effective use of coping strategies will diminish the harmful impacts of workplace bullying on employee attitudes and well-being (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Thus, the current study advanced the following research questions (RQs):

**RQ1:** To what extent does use of coping strategies affect job satisfaction and affective commitment?

**RQ2:** To what extent does use of coping strategies moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction?

**RQ3:** To what extent does use of coping strategies moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and affective commitment?

3. **METHODLOGY**

This section discusses the sample and procedure, measurement of variables, and data analysis for the current study.

3.1. **Sample and Procedure**

The sample for this study included citizens of Singapore and the U.S.A. who were research participants in a larger study. The two countries were chosen because of their contrasting cultural dimensions of power distance and individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 2001, 2011). Singapore is high power-distanced and highly collectivistic, whereas the U.S.A. is moderate power-distanced and highly individualistic. When effects stemming from cultural
differences are controlled, it is expected that findings (e.g., the moderating role of coping in the relationship between workplace bullying and job attitudes) will be generalizable internationally with a good deal of confidence.

Responses with patterned answers (e.g., all "2"s), partial completions (50% or less), and unspecified nationality were excluded, resulting in a sample (Table 1) of 648 participants – 58% Americans ($N = 376$) and 42% Singaporeans ($N = 272$).

### Table 1
Demographic Profile of Study Participants ($N = 648$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Singaporean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>European-American</td>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic-American</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed, or Other American</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singaporean Chinese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singaporean Indian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed or Other Singaporean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25 years old or less</td>
<td></td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 years old or older</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td></td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior employment experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Industry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and customer service</td>
<td></td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial services</td>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shipping &amp; transportation</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or 2-yr. college</td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree or doctorate</td>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A survey questionnaire was developed and pilot-tested with 29 full-time employees (15 Americans and 14 Singaporeans) and was then finalized into pencil-and-paper and web versions. The questionnaire was written in English for prospective participants from both nations. English is the first language in Singapore and is used in both work and non-work settings (Chew, 2007; Loh et al., 2010).

After the institutional review board at the university approved both versions of the questionnaire, we sent an email with a link to a survey website (SurveyMonkey.com) to instructors in communication and business schools at various universities and informal contacts in both Singapore and the U.S.A. They were asked to offer their students extra credit for forwarding the link to their friends, peers, family members, and others who currently work or previously worked. In order to gain as many varied workplace bullying experiences as possible (e.g., Niedl, 1996), we encouraged everyone with full-time, part-time, or previous employment to participate in the survey. Respondents had a chance to win a gift card as an incentive and as a token of appreciation for participation.

3.2. Measurement of Variables

Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009) was used to observe personal experience or exposure to workplace bullying. The NAQ-R consists of 22 items relating to bullying situations. Participants indicated the extent to which they experienced such bullying situations on a 5-point scale, ranging from “never = 1” to “daily = 5.” The higher score means a more frequent or greater exposure to workplace bullying situations. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for major variables by ethnicity/nationality (e.g., means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities).

Job satisfaction was measured by a single item. It tapped into global perception of job satisfaction on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “strongly disagree = 1” to “strongly agree = 5” on the statement: “Considering all things, I am satisfied with my job.”

A single-item measure is highly correlated with multi-item measures such as job descriptive index (JDI). It has been considered easier, flexible, and economical to use with greater face validity than multi-item measures and, thus, acceptable (Nagy, 2002; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Respondents were moderately satisfied with their jobs (M = 3.48, SD = 1.11).
Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Major Variables by Ethnicity:
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. WB Exp</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>-0.45**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Job Sat</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>-0.39**</td>
<td>0.66**</td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aff Com</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>(0.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Neglect</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>(0.78)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Acquies</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.62**</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>(0.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Voice</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Exit</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.52**</td>
<td>0.51**</td>
<td>(0.77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Retrib</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>(0.64)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. WB Exp</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-0.38**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Job Sat</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>0.69**</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aff Com</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.32**</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.14**</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Neglect</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.32**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>(0.86)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Acquies</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>(0.75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Voice</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>(0.71)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Exit</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>(0.71)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Retrib</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes.
WB Exp = Workplace bullying exposure  Job Sat = Job satisfaction
Aff Com = Affective commitment  Acquies = Acquiescence  Retrib = Retribution
*: p <0.05, **: <0.01. Two-tailed tests were conducted for all correlations.
The number of Americans ranged from 308 to 374 and Singaporeans from 222 to 272, respectively. Internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach’s alphas) appear in the parenthesis.

