The Influence of Workplace Exclusion and Personality on Counterproductive Work Behaviors: An Interactionist Perspective

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Abstract

The current research examined some of the person and situation factors that contribute to counterproductive work behavior (CWB). More specifically, this research examined the unique and interactive effects of perceived workplace exclusion and personality, as measured via the NEO-FFI, on two types of CWB: interpersonal and organizational. Participants included 105 employees from a mid-sized Midwestern utility company in the U.S. All employees completed a Workplace Experiences Survey. As predicted, exclusion via coworkers was related to interpersonal forms of CWB; whereas, exclusion by supervisors was related to organizational CWB. Support was also obtained for several of the predicted interactions between workplace exclusion and personality on CWB such that the relation between exclusion and CWB was strongest for employees whose personality exhibited less behavioral constraint. Results are discussed in terms of their implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Key Words: Workplace Exclusion, Ostracism, Personality, Counterproductive Work Behavior
The Influence of Workplace Exclusion and Personality on Counterproductive Work Behaviors: An Interactionist Perspective

Arguably, an organization’s human capital represents the most important resource for ensuring an organization's competitiveness in a local, regional, national, or even global marketplace. Thus, it stands to reason that organizations would want their employees to feel a sense of inclusiveness within the organization, especially given the positive relation between perceived inclusiveness and social support, employee psychological health, organizational satisfaction, commitment, and productivity (Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998; Mor Barak & Levin, 2002). Yet, to our knowledge, little research has specifically examined workplace exclusion as a focal construct. Drawing on previous research investigating social ostracism (Williams, 2001, 2007) and organizational behavior (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), we define workplace exclusion broadly as, the extent to which an individual (or group) perceives that they are being rejected, ignored, or ostracized by another individual (or group) within their place of work. One basic assumption underlying this definition is that many (if not most) times such behavior hinders one’s ability to complete those tasks required for successful job performance.

The current research has two primary goals. The first is to examine the link between workplace exclusion and negative work behaviors. As described more fully below, one important consideration in trying to predict how exclusion relates to workplace behavior concerns the source of the exclusion (e.g., coworkers, supervisors). A second goal is to better understand how individual differences moderate the relation between workplace exclusion and work behavior. Simply stated, the aim of the current research is to better understand the unique and interactive effects of workplace exclusion and personality on counterproductive work behaviors. More specifically, the current research examines how an employee’s perception of being excluded by
other coworkers or supervisors is related to interpersonal and organizational counterproductive work behaviors (CWB).

Generally speaking, CWB is defined as, “a set of volitional acts [as opposed to accidental or mandated] that harm or intend to harm organizations and their stakeholders (e.g., clients, coworkers, customers, and supervisors)” (Spector & Fox, 2005, pp. 151-152). Thus, CWB includes a wide range of behaviors from taking extended breaks to stealing to physical violence. Although there are a number of clearly distinct acts that are subsumed under the broader definition of CWB (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, 1997; Sackett, 2002; Spector et al., 2006), the current research focused on those behaviors associated with interpersonal (e.g., arguing with co- others) and organizational (e.g., stealing from one’s organization) dimensions of CWB. To our knowledge, research has not specifically examined how broad dimensions of one’s personality function to moderate the relation between exclusion and outcomes. In addition, the current research expands on what is currently known about exclusion and CWB by examining how the sources of exclusion (coworker or supervisor) relate to specific types of CWB.

We begin by briefly reviewing why exclusion represents an important construct for organizational researchers. Next, we review some of the most relevant social-psychological research examining how social exclusion influences attitudes and behaviors. Given our focus on workplace relationships, we rely on Social Exchange and Social Identity theories to aid in developing specific predictions about the link between sources and outcomes. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we outline how one’s personality may function to moderate the impact of perceived exclusion on CWB.

Social and Organizational Research on Exclusion, Rejection, and Ostracism

According to Belongingness Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), people possess an innate need to feel connected to and belong to something greater than oneself. Research indicates
that being excluded is psychologically aversive to victims. When one’s need for belonging is thwarted, people seek to reaffirm their sense of self-worth and meaningfulness (Williams, 2007).

