

Workplace Bullying and Work Engagement: A Self-Determination Model

Journal of Interpersonal Violence
2020, Vol. 35(21-22) 4686–4708
© The Author(s) 2017

Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0886260517717492
journals.sagepub.com/home/jiv



Alan K. Goodboy,¹ Matthew M. Martin,¹
and San Bolkan²

Abstract

This study modeled motivational mechanisms that explain the negative effects of workplace bullying on work engagement. Guided by self-determination theory, workplace bullying was predicted to decrease worker engagement indirectly, due to the denial of employees' basic psychological needs and their intrinsic motivation to work. From a sample of 243 full-time employees, serial multiple mediation models revealed that the indirect relationships between workplace bullying and work engagement (i.e., vigor, dedication, absorption) were serially mediated by basic psychological needs and intrinsic motivation to work. In support of self-determination theory, this study revealed that workplace bullying indirectly disengages employees from their work by denying them of their autonomy and relatedness needs and thwarting their motivation to perform work in a fulfilling way.

Keywords

workplace bullying, self-determination, intrinsic motivation to work, worker engagement

¹West Virginia University, Morgantown, USA

²California State University, Long Beach, USA

Corresponding Author:

Alan K. Goodboy, West Virginia University, 108 Armstrong Hall, P.O. Box 6293, Morgantown, WV 26506, USA.

Email: agoodboy@mail.wvu.edu

Ideally, and perhaps universally, organizations prefer motivated and dedicated employees who strive to do their best work and make a prosocial difference within their organization (Grant, 2007). Likewise, organizations want employees to maintain their well-being through positive communicative acts such as empathy, social support, conflict management, and teamwork (Miller, Ellis, Zook, & Lyles, 1990; Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988) in order to identify with and remain committed to their organization (Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong, & Joustra, 2007; Guzley, 1992; Trombetta & Rogers, 1988). For some organizations, however, these idealistic preferences remain impractical if employees engage in workplace bullying, which affects nearly half of American employees during their career (Lutgen-Sandvik & Fletcher, 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007). Indeed, today's workplace can be stressful environment that places considerable strain on employees, who often react by bullying other employees (Goodboy, Martin, Knight, & Long, 2017; Leon-Perez, Notelaers, Arenas, Munduate, & Medina, 2014).

Workplace bullying is defined as

repeated actions and practices that are directed against one or more workers; that are unwanted by the victim; that may be carried out deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offence, and distress; and that may interfere with work performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment. (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011, p. 9)

Workplace bullying can take the form of repeated negative acts including excessive monitoring of work, withholding information that can affect job performance, and threats of (or actual) violence and physical abuse; many of these bullying acts involve negative forms of communication such as spreading gossip and rumors, outright humiliation, and being purposely ignored (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). As Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) noted, "communication is not only central in the perpetration of [workplace] bullying but also key to the way targets make sense of it" (p. 17).

Workplace bullying causes dire personal consequences to the employees who are targeted, as it affects their stress, sleep, and physical and mental health (Hogh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2011; Kivimäki et al. 2003; Leon-Perez et al., 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). Organizations would be well advised to address workplace bullying because it causes employee absenteeism, turnover, and a substantial loss of productivity and profits (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010; Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2011; Leymann, 1990; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). In fact, the financial costs for an organization for each case of workplace bullying are estimated to be in the tens of thousands of dollars annually, collectively costing organizations billions of dollars at a

national level (Hoel et al., 2011). Because of the aforementioned psychological costs to victims of the bullying and financial costs to organizations, it is important to understand the process through which workplace bullying effects employees' well-being, and subsequently, engagement in their work. Research already shows that a negative relationship exists between workplace bullying and work engagement (Rodríguez-Muñoz, Baillien, De Witte, Moreno-Jiménez, & Pastor, 2009). However, it is likely that workplace bullying does not have a direct effect on worker engagement; rather, theoretical reasoning might offer explanations for indirect effects of workplace bullying that lead employees to be disengaged from their work. Self-determination theory (SDT) is well suited to explain the potential indirect mechanisms through which workplace bullying impacts work (dis)engagement.

Self-Determination, Motivation, and Engagement at Work

Employees who report being fully engaged in their work possess the intrinsic motivation to do so (Meyer, 2014). For over 30 years, SDT has explained why individuals enact intrinsically motivated behavior or, in other words, “[do] something for its own sake, out of interest and enjoyment” (Gagné & Deci, 2005, p. 1). Ryan and Deci (2000) argued that “perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation, the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn” (p. 70). According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002), intrinsic motivation is fostered by the satisfaction or fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: the need for autonomy (i.e., perceiving to be the original source of one’s own volitional behavior), competence (i.e., being effective with required tasks and experiencing opportunities to display one’s capabilities), and relatedness (i.e., forming personal connections with others in social contexts).

When these three basic psychological needs are met (i.e., need satisfaction or fulfillment is achieved), individuals are motivated to perform behavior intrinsically, or in other words, because they enjoy the behavior and find it to be personally fulfilling (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT and its predictions have been applied successfully to organizational research (Baard, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2014; Gagné & Deci, 2005) to explain why employees become intrinsically motivated and fully engaged in their work (Meyer, 2014). In fact, scholars have already used SDT to explain effects of workplace bullying. For instance, Aquino, Grover, Bradfield, and Allen (1999) found that employees who are bullied at work are not self-determined because they have low autonomy. Therefore, in accordance with SDT and extant scholarship, the first hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 1: The negative relationship between workplace bullying and intrinsic motivation to work will be mediated by the denial of basic psychological needs at work (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness).