Following Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli (2001), we used six items to measure affective organizational commitment. The affective commitment items were observed on a 5-point Likert-type scale as well, ranging from “strongly disagree = 1” to “strongly agree = 5.” Sample questions included:

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(a) “I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization”;
(b) “Working at my organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me”;
and
(c) “I would be happy to work at my organization until I retire.”
Affective organizational commitment had a mean of 3.27 ($SD = 0.95$), with a reliability score of Cronbach’s alpha = 0.90.

The five strategic coping behaviors of exit, voice, acquiescence, neglect, and retribution (24 items) from Lee and his colleagues (2017) were used to observe use of coping strategies. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of coping behaviors with which they managed workplace bullying on a 5-point scale ranging from "never = 1" to "very often = 5." Internal consistency reliabilities of the measures were acceptable, ranging from 0.64 to 0.87 for both Singaporean and American samples.

3.3. Data Analysis
Several background demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, education, nationality/ethnicity) that may affect overall experiences of workplace bullying were controlled in order to exclude alternative accounts for the findings. Such caution is reasonable because women may be more at risk of being bullied, especially in the public sector, and may be less able to defend themselves than men when subjected to bullying (Zapf et al., 2011). Demographic factors such as age, gender and ethnicity/culture might impact bullying experiences at work (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Loh et al., 2010; Power et al., 2013; Wang & Hsieh, 2016) in ways that are theoretically and practically relevant. Information on control variables was collected as part of background demographics. After a preliminary analysis (i.e., removing outliers, mean-centering), hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test hypotheses and answer the research questions.

4. RESULTS
This study explored (a) the effects that exposure to workplace bullying has on job attitudes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment; (b) the extent to which use of coping strategies relates to job attitudes; and (c) the extent to which coping strategies moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and job attitudes. Table 2 presents the steps taken to conduct hierarchical multiple regression analyses and summary results.

Results indicate that the model accounts for 22% and 20% of the variance in job satisfaction and affective commitment, respectively. With the effect of demographic variables (ethnicity/nationality, education, gender, and age)
controlled in the first step, exposure to workplace bullying significantly and negatively affected both job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.34$) and affective commitment ($\beta = -0.29$). These results support hypotheses 1 and 2. In the third step, coping strategies entered the equation to answer RQ1. Results suggest that the acquiescence strategy significantly affected both job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.21$) and affective commitment ($\beta = -0.14$) negatively above and beyond the impact that workplace bullying has on them. On the other hand, the strategies of neglect ($\beta = 0.09$) and voice ($\beta = 0.09$) had positive relationships with job satisfaction. Exit had a positive relationship with affective commitment ($\beta = 0.10$), whereas retribution had a negative association with affective commitment ($\beta = -0.14$).

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Analyses Examining Moderation Effects of Coping Strategies on the Relationship between Workplace Bullying and Job Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Job Satisfaction</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Affective Commitment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>$F$ Change</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>$F$ Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>7.63**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>122.87**</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
<td>-0.34**</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>89.67***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>6.48**</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>5.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiescence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4</strong></td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB x Neglect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB x Acquies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB x Voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB x Exit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB x Retrib</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. WB = Workplace bullying Acquies = Acquiescence Retrib = Retribution
*: $p < 0.05$, **: $p < 0.01$ (for t-tests for standardized coefficient betas).