Exclusion (either real or perceived) is related to a host of negative emotional states including sadness, loneliness, jealousy, guilt/shame, embarrassment, social anxiety (Leary, Koch, & Hechenbleikner, 2001). Research indicates a direct relation between exclusion and increased desire to avoid future contact with perpetrators (Cheuk & Rosen, 1994; Pepitone & Wilpizeski, 1960), decreased prosocial behaviors, decreased ability to self-regulate one’s behavior, and impaired cognitive functioning (Baumeister & Dewall, 2005). To the extent that exclusion decreases self-regulation it may serve to direct employee’s toward short-term behaviors motivated by self-interest and away from more long-term behaviors focused on the future success of the organization (Parks & Kidder, 1994). Such a shift in one’s thought processes is also consistent with the literature on exchange relations within organizations. Thus, when an employee feels excluded they may engage in behaviors, such as increased aggression and risk-taking that are not in keeping with their long-term best interests as organizational employees (Bierman & Wargo, 1995; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Yet, exclusion within the work realm has only been investigated as secondary to other constructs such as workplace incivility, bullying, retaliation, and harassment. Given this, and the potential importance of exclusion for one’s well-being, there remains a gap in the literature as to exactly how exclusion (as a focal construct) contributes to work outcomes.

Exchange Relations and Workplace Exclusion

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) posits that social behavior involves the exchange of both material (e.g., information and equipment) and non-material goods (e.g., status and approval). When one person is negligent in the exchange, the other will be more likely to leave the relationship. Based on the tenants of Social Exchange Theory, several workplace
relevant exchange theories have emerged including Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) and Coworker Exchange Theory (CWX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Sherony & Green, 2002). The crux of these theories is that the quantity and quality of leader–subordinate and coworker-coworker relations are determined, at least in part, by how “others” are viewed. For example when leaders view subordinates as “in-group” members, these individuals are interacted with differently than when a subordinate is perceived as an “out-group” member. A similar situation is also thought to develop when both entities are at the same organizational level (i.e., coworkers). For example, low-quality or problematic interactions often occur when a supervisor perceives his or her subordinate as an “out-group” member. Such situations are also characterized by a lack of trust and support.

Of particular import for the current research, when such group distinctions are made salient via exclusion, subsequent attitudes and behaviors may reflect such an in-group/out-group mentality. Such a cognitive and behavioral shift is also consistent with a host of research supporting Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002), which is based on the assumption that one’s self-esteem and self-worth are based, in part, on group membership. Consistent with a Social Exchange perspective, Thau, Aquino, and Poortvliet (2007) found that thwarted belonging, defined as the discrepancy between desired and actual level of belonging, was predictive of self-defeating deviant behavior within organizations (cf. Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick; 2004; Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992).

Furthermore, evidence exists that supervisor support and organizational support are positively related and, therefore, a lack of supervisor support, via exclusion, may be expected to relate more closely to behaviors traditionally associated with a lack of organizational support, namely organizational CWB (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).
contrast, given that coworkers often spend much more of their time with other coworkers, as compared to supervisors, we believe that suffering exclusion at the hands of other coworkers would relate to an employee questioning their sense of belonging to that group (i.e., coworkers), and serve to exacerbate in-group/out-group distinctions between oneself and other coworkers. As a result, we would expect coworker exclusion to relate to interpersonal forms of CWB (e.g., speaking badly of another coworker, gossiping) (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Frone, 2000; Spector et al., 2006b). Based on the theory and research outlined above, we predict the following:

**H1:** Exclusion by one’s supervisor(s) will be positively related to organizational CWB.

**H2:** Exclusion by one’s coworker(s) will be positively related to interpersonal CWB.

### A Person X Situation Approach

There is a large body of research supporting the relation between individual difference factors (e.g., personality dimensions) and counterproductive attitudes and behaviors (Ones, Viswesvaran, Schmidt, & Reiss, 1994; McCrae & Costa; 1986; O’Brien & DeLongis, 1996; Salgado, 2002). One commonly used measure of personality is the NEO-FFI which measures individual differences along five conceptually and empirically distinct dimensions which include neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Higher levels of neuroticism are characterized by more anxiety, impulsivity, anger, and hostility. Higher levels of extraversion are characterized by warmth, gregariousness, and positive emotions. Openness to experience is characterized by unconventional values and divergent thinking, being more emotionally expressive (both positive and negative), being more intellectual, and being more open to reexamine one’s value system. Individuals who score higher in agreeableness tend to befriend others more easily and are more altruistic and less antagonistic
than those scoring lower on this dimension. Finally, conscientiousness is associated with self-discipline, dutifulness, and a high level of aspiration.

Higher levels of neuroticism (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 2003), as well as, lower levels of conscientiousness (Ashton, 1998; Sackett & DeVore, 2001), agreeableness (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997; Salgado, 2002), extraversion (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Collins & Schmidt, 1993), and openness to experience (Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006) are linked to higher levels of anger, aggression, and/or CWB. To wit, the main effects of various person factors on organizational outcomes are generally well supported by research. However, less research has been conducted examining the joint contributions of situation and person factors in predicting workplace behaviors.