SDT has also been used to explain the process behind work engagement. Work engagement is “a positive, work-related state of well-being or fulfillment characterized by a high level of energy and strong identification with one’s work” (Bakker & Leiter, 2010, p. 182). Schaufeli, Bakker, and colleagues (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzáles-Romá, & Bakker, 2002) consider work engagement to consist of three dimensions: vigor (i.e., high levels of mental energy and resilience to hard work), dedication (i.e., high involvement in work because of significance and pride), and absorption (i.e., high concentration and engrossment in work). In line with these dimensions, work engagement can be viewed as a “positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being that can be seen as the antipode of job burnout” (Bakker et al., 2008, pp. 189-190) and is measured as three distinct dimensions (Mills, Culbertson, & Fullagar, 2012). SDT has been successfully applied to work engagement research. For instance, Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, and Lens (2008) showed that basic psychological need satisfaction serves as a mediator between job demands and work engagement. Likewise, Schreurs, van Emmerick, Van den Broeck, and Guenter (2014) found that employee psychological need satisfaction is positively associated with work engagement. Most importantly, two studies by Trépanier, Fernet, and Austin (2013, 2015) revealed that the negative relationship between workplace bullying and work engagement is mediated by the unsatisfied needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Although these studies have successfully modeled SDT predictions and have revealed that the denial of basic psychological needs adequately explains why employees are disengaged at work, it is surprising, given the theoretical predictions of SDT that ultimately explain intrinsic motivation, that employee intrinsic motivation has not been modeled as an antecedent to work engagement. To our knowledge, a full SDT serial mediation model (i.e., a model incorporating mediation basic psychological needs and intrinsic motivation as sequenced mediators) has not been tested to explain the indirect relationship between workplace bullying and worker (dis)engagement. In a conceptual model, Meyer (2014) noted that employees become fully engaged in their work when they experience need satisfaction and, in turn, become intrinsically motivated. In line with Meyer’s (2014) engagement model, tested in the context of workplace bullying, a serial multiple mediation model is proposed (see Figure 1).

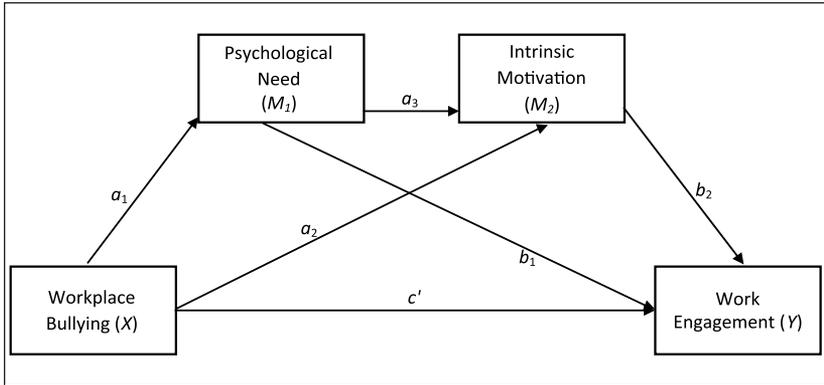


Figure 1. Self-determination models of serial multiple mediation with basic psychological needs and intrinsic motivation as proposed mediators of workplace bullying effects on work engagement.

Note. Serial multiple mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 6.

Guided by SDT, the serial mediation hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 2: The relationships between workplace bullying and work engagement (i.e., vigor, dedication, absorption) will be serially mediated by psychological need fulfillment (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness), and subsequently, intrinsic motivation to work.

Method

Participants

Participants were 243 full-time employees working 35 hr or more per week, who were recruited using network sampling via social media. Online survey links (Qualtrics) were posted via our social media accounts, encouraging employees who worked full-time to complete an anonymous survey. We encouraged participants who completed the survey to share this link on their own social media for network sampling. Approximately 58% ($n = 139$) of participants worked in managerial and professional jobs (e.g., reporting job titles such as Engineering Manager, Associate Dean of Outreach, Director of Supply Management, Optometrist, Attorney); 24% ($n = 59$) in technical, sales, and administrative support (e.g., Sales Representative, Senior Regional Recruiter, Marketing Associate, Computer Systems Specialist); 10% ($n = 24$) in service occupations (e.g., Child Development Specialist, Server, Probation

Officer); 4% ($n = 10$) in precision production, craft, and repair (e.g., Engineered Lumber Specialist, Auto Glass Technician, Fleet Maintenance Mechanic); and 3% ($n = 7$) in fabricators, operators, and labor (e.g., Fork Lift Operator, Plant Technician, Mixer Operator, Foreman), with 4 participants electing not to report their job field or job title. The sample consisted of 59 male and 184 female employees whose ages ranged from 21 to 63 years ($M = 34.06$ years, $SD = 9.93$). Participants reported working at their current organization from less than 1 year to 44 years ($M = 6.49$ years, $SD = 6.75$) and earned between \$12,000 and \$280,000 per year ($M = \$63,992$, $SD = \$40,547$). The race of the participants included White/Caucasian ($n = 225$), Asian American ($n = 5$), Black/African American ($n = 5$), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 54$), Pacific Islander ($n = 1$), and multiracial ($n = 3$).