$N = 648$

The number of Americans ranged from 308 to 374 and Singaporeans from 222 to 272, respectively.
In the final step, the interaction terms (workplace bullying x coping strategies) were added to the equation to answer RQs 2 and 3. Result showed only one significant interaction effect for the exit strategy on the relationship between workplace bullying and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.19$). No other strategy significantly moderated the relationship of workplace bullying with either job satisfaction or affective commitment. Analyses revealed that, despite the presence of workplace bullying, people who use more exit coping strategy tend to report higher job satisfaction. Respondents of differential use of the exit strategy did not differ in job satisfaction level under the condition of low workplace bullying, but large differences were noted under conditions of high workplace bullying (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Interaction Effect of Workplace Bullying and Exit Coping Strategy on Job Satisfaction](image-url)
5. DISCUSSION

Workplace bullying is prevalent worldwide and has become a core agenda to the organization (Chadwick & Travaglia, 2017; Loh et al., 2010; Power et al., 2013). The present study examined part of the underlying mechanism through which workplace bullying influences such job attitudes as job satisfaction and affective commitment. It explored the degree to which coping strategies relate to job attitudes. Further, it investigated the moderating role of coping strategies in the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and job attitudes.

5.1. Workplace Bullying and Job Attitudes

As hypothesized, exposure to workplace bullying significantly and negatively related to both job satisfaction and affective commitment. As employees are subjected to more workplace bullying, they feel less satisfaction about the job and less affective commitment to the organization. These findings are consistent with earlier reports (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Ertureten et al., 2013; Giorgi et al., 2015; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Hogh et al., 2011). They are also consistent with expectations from the stress-coping perspective (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Workplace bullying is a severe form of work stressor that significantly weakens the victim's pleasurable or positive feelings toward the job and emotional attachment or identification with the organization.

5.2. Coping Strategies and Job Attitudes

Three coping strategies of neglect, acquiescence, and voice significantly affected the level of job satisfaction. As employees engaged in more neglect and voice, they reported greater job satisfaction. Acquiescence strategy veered in the opposite direction: more acquiescence, less job satisfaction. Similarly, three coping strategies of acquiescence, exit, and retribution impacted the level of affective commitment. Both acquiescence and retribution strategies had a negative relationship with affective commitment. However, exit strategy had a positive link to affective commitment.

Hsiung and Yang (2012) found that job satisfaction has an inverted U-shaped relationship with both aggressive voice and neglect behaviors at work. Thus, at least, up to a point, it is likely that job satisfaction has a positive relationship with both use of aggressive voice and neglect behaviors when faced with stressful situations at work. The relatively weak relationship in the current study ($\beta = 0.09$) may reflect such curvilinear relationships. Acquiescence strategy (i.e., yielding to the demands of the bully) had a negative association with both job satisfaction and affective commitment. This strategy amounts to the passive endurance of the
stressor with little control over the situation, which then may have impacted job satisfaction and affective commitment negatively. Greater enactment of retribution may sustain a heightened state of cognitive activation (being aware of and keep working on the stressor), reminding the victim of the stressor, a sense of inability, and/or the lack of social skills to fully control the bullying situation, thereby leading to less affective commitment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The exit coping strategy may help the victim escape from the source of workplace bullying to some extent and could be taken as support from the management to control the scene (i.e., quitting, escaping the scene of conflict, temporary assignment, leave), potentially leading to greater affective commitment to the organization. Social support helps people manage stress such as workplace bullying effectively (Van den Brande et al., 2016).

5.3. Coping Strategies as Moderators

This study found that exit strategy is a moderator in the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and job satisfaction. Workplace bullying negatively relates to job satisfaction linearly. When workplace bullying is minimal, regardless of use of the exit coping strategy, all employees have similarly high job satisfaction. However, as exposure to workplace bullying increases, job satisfaction levels become divergent among employees with differential use of exit coping strategy; greater users of exit coping behaviors reported less decrease in job satisfaction. This pattern is most pronounced when exposure to workplace bullying is the highest, suggesting that exit coping behaviors may serve as the "bumping effect" (i.e., slows down the speed of decrease in job satisfaction).