Consistent with the views espoused by other researchers, we view the outcomes associated with exclusionary behavior as a complex interaction between an employee’s personality and their immediate social situation (cf. Geen, 2001; O’leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996; Twenge, 2006; Williams, 2001; Robinson & Bennett, 1997; Martinko & Zellars, 1998). For example, Robinson and Bennett developed a model of workplace deviance in which the expression of deviant behaviors is thought to be the product of a complex interaction between situational antecedents (e.g., inequities, unfair treatment, and social pressures) and constraints (e.g., internalization of norms). Consistent with this, Spector, Fox, and Domagalski (2006) state, “…the literature demonstrates that violent, aggressive, and counterproductive work behaviors are best explained when both individual differences and situational factors are examined” (p. 37). In fact, a number of researchers have provided evidence in support of a person x situation model (Colbert et al, 2004; Keashly & Harvey, 2004; Neuman & Baron, 1997, 1998; Romero-Canyas & Downey, 2006; Vardi & Weitz, 2004).
Comparing Additive and Interactive Effects Models

As previously noted we expect that the perception that an employee is being excluded within their place of work will relate to CWB. We also expect that, individual differences in personality will relate to CWB. As such, it is important to distinguish theoretically why we expect interactive over additive effects to emerge. Generally speaking, with an additive effects model we would expect to see that employees reporting higher levels of exclusion would report higher levels of CWB, compared to employees reporting lower levels of exclusion. Similarly, highly neurotic employees would be expected to exhibit higher levels of CWB than employees reporting lower neuroticism. The net effect of these two unique main effects might be for highly neurotic employees reporting high levels of exclusion to report the most CWB. Such an effect is consistent with an additive model.

In contrast, we might expect that personality functions to constrain behavior (cf. Colbert et al., 2004) such that at low levels of neuroticism (e.g., low anxiety, hostility, impulsiveness, and vulnerability) CWB would be similar across all levels of exclusion. In this instance, one’s personality would function as a behavioral constraint. However, at high levels of neuroticism we would expect more variability in CWB depending on the frequency with which an employee reports experiencing exclusion. In this case, the employee’s behavior would not be constrained by their personality and we might expect that the highest levels of CWB would emerge for highly neurotic individuals experiencing high levels of exclusion. Thus, although the net result may be the same under both additive and interactive conditions, there is a difference in the underlying theoretical rationale for why we ought to see these effects.

In sum, consistent with previous findings suggesting that individuals who possess specific personality characteristics are more or less likely to engage in aggressive, antisocial, and deviant forms of organizational behavior, we expected that those employees whose personality
exerts a stronger constraint on behavior would report engaging in similar levels CWB irrespective of how much workplace exclusion they report experiencing. As reviewed above, we expected that personality would exert stronger constraints on behavior for employees reporting low levels of neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, as well as, those reporting higher conscientiousness and agreeableness. In contrast, we expected much more variability in CWB as a function of workplace exclusion among individuals whose personality imposes fewer constraints on behavior. As such, we expect that, people whose behavior is less constrained via their personality will be more reactive to various situational influences, including workplace exclusion.

**H3:** Perceived coworker exclusion and personality will interact to influence interpersonal CWB such that the relation between coworker exclusion and interpersonal CWB will be stronger for individuals whose personality exhibits less constraint on their behavior (i.e., high neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, and low agreeableness and conscientiousness).

**H4:** Perceived supervisor exclusion and personality will interact to influence organizational CWB such that the relation between supervisor exclusion and organizational CWB will stronger for individuals whose personality exhibits less constraint on their behavior (i.e., high neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, and low agreeableness, and conscientiousness).

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants included 105 employees from a medium-sized utility company located in the Midwestern United States. Men comprised 63.8% of the sample ($n = 67$). Participant ages ranged from 23-63 years ($M = 43.17$, $SD = 8.66$, $Mdn = 44$). The entire sample identified as
Caucasian (100 %). The majority of participants reported being married (83.8%) and working full-time (97%). A total of 145 surveys were distributed with 105 surveys returned. According to Hamilton (2003), this represents an excellent response rate of 72%.

Procedure and Measures

All participants completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire assessing various aspects of their workplace environment. Questionnaires were administered at departmental meetings ranging from three to twenty employees per meeting. Small group sessions were used to adequately communicate the purpose of the questionnaire and answer any questions or concerns from employees. Upon arrival, participants were informed of their rights as research participants and asked to read over and sign an informed consent sheet prior to participation. Informed consent sheets were kept separate from survey responses to ensure confidentiality. Average completion time of the questionnaire was approximately 25 minutes. Participants had the option to either complete the questionnaire at the departmental meetings or on their own time and return the survey to the researcher in a sealed envelope upon completion.