Procedures/Measurement

Institutional review board approval was secured and an online survey administered using a recruitment script to solicit voluntary participation from full-time employees. Participants completed an anonymous questionnaire that included the following measurement instruments:

Workplace bullying. The Negative Acts Questionnaire–Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009) is a 22-item self-report instrument that measures to what extent targets are exposed to acts of workplace bullying (e.g., “being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm”) over the last 6 months. Responses were solicited on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). The instrument was reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha of .90 ($M = 1.6$, $SD = .5$, Skewness = 1.1). Only 18% of the sample reported an average score of 2.0 (responding on average with being bullied “now and then” in the past 6 months across the 22 items) or greater (with a mean 3.0+ which reflects being bullied “monthly” on average across the 22 items).

Basic psychological needs. The Work-Related Basic Need Satisfaction scale (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens, & Lens, 2010) is a 16-item instrument that uses three subscales to capture employee autonomy (six items; e.g., “I feel free to do my job the way I think it could be done best”), competence (four items; e.g., “I have the feeling that I can even accomplish the most difficult tasks at work”), and relatedness (six items; e.g., “At work, I feel part of a group”) as proposed by SDT. Responses were solicited on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alphas for the subscales were autonomy ($\alpha = .85$; $M = 3.2$, $SD = .9$), competence ($\alpha = .89$; $M = 4.3$, $SD = .7$), and relatedness ($\alpha = .89$; $M = 3.7$, $SD = .9$).

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Matrix.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Workplace Bullying	—							
Self-Determination								
2. Autonomy	-.68	—						
3. Competence	-.14	.21	—					
4. Relatedness	-.47	.51	.29	—				
5. Intrinsic Motivation	-.37	.55	.26	.47	—			
Work Engagement								
6. Vigor	-.40	.60	.32	.50	.71	—		
7. Dedication	-.23	.40	.34	.37	.64	.71	—	
8. Absorption	-.38	.62	.26	.47	.61	.77	.67	—

Note. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$ except $r = -.14$ at $p < .05$.

Intrinsic motivation. The Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (WEIMS; Tremblay, Blanchard, Taylor, Pelletier, & Villeneuve, 2009) is an 18-item instrument that measures motivation to work as theorized by SDT (i.e., intrinsic motivation, different types of extrinsic motivation, and amotivation). Only the items measuring intrinsic motivation were used (three items; e.g., “I work at my current organization because I derive much pleasure from learning new things”). Responses were solicited on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The instrument was reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha of .91 ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.0$).

Work engagement. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) is a nine-item instrument that measures work engagement as a positive work-related state of fulfillment through three subscales of vigor (three items; e.g., “at work, I feel bursting with energy”), dedication (three items; e.g., “I am proud of the work I do”), and absorption (three items; e.g., “I am immersed in my job”). Responses were solicited on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Cronbach’s alphas for the subscales were vigor ($\alpha = .79$; $M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.1$), dedication ($\alpha = .85$; $M = 5.0$, $SD = 1.3$), and absorption ($\alpha = .72$; $M = 4.9$, $SD = 1.1$).

Results

Before testing the mediation hypotheses, Pearson correlations between all variables were computed and reported in Table 1.

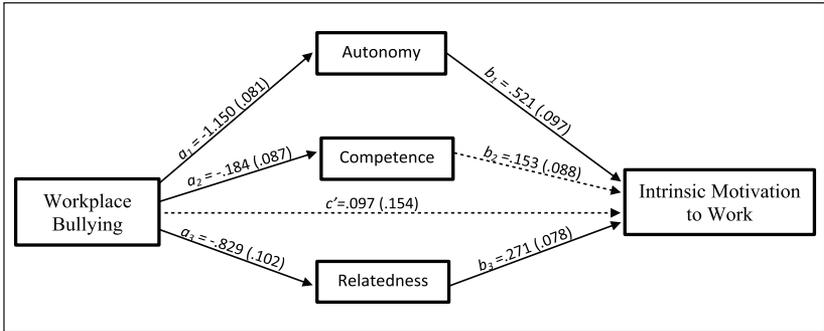


Figure 2. Parallel multiple mediation model.

Note. Self-determination theory model with students’ basic psychological needs simultaneously mediating the association between workplace bullying and intrinsic motivation to work. Paths are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Solid paths are significant ($p < .05$).

Parallel Multiple Mediation Model

To test H1, a parallel multiple mediation model was estimated using ordinary least squares path analysis to determine the effect of workplace bullying on intrinsic motivation through the denial of employees basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness). This model was calculated using PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) to estimate the three indirect effects in parallel to control for the unique variance explained by each mediator; 50,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples were used for the 95% confidence interval (CI). The model (see Figure 2 for path coefficients) revealed that workplace bullying produced a negative effect on intrinsic motivation to work through the denial of basic psychological needs.