Except for the exit coping strategy, though, no other coping strategy was found to play a moderator role in the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and job attitudes. Against the theoretical expectation of the stress-coping framework (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012), the current findings are largely consistent with earlier empirical data showing that coping strategies have little or no moderator role in other cultural contexts (Jiang et al., 2012; Malik & Bano, 2016). Thus, the role of coping strategies as moderators appears to be limited.

5.4. Implications

This study is one of the first to examine the theoretical claims in the stress-coping framework (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). The current findings reconfirm the postulated nexus between workplace bullying and job attitudes (i.e., more exposure to workplace bullying, worse job satisfaction and affective commitment). However, results do not fully support the claim that coping strategies will moderate
the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and job attitudes. The stress-coping framework argued that the success or failure of coping strategies will explain the link between workplace bullying and various outcomes. However, it did not offer specific ways to assess the success or failure of coping behaviors. The framework needs to include a clear way to detect the degree to which coping behaviors resolve the stressor (workplace bullying) in a satisfactory manner. Further, the framework needs to guide types of coping behaviors or strategies envisioned as moderators. In other words, the way that coping behaviors are operationalized may account for the lack of support in the current study. Consistent with the transactional theory of stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), for example, coping behaviors could be grouped into problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies and be explored for their moderating roles (Hewett et al., 2018).

Another important contribution of this study is the findings that multiple coping strategies have direct implications for job attitudes. For example, acquiescence strategy has negative influence on both job satisfaction and affective commitment. Neglect and voice strategies can predict job satisfaction, and exit and retribution affective commitment, respectively. These findings should help revise the stress-coping framework by allowing a direct path from coping to outcomes, not just constraining coping behaviors into the moderator role (see Figure 1). Coping behaviors may have expansive roles in the stress-coping framework.

To mitigate the destructive impact of workplace bullying on job attitudes, the organization should train and coach their employees on how to handle the stressor (workplace bullying). In particular, voice, exit/escape, and neglect strategies can offer employees space and time to regroup and help maintain acceptable levels of job satisfaction and affective commitment. Trainers, counselors, and other coaches should advise against using acquiescence behaviors (yielding to demands from the bully). Acquiescence is only likely to exacerbate job attitudes.

5.5. Limitations

This study has several limitations. Data were collected via self-reports that may include response biases such as social desirability, false positives, and common method bias. It is recommended that, to eliminate such response biases, future studies use multiple supplementary sources of data collection for corroboration (e.g., interviews and focus groups) and present independent and dependent variables far apart in the survey questionnaire in a way that immediate previous responses do not affect immediate next responses. Another limitation is
that the current research design is cross-sectional, which cannot ascertain the causality between any variables. A longitudinal tracking of exposure to workplace bullying and coping behaviors would be beneficial to establish a firm causal relationship between them. The third limitation is that the current study used combined responses from Singaporean and American subjects, thus raising issues relating to cultural differences in workplace bullying. In the study, however, we controlled the effect associated with ethnicity/nationality for the analyses.

5.6. Conclusions

Workplace bullying is a global concern. It has become a core agenda of the organization (Chadwick & Travaglia, 2017; Loh et al., 2010; Power et al., 2013). It affects employee attitudes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment to the organization. Coping strategies have limited or no moderating role in the relationship between exposure to workplace bullying and employee attitudes. On the other hand, coping strategies directly influence employee attitudes above and beyond workplace bullying exposure. In this study, three coping strategies (neglect, acquiescence, and voice) were found to significantly affect the level of job satisfaction. As employees engaged in more neglect and voice, they reported greater job satisfaction. Acquiescence strategy moved in the opposite direction: more acquiescence, less job satisfaction. Similarly, three coping strategies (acquiescence, exit, and retribution) were found to impact the level of affective commitment. Both acquiescence and retribution strategies had a negative relationship with affective commitment. However, exit strategy had a positive link to affective commitment.

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The Moderating Role of Coping Strategies


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