Workplace Exclusion. The Revised Workplace Exclusion Scale (WES-R; see Appendix A) is a 17-item self-report scale, which asks participants to indicate how often they perceived of themselves as experiencing different types of exclusionary behaviors during the past 12 months at their organization. The scale is comprised of three subscales, a 7-item subscale assessing one’s perception of being excluded by coworkers (e.g., *Coworkers shutting you out of their conversation*), a 5-item subscale assessing one’s perception of being excluded by supervisors (e.g., *Supervisors keeping important work-related information from you – e.g., meeting times*), and a 3-item language-based exclusion subscale (e.g., *Coworkers speaking to each other in a language you did not understand*). The final two items represent criterion questions. All responses were obtained on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (most of the
time), with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived exclusion. Due to the
demographic make-up of the current sample, and a low base-rate associated with the language-
based exclusion factor (i.e., 4 respondents indicating experiencing language-based exclusion),
the language-based exclusion subscale was not used in subsequent analyses. Previous research
indicates the WES to be reliable with alpha coefficients ranging from .79-.85 across studies
(Hitlan, Cliffton, & DeSoto, 2006; Hitlan, Kelly, & Zárate, under review). Initial research also
supports the validity of the WES (Walsh & Hitlan, 2008). For the current research, the reliability
coefficients for the coworker (α = .76) and supervisor (α = .75) subscales indicated acceptable
reliability estimates.

Individual Differences. Personality was assessed using the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae,
1992), which contains 60-items measuring the “Big Five” dimensions of personality including
neuroticism (e.g., I am not a worrier), extraversion (e.g., I like to have a lot of people around
me), openness to experience (e.g., I find philosophical arguments boring), agreeableness (e.g., I
try to be courteous to everyone I meet), and conscientiousness (e.g., I keep my belongings neat
and clean). Each subscale is comprised of 12-items. Respondents indicate their level of
agreement/disagreement with a series of statements using a 5-point response scale ranging from
1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Composite scores were created by averaging across
scale items. Higher scores indicate higher levels of that particular personality characteristic. The
NEO-FFI scales show correlations of .77-.92 with the NEO-PI, and internal consistency
reliability values range from .68-.86 (Costa & McCrae, 1992). For the current research, the
reliability coefficients for the NEO-FFI were: neuroticism (α = .85), agreeableness (α = .77),
extraversion (α = .79), conscientiousness (α = .75), and openness to experience (α = .70).

Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB). CWB was measured by using the Workplace
Deviance Scale (Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999)\(^1\). This scale is comprised of two subscales:
organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance. The organizational deviance subscale includes 8-items assessing deviant behaviors directed toward the organization (e.g., Intentionally arrived late for work); the interpersonal deviance subscale consists of 6-items assessing interpersonal deviance (e.g., Swore at a co-worker). Participants responded on an 8-point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 8 (More than once a week), with high scores indicating higher frequency of deviant behaviors. Past research has supported the reliability and validity of the instrument, with reliability coefficients for interpersonal deviance ($\alpha = .73$) and organizational deviance ($\alpha = .76$; Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999). For the current research, the reliability coefficients were .74 for organizational deviance and .76 for interpersonal deviance.

Results

Frequency of Workplace Exclusion

The most frequent forms of supervisor exclusion included supervisors not replying to requests/questions within a reasonable period of time and respondents not being invited by supervisors to participate in work-related activities. More specifically, 71.2% and 74.3% of respondents indicated that, at least once or twice, over the course of the previous 12 month period, a supervisor had not replied to their request within a reasonable period of time and/or that they were not invited to participate in work-related activities. Moreover, 63.8% of respondents indicated receiving the ‘silent treatment’ by during this same time period. Of those, 6.7% indicated that such behavior occurred often or most of the time. Also, 59% of respondents indicated having been shut out of conversations by coworkers with 7.7% indicating that such behavior occurred either often or most of the time.

Frequency of Organizational and Interpersonal CWB

The most frequent forms of organizational CWB included employees working on a personal matter instead of working for their employer (60.6%), gossiping about one’s supervisor
(55.8%), making unauthorized use of organizational property (31.7%), and calling in sick when not actually ill (21.2%). The least frequent forms of organizational CWB included intentionally arriving late to work (7.7%), and lying about the number of hours worked (2.9%). The most frequent forms of interpersonal CWB included regularly teasing a co-worker in front of other employees (52.9%), refusing to talk to a co-worker (34.6%), and swearing at a coworker (32.7%). The least frequent forms of interpersonal CWB included making ethnic, racial, or religious slurs against a co-worker (9.6%) and making an obscene comment or gesture at a coworker (29.8%).