The total indirect effect was -0.852 (95% CI: $[-1.102, -0.619]$) with a completely standardized total indirect effect of -0.417 (95% CI: $[-0.524, -0.312]$). Indirect effects and bootstrapped CIs were as follows: autonomy ($ab = -0.599$, 95% CI: $[-0.859, -0.349]$; $ab_{cs} = -0.293$), competence ($ab = -0.028$, 95% CI: $[-0.098, .002]$; $ab_{cs} = -0.014$), relatedness ($ab = -0.225$, 95% CI: $[-0.424, -0.083]$; $ab_{cs} = -0.110$). The bootstrapped CIs were entirely below zero for autonomy and relatedness suggesting parallel mediation from these needs, but competence did not produce an indirect effect as the CI included zero. There was no evidence of a direct effect of workplace bullying on intrinsic motivation to work ($c' = 0.097$, $p = .53$). In other words, employees’ were less intrinsically motivated to work when they were bullied because they lacked autonomy and relatedness at work (controlling for each other).

Serial Multiple Mediation Models

Because competence did not serve as a parallel mediator in hypothesis one, it was excluded from the serial multiple mediation model tests for hypothesis two. Employee autonomy and relatedness were retained as mediators using PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) to estimate the serial indirect effects proposed in Figure 1; 50,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples were used again for the 95% bootstrapped CI.

Vigor

The data provided evidence for serial mediation with autonomy and intrinsic motivation serving as mediators ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) between workplace bullying and employee vigor. See Table 2 for path coefficients and model summary statistics that are visually represented in Figure 1.

Workplace bullying decreased employee vigor serially through decreased autonomy, and subsequently, intrinsic motivation to work ($a_1a_3b_2 = -.328$, 95% CI: $[-.491, -.206]$; $a_1a_3b_{2cs} = -.146$). Moreover, an indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$) was revealed for workplace bullying on employee vigor through decreased autonomy ($a_1b_1 = -.671$, 95% CI: $[-.926, -.439]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.440$), but there was no indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) through intrinsic motivation ($a_2b_2 = .009$, 95% CI: $[-.140, .145]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = .004$). The total indirect effect was $-.990$ (95% CI: $[-1.264, -.751]$) with a completely standardized total indirect effect of $-.440$. There was no evidence of a direct effect ($c' = .117$, $p = .49$).

The data provided evidence for serial mediation with relatedness and intrinsic motivation serving as mediators ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) between workplace bullying and employee vigor. See Table 3 for path coefficients and model summary statistics.

Workplace bullying decreased employee vigor serially through decreased relatedness, and subsequently, intrinsic motivation to work ($a_1a_3b_2 = -.180$, 95% CI: $[-.303, -.100]$; $a_1a_3b_{2cs} = -.080$). Moreover, an indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$) was revealed for workplace bullying on employee dedication through decreased relatedness ($a_1b_1 = -.189$, 95% CI: $[-.323, -.085]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.096$), and an indirect effect was also revealed ($X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) through intrinsic motivation ($a_2b_2 = -.204$, 95% CI: $[-.390, -.057]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.091$). The total indirect effect was $-.599$ (95% CI: $[-.835, -.410]$) with a completely standardized total indirect effect of $-.267$. There was also evidence of a direct effect ($c' = -.275$, $p = .04$).

Dedication

The data provided evidence for serial mediation with autonomy and intrinsic motivation serving as mediators ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) between workplace

Table 2. Serial Multiple Mediation Model.

Antecedent	Consequent								
	M ₁ (Autonomy)			M ₂ (Intrinsic Motivation)			Y (Vigor)		
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
X (Workplace Bullying)	a ₁			a ₁			c'		
M ₁ (Autonomy)	—	.134	<.001	.022	.157	.888	b ₁	.117	.148
M ₂ (Intrinsic Motivation)	—	—	—	.676	.093	<.001	b ₂	.582	.097
Constant	i _{M1}	5.066	<.001	—	—	—	i _y	.421	.062
				i _{M2}	1.420	.510		.616	.487
		R ² = .470			R ² = .151				R ² = .478
		F(1, 230) = 203.746, p < .001			F(2, 229) = 21.701, p < .001				F(3, 228) = 69.695, p < .001

Table 3. Serial Multiple Mediation Model.

Antecedent	Consequent										
	M_1 (Relatedness)			M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)			Y (Vigor)				
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p		
X (Workplace Bullying)	a_1	.102	<.001	a_1	.134	.003	c'	-.275	.130	.036	
M_1 (Relatedness)	—	—	—	a_3	.078	<.001	b_1	.261	.078	.001	
M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)	—	—	—	—	—	—	b_2	.506	.063	<.001	
Constant	i_{M1}	4.987	<.001	i_{M2}	2.695	<.001	i_Y	1.855	.445	<.001	
		$R^2 = .222$			$R^2 = .241$			$R^2 = .423$			
		$F(1, 229) = 65.507, p < .001$				$F(2, 228) = 36.185, p < .001$				$F(3, 227) = 55.398, p < .001$	

bullying and employee dedication. See Table 4 for path coefficients and model summary statistics.