Correlational Analyses

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, zero-order correlation coefficients, and reliability coefficients for each of the study variables. Hypothesis 1 predicted a significant positive relation between perceptions of supervisor exclusion and organizational CWB. Consistent with this prediction, supervisor exclusion was significantly correlated with organizational CWB, \( r(102) = .37, p < .001 \). In contrast, the relation between supervisor exclusion and interpersonal CWB was not significant, \( r(102) = .16, p > .05, ns \). Thus, employees who reported higher levels of supervisor exclusion were also more likely to report engaging in higher levels of organizational CWB but not interpersonal CWB. Results also indicated that the relation between supervisor exclusion and organizational CWB was significantly stronger than the relation between supervisor exclusion and interpersonal CWB, \( t(101) = 1.81, p = .03, one \) tailed.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive correlation between coworker exclusion and interpersonal CWB. As predicted, perceptions of exclusion via coworkers was related to interpersonal CWB, \( r(102) = .19, p = .05 \). Results also indicated a significant relation between coworker exclusion and organizational CWB, \( r(102) = .28, p = .004 \). Employees reporting higher
levels of exclusion via coworkers also reported higher levels of both interpersonal and organizational CWB. Follow-up analyses indicated that the difference between these two correlation coefficients was not statistically significant, $t(101) = 0.76, p = .23$, one tailed.

**Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analysis**

To assess the interactive effects of perceived exclusion and personality on CWB, a series of moderated hierarchical regression analyses were computed. The first series of regressions used interpersonal CWB as the criterion; the second series used organizational CWB as the criterion. In the first step, the exclusion and moderator conditional effects were entered. In the second step, the two-way interaction term between perceived exclusion and personality was entered\(^2\). Based on recommendations by Aiken and West (1991), the exclusion and personality variables were centered prior to entering the conditional effects and interaction term into the regression model.

Coworker exclusion, personality, and CWB. Hypothesis 3 predicted that coworker exclusion would interact with personality in predicting interpersonal CWB. More specifically, the relation between coworker exclusion and interpersonal CWB was predicted to be stronger for individuals whose behavior was less constrained by their personality (higher neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, and lower agreeableness and conscientiousness). Separate regression equations were computed for each test of moderation. Results provided some support for the predicted interactions (see Table 2). At step 2, after controlling for the main effects associated with coworker exclusion and personality, the interaction between coworker exclusion and extraversion accounted for a significant proportion of unique variance in the prediction of interpersonal CWB, $ΔF(1, 100) = 5.16, p = .025, R = .34, ΔR^2 = .05$. To better understand the nature of the interaction two methods were used: a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) and the Johnson-Neyman Technique which provides a point estimate for the...
range of values of the moderator where the focal independent variable (exclusion) is significantly related to CWB (Johnson & Newman, 1936; Hays & Matthes, in press).

As illustrated in Figure 1, at low levels of extraversion (-1SD), the relation between coworker exclusion and interpersonal CWB was not significant, $b = .08$, $SE = .25$, $t = .31$, $p = .76$; with a 95% confidence interval of -.4272 to .5829. However, the simple slope was significantly different from zero at both the mean, $b = .49$, $SE = .19$, $t(100) = 2.54$, $p = .01$, with a 95% confidence interval of .1067 to .8663, and high (+1sd) levels of extraversion, $b = .90$, $SE = .27$, $t(100) = 3.31$, $p = .001$, with a 95% confidence interval of .3584 to 1.4318. Moreover, the points estimate indicated that when extraversion is 3.245 or above the coefficient for exclusion is significantly positive (using alpha = .05). Thus, participants reporting low levels of extraversion reported little difference in the frequency of interpersonal CWB across levels of coworker exclusion. However, at higher levels of extraversion this difference became much more pronounced with the highest levels of interpersonal CWB being observed under conditions of high extraversion and high coworker exclusion. The other predicted interactions between coworker exclusion and interpersonal CWB failed to emerge.

Supervisor exclusion, personality, and CWB. Hypothesis 4 predicted that supervisor exclusion would interact with personality in predicting organizational CWB. More specifically, the relation between supervisor exclusion and organizational CWB was predicted to be stronger for individuals whose behavior was less constrained by their personality (higher neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, and lower agreeableness and conscientiousness). The procedure was identical to that outlined above with coworker interactions. Consistent with predictions, at Step 2, after controlling for the main effects of supervisor exclusion and personality, each of the interaction terms (excluding extraversion) contributed unique variance to the prediction of organizational CWB including neuroticism, $\Delta F(1, 100) = 8.00$, $p < .01$, $R = .50$,
ΔR² = .06, agreeableness, ΔF(1, 100) = 5.36, p = .02, R = .48, ΔR² = .04, conscientiousness, ΔF(1, 100) = 13.42, p < .01, R = .58, ΔR² = .09, and openness to experience, ΔF(1, 100) = 4.08, p = .04, R = .41, ΔR² = .03. The direction for each of these interaction terms is consistent with predictions (see Figures 2-5). Employees whose personality exerted a stronger constraint over their behavior were less variable in reporting to have engaged in organizational CWB. Moreover, the most CWB was evidenced under conditions of high supervisor exclusion and low behavioral constraint. Table 4 displays the simple slope coefficients, significance values, 95% confidence intervals, and point estimates along low (-1SD), mean, and high levels (+1SD) of these personality dimensions.