Workplace bullying decreased employee dedication serially through decreased autonomy, and subsequently, intrinsic motivation to work ($a_1a_3b_2 = -.498$, 95% CI: $[-.727, -.318]$; $a_1a_3b_{2cs} = -.244$). Moreover, an indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$) was revealed for workplace bullying on employee dedication through decreased autonomy ($a_1b_1 = -.606$, 95% CI: $[-.888, -.346]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.437$), but there was no indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) through intrinsic motivation ($a_2b_2 = .017$, 95% CI: $[-.196, .226]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.437$). The total indirect effect was -1.087 (95% CI: $[-1.375, -.811]$) with a completely standardized total indirect effect of $-.437$. There was no evidence of a direct effect ($c' = .103$, $p = .49$).

The data provided evidence for serial mediation with relatedness and intrinsic motivation serving as mediators ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) between workplace bullying and employee dedication. See Table 5 for path coefficients and model summary statistics.

Workplace bullying decreased employee dedication serially through decreased relatedness, and subsequently, intrinsic motivation to work ($a_1a_3b_2 = -.256$, 95% CI: $[-.422, -.142]$; $a_1a_3b_{2cs} = -.103$). Moreover, an indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$) was revealed for workplace bullying on employee dedication through decreased relatedness ($a_1b_1 = -.207$, 95% CI: $[-.380, -.070]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.083$), and an indirect effect was also revealed ($X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) through intrinsic motivation ($a_2b_2 = -.283$, 95% CI: $[-.518, -.076]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.114$). The total indirect effect was $-.745$ (95% CI: $[-1.017, -.511]$) with a completely standardized total indirect effect of $-.300$. There was no evidence of a direct effect ($c' = -.240$, $p = .07$).

Absorption

The data provided evidence for serial mediation with autonomy and intrinsic motivation serving as mediators ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) between workplace bullying and employee absorption. See Table 6 for path coefficients and model summary statistics.

Workplace bullying decreased employee absorption serially through decreased autonomy, and subsequently, intrinsic motivation to work ($a_1a_3b_2 = -.484$, 95% CI: $[-.686, -.325]$; $a_1a_3b_{2cs} = -.220$). However, an indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$) was not discovered for workplace bullying on employee dedication through decreased autonomy ($a_1b_1 = -.236$, 95% CI: $[-.489, .006]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = -.108$) nor was an indirect effect found ($X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) through intrinsic motivation ($a_2b_2 = .014$, 95% CI: $[-.207, .209]$; $a_1b_{1cs} = .006$). The total indirect effect was $-.706$ (95% CI: $[-.992, -.440]$) with a completely

Table 4. Serial Multiple Mediation Model.

Antecedent	Consequent												
	M_1 (Autonomy)				M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)				Y (Dedication)				
	Coefficient	SE	p		Coefficient	SE	p		Coefficient	SE	p		
X (Workplace Bullying)	a_1	-.154	.081	<.001	a_1	.027	.157	.863	c'	.103	.148	.486	
M_1 (Autonomy)		—	—	—	a_3	.679	.094	<.001	b_1	.525	.098	<.001	
M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	b_2	.635	.062	<.001	
Constant	i_{M1}	5.069	.134	<.001	i_{M2}	1.397	.511	.007	i_y	.822	.489	.094	
		$R^2 = .471$			$R^2 = .297$			$R^2 = .574$					
		$F(1, 229) = 203.671, p < .001$				$F(2, 228) = 48.211, p < .001$				$F(3, 227) = 101.731, p < .001$			

Table 5. Serial Multiple Mediation Model.

Antecedent	Consequent											
	M_1 (Relatedness)					M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)					Y (Dedication)	
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	p	
X (Workplace Bullying)	a_1		<.001	a_1		.004	c'		-.240	.130	.066	
M_1 (Relatedness)		.102	—	a_3		<.001	b_1		.250	.077	.002	
M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)		—	—			—	b_2		.710	.063	<.001	
Constant	i_{M1}	4.993	<.001	i_{M2}	2.668	.432	i_Y	1.877	.441	<.001	<.001	
		$R^2 = .224$			$R^2 = .243$			$R^2 = .539$				
		$F(1, 228) = 65.807, p < .001$			$F(2, 227) = 36.329, p < .001$			$F(3, 226) = 88.053, p < .001$				

Table 6. Serial Multiple Mediation Model.

Antecedent	Consequent											
	M_1 (Autonomy)					M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)					Y (Absorption)	
	Coefficient	SE	p			Coefficient	SE	p			Coefficient	SE
X (Workplace Bullying)	a_1	-.153	.081	<.001	a_1	.022	.157	.888	c'	.215	.153	.162
M_1 (Autonomy)		—	—	—	a_3	.676	.093	<.001	b_1	.205	.101	.043
M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)		—	—	—		—	—	—	b_2	.621	.064	<.001
Constant	i_{M1}	5.066	.134	<.001	i_{M2}	1.420	.511	.006	i_y	1.605	.505	.002
		$R^2 = .471$				$R^2 = .296$				$R^2 = .412$		
		$F(1, 230) = 203.746, p < .001$				$F(2, 229) = 48.134, p < .001$				$F(3, 228) = 53.147, p < .001$		

standardized total indirect effect of $-.322$. There was no evidence of a direct effect ($c' = .215, p = .16$).

The data provided evidence for serial mediation with relatedness and intrinsic motivation serving as mediators ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) between workplace bullying and employee absorption. See Table 7 for path coefficients and model summary statistics.

Workplace bullying decreased employee absorption serially through decreased relatedness, and subsequently, intrinsic motivation to work ($a_1 a_3 b_2 = -.224, 95\% \text{ CI: } [-.375, -.124]; a_1 a_3 b_{2cs} = -.103$). An indirect effect ($X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$) was not revealed for workplace bullying on employee absorption through decreased relatedness ($a_1 b_1 = -.123, 95\% \text{ CI: } [-.288, .015]; a_1 b_{1cs} = -.056$), but an indirect effect was revealed ($X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$) through intrinsic motivation ($a_2 b_2 = -.254, 95\% \text{ CI: } [-.470, -.073]; a_1 b_{1cs} = -.116$). The total indirect effect was $-.600$ ($95\% \text{ CI: } [-.852, -.397]$) with a completely standardized total indirect effect of $-.275$. There was no evidence of a direct effect ($c' = .107, p = .41$).

Discussion

This study combined previous SDT research findings (Schreurs et al., 2014; Trépanier et al., 2013, 2015; Van den Broeck et al., 2008) to predict that workplace bullying denies employees of their basic psychological needs, and when employees are denied of these needs, they are less intrinsically motivated to work and become less engaged in their work. By integrating these findings into one comprehensive model, this study estimated a serial indirect effect to explain the process by which workplace bullying results in work disengagement. Direct effects of workplace bullying on work engagement were unsupported in the serial mediation models, suggesting that the workplace bullying/work engagement relationship is modeled better as a process.

These findings support a long history of SDT research showing that employees require intrinsic need satisfaction to be engaged in their work (Deci et al., 2001); workplace bullying stifles these needs and results in decreased intrinsic motivation to work. However, of the three basic psychological needs purported by SDT, only employee autonomy and relatedness served as mediators and employee competence did not. Employees who lack autonomy are not free to be themselves and they cannot conduct their work the way they want to; it is likely that the controlling behaviors that constitute workplace bullying (e.g., excessive monitoring of work, withholding important information, receiving an unmanageable workload) make workers feel restricted and regulated.

Table 7. Serial Multiple Mediation Model.

Antecedent	Consequent								
	M_1 (Relatedness)			M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)			Y (Absorption)		
	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p	Coefficient	SE	p
X (Workplace Bullying)	a_1			a_1			c'		
M_1 (Relatedness)	-.827	.102	<.001	-.403	.134	.003	b_1	.107	.129
M_2 (Intrinsic Motivation)	—	—	—	.430	.077	<.001	b_2	.149	.077
Constant	i_{M1}			i_{M2}			i_Y	.630	.062
	4.987	.170	<.001	2.695	.430	<.001		1.856	.438
	$R^2 = .222$			$R^2 = .241$			$R^2 = .406$		
	$F(1, 229) = 65.507, p < .001$			$F(2, 228) = 36.185, p < .001$			$F(3, 227) = 51.822, p < .001$		

The relationship-damaging behaviors that constitute workplace bullying (e.g., being ignored or ostracized, excessive teasing, being the target of rumors and gossip) make it very difficult to fulfill the relatedness need at work as well. Bullied employees often report feeling a lack of support among coworkers and an inability to related to others (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006). Contrary to a finding by Trépanier et al. (2013), why did competence not emerge as a serial mediator between workplace bullying and work engagement? Statistically speaking, this can be explained because the correlation between workplace bullying and competence was weak ($-.14$) and not significant. This lack of significant association might be an issue of sample-specific variation within our sample as Trépanier et al. found a significant association in a sample of Canadian nurses and our sample requested a broader assessment across many career types.

Or perhaps the competence dimension of basic psychological needs is less affected by workplace bullying because some organizations value a culture that promotes aggressive and competitive behaviors between employees, yet expect employees to be competent in their job despite how they are treated. As Salin and Hoel (2011) noted, organizations with high power structures, formal reward systems, and high internal competition among workers promote workplace bullying. Organizations that promote such a culture typically have employees who perform and display competence in their job, yet they mistreat others to “get ahead” and meet organizational goals and objectives (Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009; Salin & Hoel, 2011), and victims of bullying might actually be quite competent in their jobs. An organization that allows employee mistreatment but values employee competence through incentives likely promotes extrinsic motivation for work accomplishments (Baard, 2002), rather than intrinsic motivation (as measured in our study), which is a major limitation.

There are other limitations to our study design. Of course, our data are correlational and the mediation predictions were guided by theory (SDT) without time precedence, so causal assumptions are only based on covariation among the modeled variables. Although it is unethical to manipulate workplace bullying in an experimental design to establish time precedence, it would be advantageous to observe this covariation over time. Another limitation to this study is that the indirect effects of workplace bullying may be conditional upon the types of workplace bullying that occur. We used a popular measurement instrument to assess workplace bullying in general, but it is possible that specific negative acts thwart employee’s psychological needs more than others. For example, employee exclusion might affect employee relatedness more, whereas excessive monitoring of work might deprive employees of their autonomy. That said, a micro-level behavioral assessment

of specific workplace bullying acts might be warranted instead of the global assessment we used. A final limitation is that our sample consisted of predominantly White participants.