Discussion

The current research examined how an employee’s perception of being excluded within their work environment relates to counterproductive work behaviors. Although there is a large body of literature examining how situational factors influence outcomes, little research has specifically addressed the phenomena of workplace exclusion, and its associated outcomes (Hitlan, Kelly, Schepman, Schneider, & Zárate, 2006). One of the goals of the current research was to begin to fill this gap by examining how both sources of exclusion and one’s personality contribute to the expression of CWB. We relied on research evidence suggesting that the source of exclusion (e.g., coworkers, supervisors) may be important to more fully understanding the behavioral outcomes associated with such behavior.

Higher levels of supervisor exclusion were related to higher levels or organizational CWB but not interpersonal forms of CWB. In addition, coworker exclusion was positively related to interpersonal CWB. Somewhat interestingly, a significant relation also emerged between coworker exclusion and organizational CBW. Although this latter finding was not specifically predicted in the current research, it is consistent with Frone (2000) who found that
both interpersonal conflict with supervisors and interpersonal conflict with coworkers related to interpersonal (depression, self-esteem, somatic symptoms) and organizational outcomes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover). Although Frone did not attempt to explain this “cross-over” effect for outcomes we suspect that, interactions with coworkers are shaped by many different variables (e.g., seniority, personality, job position) that may lead to less discrimination in the display of CWB. As such, an employee who feels they are being excluded by coworkers may consider multiple factors when deciding to respond. We contrast this with perceived exclusion at the hands of one’s supervisor where it is generally recognized that supervisors are more closely associated with their role agents of an organization.

To test this proposition, we conducted a secondary analysis using the data provided by Frone (2000) which included the sample size and tabled correlations. We examined whether the effect sizes between interpersonal conflict with coworkers and interpersonal outcomes (e.g., depression, self-esteem, somatic symptoms) differed from those between interpersonal conflict with coworkers and organizational outcomes (satisfaction, commitment, turnover). None of the comparisons indicated significant differences in effect size estimates across interpersonal and organizational outcomes. So, the relations between coworker conflict and outcomes were similar across both interpersonal and organizational outcomes. Simply stated, all cross-outcome coefficients were of equal strength. However, for interpersonal conflict with supervisors, all of the effect sizes associated with organizational outcomes were significantly stronger than the relations between supervisor conflict and interpersonal outcomes. A similar analysis based on information provided by Bruk-Lee and Spector (2006) examined the relations among supervisor conflict, coworker conflict, organizational CWB, and interpersonal CWB, and found a significantly stronger relation between interpersonal conflict and interpersonal CWB (as compared to organizational CWB) and no difference in the strength of the relations associated
with supervisor conflict. Thus additional research is needed to better understand the nature of this discrepancy. For example, Frone (2000) focused on younger employees and attitudinal outcomes, Bruk-Lee and Spector (2006) examined university employees and behavioral outcomes, and the current research specifically examined workplace exclusion using employees from a utility company and behavioral outcome measures. Might there be something inherent in a specific sample, organization, or outcome underlying these effects?

**Personality and CWB**

Consistent with previous research, we found that each of the measured personality dimensions was related to some form of CWB. More specifically, negative relations emerged between openness to experience (and agreeableness) and interpersonal CWB. Employees reporting less of these characteristics were more likely to report engaging in interpersonal CWB. Similar negative relations emerged between organizational CWB and extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Employees scoring lower on these dimensions reported more organizational CWB compared to those scoring higher on each of these dimensions. Finally, neuroticism was positively related to organizational CWB.

While these relations are consistent with those obtained in previous research, as one reviewer of the current manuscript pointed out, these relations may simply reflect a tendency of some individuals to report acting in more counterproductive ways as opposed to actually engaging in counterproductive behaviors. For example, one could argue that conscientious people attempt to be highly accurate in reporting everything, and those who are less conscientious might not feel as compelled to report deviant behavior. Although our method and data do not allow us to entirely rule out this possibility, the negative correlations between conscientiousness and organizational CWB indicates that less conscientious people actually do report engaging in
more CWB. Nevertheless, this is an important empirical question but one that cannot be fully disentangled with the current research design.