Future researchers should consider incorporating additional theoretical frames to understand how bullying affects employees at work. Affective events theory, for instance, has been successfully applied to workplace bullying research by examining employee's emotional experiences as a mediator between bullying and work outcomes (Glas, Vie, Holmdal, & Einarsen, 2011). Using theory to test models of workplace bullying will help researchers move beyond simple bivariate correlations between workplace bullying and psychological and/or organizational outcomes, and will allow for the causal order of bullying variables to be determined by theory, which is especially needed for directionality specifications in a cross-sectional design (Goodboy & Kline, 2017). Future researchers should also rely on multilevel modeling to account for hierarchical structures in an organization such as bullying that occurs in one department, but not another (e.g., Skogstad, Torsheim, Einarsen, & Hauge, 2011).

In conclusion, employees who report being victimized at work believe that they lack autonomy and relatedness as basic psychological needs at work. As SDT predicts, having these needs unmet makes workers less intrinsically motivated to work, and as a result, less engaged in their work. Organizations, then, must consider how to throttle workplace bullying if they expect their workers to remain motivated and engaged. Otherwise, organizations can expect victimized employees to lack self-determination and become disengaged in their work.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Aquino, K., Grover, S. L., Bradfield, M., & Allen, D. G. (1999). The effects of negative affectivity, hierarchical status, and self-determination on workplace victimization. *Academy of Management Journal*, 42, 260-272. doi:10.2307/256918
- Baard, P. P. (2002). Intrinsic need satisfaction in organizations: A motivational basis of success in for-profit and not-for-profit settings. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 255-275). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International, 13*, 209-223. doi:10.1108/13620430810870476
- Bakker, A. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2010). Where to go from here: Integration and future research on work engagement. In A. B. Bakker & M. P. Leiter (Eds.), *Work engagement: A handbook of essential theory and research* (pp. 181-196). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Bakker, A. B., Schaufeli, W. B., Leiter, M. P., & Taris, T. W. (2008). Work engagement: An emerging concept in occupational health psychology. *Work & Stress, 22*, 187-200. doi:10.1080/02678370802393649
- Bartels, J., Pruyn, A., de Jong, M., & Joustra, I. (2007). Multiple organizational identification levels and the impact of perceived external prestige and communication climate. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 28*, 173-190. doi:10.1002/job.420
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2014). The importance of universal psychological needs for understanding motivation in the workplace. In M. Gagné (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of work engagement, motivation, and self-determination theory* (pp. 13-32). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Deci, E. L., Ryan, R. M., Gagné, M., Leone, D. R., Usunov, J., & Kornazheva, B. P. (2001). Need satisfaction, motivation, and well-being in the work organizations of a former eastern bloc country: A cross-cultural study of self-determination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 930-942. doi:10.1177/0146167201278002
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the negative acts questionnaire-revised. *Work & Stress, 23*, 24-44. doi:10.1080/02678370902815673
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. L. (2011). The concept of bullying and harassment at work: The European tradition. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 3-39). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*, 331-362. doi:10.1002.job.322
- Glas, Ø. L., Vie, T. L., Holmdal, G. R., & Einarsen, S. (2011). An application of affective events theory to workplace bullying: The roles of emotions, trait anxiety, and trait anger. *European Psychologist, 16*, 198-208. doi:10.1027/1016-9040/a000026
- Goodboy, A. K., & Kline, R. B. (2017). Statistical and practical concerns with published communication research featuring structural equation modeling. *Communication Research Reports, 34*, 68-77. doi:10.1080/08824096.2016.1214121
- Goodboy, A. K., Martin, M. M., Knight, J. M., & Long, Z. (2017). Creating the boiler room environment: The job demand-control-support model as an explanation of workplace bullying. *Communication Research, 44*, 244-262. doi:10.1177/0093650215614365

- Grant, A. M. (2007). Relational job design and the motivation to make a prosocial difference. *Academy of Management Review*, 32, 393-417. doi:10.5465/AMR.2007.24351328
- Guzley, R. M. (1992). Organizational climate and communication climate: Predictors of commitment to the organization. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 5, 379-402. doi:10.1177/0893318992005004001
- Hauge, L. J., Skogstad, A., & Einarsen, S. (2010). The relative impact of workplace bullying as a social stressor at work. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 51, 426-433. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9450.2010.00813.x
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression based approach*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Hoel, H., Sheehan, M. J., Cooper, C. L., & Einarsen, S. (2011). Organisational effects of workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 129-147). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Hogh, A., Mikkelsen, E. G., & Hansen, A. M. (2011). Individual consequences of workplace bullying/mobbing. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 107-128). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Kivimäki, M., Virtanen, M., Vartiainen, M., Elovainio, M., Vahtera, J., & Keltikangas-Järvinen, L. (2003). Workplace bullying and the risk of cardiovascular disease and depression. *Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 60, 779-783. doi:10.1136/oem.60.10.779
- Leon-Perez, J. M., Notelaers, G., Arenas, A., Munduate, L., & Medina, F. J. (2014). Identifying victims of workplace bullying by integrating traditional estimation approaches into a latent class cluster model. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29, 1155-1177. doi:10.1177/0886260513506280
- Leymann, H. (1990). Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces. *Violence and Victims*, 5, 119-125.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P., & Fletcher, C. V. (2013). Conflict motivations and tactics of targets, bystanders, and bullies: A three-told tale of workplace bullying. In J. G. Oetzel & S. Ting-Toomey (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of conflict communication: Integrating theory, research, & practice* (pp. 349-376). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P., Namie, G., & Namie, R. (2009). Workplace bullying: Causes, consequences, and corrections. In P. Lutgen-Sandvik & B. D. Sypher (Eds.), *Destructive organizational communication: Processes, consequences, and constructive ways of organizing* (pp. 27-52). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P., & Tracy, S. J. (2012). Answering five key questions about workplace bullying: How communication scholarship provides thought leadership for transforming abuse at work. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 26, 3-47. doi:10.1177/0893318911414400
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P., Tracy, S. J., & Alberts, J. K. (2007). Burned by bullying in the American workplace: Prevalence, perception, degree and impact. *Journal of Management Studies*, 44, 837-862.

- Meyer, J. P. (2014). Employee commitment, motivation, and engagement: Exploring the links. In M. Gagné (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of work engagement, motivation, and self-determination theory* (pp. 33-49). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, K. I., Ellis, B. H., Zook, E. G., & Lyles, J. S. (1990). An integrated model of communication, stress, and burnout in the workplace. *Communication Research*, 17, 300-326. doi:10.1177/009365090017003002
- Miller, K. I., Stiff, J. B., & Ellis, B. H. (1988). Communication and empathy as precursors to burnout. *Communication Monographs*, 55, 250-265. doi:10.1080/03637758809376171
- Mills, M. J., Culbertson, S. S., & Fullagar, C. J. (2012). Conceptualizing and measuring engagement: An analysis of the Utrecht work engagement scale. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 13, 519-545. doi:10.1007/s10902-011-9277-3
- Nielsen, M. B., & Einarsen, S. (2012). Outcomes of exposure to workplace bullying: A meta-analytic review. *Work & Stress*, 26, 309-322. doi:10.1080/02678373.2012.734709
- Rodríguez-Muñoz, A., Baillien, E., De Witte, H., Moreno-Jiménez, B., & Pastor, J. C. (2009). Cross-lagged relationships between workplace bullying, job satisfaction, and engagement: Two longitudinal studies. *Work & Stress*, 23, 225-243. doi:10.1080/02678370903227357
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78. doi:10.1037//0003-066x.55.1.68
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). Overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 3-36). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Salin, D., & Hoel, H. (2011). Organisational causes of workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 227-243). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Salanova, M. (2006). The measurement of work engagement with a short questionnaire: A cross-national study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 66, 701-716. doi:10.1177/0013164405282471
- Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-Romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3, 71-92.
- Schreurs, B., van Emmerick, I. H., Van den Broeck, A., & Guenter, H. (2014). Work values and work engagement within teams: The mediating role of need satisfaction. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 18, 267-281. doi:10.1037/gdn0000009
- Skogstad, A., Torsheim, T., Einarsen, S., & Hauge, L. J. (2011). Testing the work environment hypothesis of bullying on a group level of analysis: Psychosocial factors as precursors of observed workplace bullying. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 60, 475-495. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2011.00444.x

- Tracy, S. J., Lutgen-Sandvik, P., & Alberts, J. K. (2006). Nightmares, demons, and slaves: Exploring the painful metaphors of workplace bullying. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *20*, 148-185. doi:10.1177/0893318906291980
- Tremblay, M. A., Blanchard, C. M., Taylor, S., Pelletier, L. G., & Villeneuve, M. (2009). Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale: Its value for organizational psychology research. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, *41*, 213-226. doi:10.1037/a0015167
- Trépanier, S., Fernet, C., & Austin, S. (2013). Workplace bullying and psychological health at work: The mediating role of satisfaction of needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. *Work & Stress*, *27*, 123-140. doi:10.1080/02678373.2013.782158
- Trépanier, S., Fernet, C., & Austin, S. (2015). A longitudinal investigation of workplace bullying, basic need satisfaction, and employee functioning. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *20*, 105-116. doi:10.1037/a0037726
- Trombetta, J. J., & Rogers, D. P. (1988). Communication climate, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment: The effects of information adequacy, communication openness, and decision participation. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *1*, 494-514. doi:10.1177/0893318988001004003
- Van den Broeck, A., Vansteenkiste, M., De Witte, H., & Lens, W. (2008). Explaining the relationships between job characteristics, burnout, and engagement: The role of basic psychological need satisfaction. *Work & Stress*, *22*, 277-294. doi:10.1080/02678370802393672
- Van den Broeck, A., Vansteenkiste, M., De Witte, H., Soenens, B., & Lens, W. (2010). Capturing autonomy, competence, and relatedness at work: Construction and initial validation of the Work-Related Basic Need Satisfaction scale. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *83*, 981-1002. doi:10.1347/096317909X481382

Author Biographies

Alan K. Goodboy is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University.

Matthew M. Martin is a professor and chairperson in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University.

San Bolkan is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Long Beach.