**Personality as a Moderator**

For interpersonal CWB, the only significant interaction term to emerge was between coworker exclusion and extraversion. The effect of coworker exclusion on interpersonal CWB was dependent on one’s personality. For employees reporting low levels of extraversion, there was little change in the self-reported display of interpersonal CWB across exclusion levels. However, at higher levels of extraversion (where we would expect less behavioral constraint), the difference between low and high levels of coworker exclusion on interpersonal CWB was much more pronounced when employees scored high in extraversion. Based on this finding, it seems that the specific characteristics associated with extraversion (e.g., warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity) are more important for understanding reactions to interactions involving other coworkers (as opposed to supervisors). One explanation for this finding is reflected in the amount of time that employees spend interacting with one another. Generally, employees spend a significant percentage of their time interacting with other coworkers. So, one might expect that: 1) those scoring lower in extraversion would not be as inclined (as those scoring higher) to feel the need to interact with others in an attempt to satisfy those personality characteristics of warmth and gregariousness and 2) as a result of this lower need to satisfy oneself via the company of others, exclusion by coworkers would not be viewed as aversive as it would be by highly extraverted individuals (more constrained personality). Thus, extraversion seems of particular importance for coworker interactions, especially when combined with relevant situations factors, such as exclusion.

For organizational CWB, each of the predicted interactions between supervisor exclusion and personality emerged, except for the interaction involving extraversion. When employee
behavior was constrained by their personality, little difference emerged on organizational CWB across levels of supervisor exclusion. In contrast, much more pronounced changes in CWB emerged for those employees whose personality exerted less control over their behavior (high neuroticism, high openness to experience, low conscientiousness, and low agreeableness).

Overall, these findings suggest that the likelihood of employees engaging in CWB depends on both persona and situation factors – especially when trying to predict organizational forms of CWB. Additionally, consistent with previous research, source characteristics appear to be important to determining specific types of outcomes. By virtue of the number and strength of the interaction terms in the current research, it seems that personality dimensions are more closely associated with CWB directed at the organization. It could be that when exclusionary behavior is thought to emanate from an organization, as is the case with supervisor exclusion, an employee not only feels that such behavior has implications for their immediate social milieu but also to their immediate and future existence and advancement opportunities within their organization (and thus calling into question those very personality characteristics that makes us who we are).

Limitations of the Current Research

It is also important to note a few potential limitations to the current research. First, due to the self-report methodology and the sensitive nature of the information being obtained, responses may have been influenced by socially desirability or common method variance (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). However, others believe that the magnitude of any such effects is often overstated (Spector, 1994). So, although research has indicated such effects may inflate relations among variables, there does not appear to be a consensus on the absolute magnitude of such effects. Also, the common method variance explanation cannot account for interaction effects which are less likely to be spurious. Second, consistent with previous survey
research, participants completed the survey at a single point in time whereby prohibiting any firm conclusions regarding cause and effect. Nevertheless, when combined with previous experimental research, we believe that the current research makes an important contribution to our understanding of when we might expect workplace exclusion to predict whether or not an employee will choose to engage in counterproductive work behaviors.

That said, both workplace exclusion and CWB represent broad constructs encompassing a number of subtypes (Spector et al., 2006b), many of which were not examined in the current research. Even within the current sample, it seems that some forms of exclusion are experienced more frequently than others as are specific forms of both interpersonal CWB and organizational CWB. For example, does it matter if employees were being excluded socially (by others ignoring them) or physically (by others physically leaving their presence)? Might the mode of exclusion (e.g., face-to-face, chat-room), and length of time one was excluded influence outcomes?

Additionally, the entire sample reported being Caucasian (100%) and the majority reported working full-time (97%). As a result, one needs to be careful when making statements about the applicability of the current findings to other ethnicities, and employees who are employed on a temporary basis or part-time. Future research in this area would also benefit from examining samples of different ethnicities, ages, and locations would be of great interest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe this research adds to what is currently known about workplace behaviors in a few different ways. First, we were able to show that the mere perception of exclusion is sufficient to increase the likelihood of employees engaging in CWB. Second, this research provides additional support for the argument that the sources of conflict (or exclusion in this case) are important to better understanding how employees may choose to respond to their experiences. Third, it provides additional insight regarding the moderating effects of personality
in the prediction of CWB including an initial assessment of which personality dimensions seem most important under certain conditions. Finally, while the current research answers some questions concerning the relations and interactions between workplace exclusion, personality, and counterproductive work behaviors, it also brings up some additional questions and avenues for subsequent research in this area. Ultimately, we believe the current research will help in the development of specific models outlining the antecedents, moderators, and consequences of CWB.
References


Shanock, L. R., & Eisenberger, R. (2006). When supervisors feel supported: Relationships with


Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Zero-Order Correlations, and Reliability Estimates for Study Variables

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<td>8. Agreeableness</td>
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Note. N = 104. *p < .05, **p < .01. Reliability estimates are displayed in parentheses along the diagonal.
Table 2

Moderated Multiple Regression Analysis for Coworker Exclusion and Personality on Interpersonal CWB

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<th>Step</th>
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<th>S.E.</th>
<th>β</th>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.27</td>
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<td>Openness to Experience</td>
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<td>.07*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Agreeableness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.75</td>
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<td>.23</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.66</td>
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Note. *p < .01, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Coefficients represent the values obtained after all variables, including the interaction term, were entered into the regression equation.
Table 3. Moderated Multiple Regression Analysis for Supervisor Exclusion and Personality on Organizational CWB

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<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
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<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.33 **</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>0.19 ***</td>
<td>0.20 *</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.06 **</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>2.29</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.29 *</td>
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<td>0.16 **</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
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Note. *p < .01, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Coefficients represent the values obtained after all variables, including the interaction term, were entered into the regression equation.
Table 4

Test of the Simple Slope Effects for the effect of Supervisor Exclusion on Organizational CWB as a function of differing levels of personality dimensions.

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<td>B</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<td>.08</td>
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<td>High (+1SD)</td>
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<td>Openness</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<td>Agreeableness</td>
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<td>.43**</td>
<td>.11</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<td>High</td>
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</table>

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01. Alpha level used for the Johnson-Neyman point estimate is .05.
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Interaction between perceived coworker exclusion and extraversion on interpersonal CWB.

Figure 2. Interaction between perceived supervisor exclusion and neuroticism on organizational CWB.

Figure 3. Interaction between perceived supervisor exclusion and conscientiousness on organizational CWB.

Figure 4. Interaction between perceived supervisor exclusion and agreeableness on organizational CWB.

Figure 5. Interaction between perceived supervisor exclusion and openness to experience on organizational CWB.
Figure 1

Figure 2
Figure 3

Figure 4
Figure 5
Endnotes

1. Based on comments made by an anonymous review, we choose to use the term Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) instead of Workplace Deviance because of the conceptual distinctions between these two constructs (see introduction) and because we were not able to confidently determine if the interpersonal and organizations behaviors actually constituted organizational norm violations. As pointed out by the reviewer, although arriving late for work may be counterproductive, it may not represent a norm violation if most all employees engage in such behavior.

2. Previous research indicates that, overall, men are more likely than women to engage in (Geen, 2001; Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006) and experience deviant workplace behaviors (Duhart, 2001). Men and women have also been found to respond differently to experiences of workplace exclusion (Hitlan, Cliffton, & DeSoto, 2006). Thus, we examined gender differences across CWB and personality. Results indicated that, even after entering the main effects and the interaction terms, gender contributed a significant proportion of unique variance to the prediction of interpersonal CWB (for both coworker and supervisor analyses). Follow-up mean comparisons between males and females indicated that, overall, men engaged in significantly higher levels of interpersonal CWB ($M = 2.16, SD = 1.40$) than did women ($M = 1.39, SD = .51$), $t = 4.02, p < .001$, equal variances not assumed (Levene’s Test of equality of variances: $F = 17.99, p < .001$). In contrast, gender did not contribute significantly to the prediction of organizational CWB.
Appendix A

Workplace Exclusion Scale (WES-R) Items

1. Your boss or supervisor complimenting you on a job well done. (Supervisor - R)
2. Coworkers giving you the “silent treatment.” (Coworker)
3. Coworkers shutting you out of their conversations. (Coworker)
4. Coworkers giving you the impression that they enjoy your company. (Coworker - R)
5. Coworkers interacting with you only when they are required to do so. (Coworker)
6. Feeling accepted by other employees at your organization. (Coworker - R)
7. Employees updating you about important work-related activities. (Coworker - R)
8. Supervisors not replying to your requests/questions within a reasonable period of time. (Supervisor)
9. Coworkers making you feel like you were not a part of the organization. (Coworker)
10. Supervisors inviting you to participate in work-related activities (Supervisor - R)
11. Coworkers speaking to one another in a language you do not understand. (Language)
12. Coworkers not speaking English on the job. (Language)
13. Being unable to interact with others at work due to language communication difficulties. (Language)
14. Supervisors keeping important work-related information from you (e.g., deadlines) (Supervisor)
15. Supervisors interacting with you at work. (Supervisor - R)
16. Felt as if you were being ostracized by coworkers. (Criterion)
17. Felt as if you were being ostracized by supervisors. (Criterion)