Die Balance zwischen online und offline

Isabel Willemse
Onlinesucht
Ein Ratgeber für Eltern, Betroffene und ihr Umfeld

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Wenn die exzessive Mediennutzung negative Auswirkungen hat auf das Sozialeben und Hobbys, den Beruf oder die Ausbildung und allenfalls auch die Gesundheit, dann könnte es sich um eine Onlinesucht handeln. Hierbei handelt es sich um eine sehr neue Diagnose, die noch nicht in den offiziellen Diagnoseinstrumenten vorhanden ist. Nichtsdestotrotz wird sie von Eltern, Betroffenen und ihrem Umfeld erkannt und in der Beratungspraxis regelmäßig ange troffen.

Der Ratgeber wird in einem theoretischen Teil eine allgemeine Einführung in die Mediennutzung geben, aber vor allem das Störungsbild genau beschreiben. Hierzu gehören die Diagnosekriterien, Verbreitung, Ursachen und auch Begleiterkrankungen. Der praktische Teil enthält viele konkrete Vorschläge für Bezugspersonen und Betroffene im Umgang mit Onlinesucht.
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Lifestyle, Conflict-Solving Styles, and Exposure to Workplace Bullying
A Model of Mediation

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Abstract. The present study identified direct and indirect relationships between lifestyle attributes and exposure to workplace bullying (via the conflict-solving styles of problem solving, compromising, yielding, and forcing). Our results demonstrated that being cautious, going along, and taking charge were positively directly related to exposure to workplace bullying. In addition, higher belonging/social interest was related to less exposure to bullying via more frequent use of problem solving and less frequent use of forcing. Higher being cautious was related to greater exposure to bullying via less frequent use of problem solving. Higher going along was related to greater bullying via more frequent use of forcing. On the other hand, they were also related to less bullying via more frequent use of problem solving. The results prompt the inclusion of situational moderators that would help us to identify when conflict-solving styles are used. The conflict-solving styles of compromising and yielding did not explain the indirect effects, so the findings highlighted the two key conflict-solving dimensions of problem solving and forcing which partially explained the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between lifestyle attributes and workplace bullying.

Keywords: lifestyle, personality, conflict-solving styles, workplace bullying, individual psychology theory

The term “workplace bullying” refers to situations in which one or more individuals have been exposed to repeated and persistent negative behaviors over the past 6 months from colleague(s), supervisor(s) or subordinate(s). These behaviors may be person-related, work-related, and/or physically intimidating behavior (Einarsen, 2000, 2005; Notelaers, 2011). Previous research demonstrated that workplace bullying may be considered one of the most severe workplace stressors (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010), and that it is linked to anxiety (Leymann, 1990, 1996), depression (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994; Hansen et al., 2006), posttraumatic stress disorder (Leymann & Gustafson, 1996), fatigue, loss of self-confidence (Pranjic, Males-Bilic, Begnic, & Mustajbegovic, 2006; Vartia, 2001), aggression, insomnia, apathy (Björkqvist et al., 1994), muscle pains, headaches, stomach problems, and hand tremors (Celep & Konakli, 2013). These negative consequences encouraged researchers to explore potential causes that may trigger or deter bullying in the workplace (Astrauskaite, 2013; Notelaers, 2011).

Previous research indicates that workplace bullying may be related to individual attributes such as the personality of the target or the instigator (Balducci, Alfano, & Fracaroli, 2009; Brodsky, 1976; Gandolfo, 1995; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001, 2007; Vartia, 1996), coping styles (Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009; Zapf & Gross, 2001), or work-related factors such as job design and leadership style (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Notelaers, De Witte, & Einarsen, 2010).

Figure 1. Hypothesized model.
One of the most recent approaches to the various antecedents of workplace bullying is the three-way model presented by Baillien et al. (2009). The authors argued that workplace bullying may develop as a result of three pathways, namely, frustration and strain, conflicts and conflict solving, and aspects of the team and organization (Baillien et al., 2009). They also suggested that individual characteristics and work-related antecedents may influence these three pathways and be indirectly related to workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2009). In the present study, we investigated one of the pathways proposed to lead to bullying by analyzing how one’s personality/lifestyle attributes are related to exposure to workplace bullying via conflict-solving styles. The proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.

### Lifestyle and Workplace Bullying

Since the first theoretical work on work harassment (Brodsky, 1976), a number of studies have examined the personality of the target as a potential antecedent of workplace bullying. Brodsky (1976) was the first to argue that individual vulnerability is the most dominant antecedent and claimed that egocentric, self-absorbed people may see hostility in others, expect to be attacked and, thus, become targets of harassment. In a recent longitudinal study, Bowling, Behr, Bennett, and Watson (2010) showed that the target’s personality was indeed related to victimization and not vice versa. Other studies demonstrated that greater exposure to workplace bullying was linked to Type A personality (Pranjic et al., 2006), neuroticism, sensitivity, suspicious attitude, anger (Balducci et al., 2009; Gandolfo, 1995; Vartia, 1996), narcissism, psychopathy (Linton & Power, 2013), impulsiveness (Persson et al., 2009), low self-esteem (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007), lower independence, and higher introversion (Coyne, Seigle, & Randall, 2000). In addition, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007) identified the provocative target group, who displayed a higher level of aggression and unstable self-esteem. Hence, it seems that individuals may participate in their own victimization by behaving passively or exhibiting aggressive, irritating behaviors (Aquino, 2000).

Despite numerous studies conducted on the personality characteristics of the potential target, it is surprising that few studies have linked research findings to an organized personality theory (Astrauskaite & Kern, 2011). To provide additional insight into the personality attributes of the potential target, the present study is presented from an individual psychology perspective, which is an organized personality theory that aims to explain the individual’s present behavior and reactions by analyzing early childhood experiences (Del Corso, Rehfuss, & Galvin, 2011; Dreikurs, 1971).

### Hypotheses

#### Hypothesis 1

In the theory of individual psychology, “personality” is referred to as “lifestyle” (Ferguson, 2003). According to Adler (1964), “lifestyle” is a more efficient concept than “personality” because it refers to the ways an individual operates within the social system (Griffith & Powers, 2007). “Lifestyle” may be conceptualized as an organized set of biased perceptions, beliefs, and values that the individual creates before the age of 10 within the confines of the family and employs throughout life to solve problems related to social relationships, work, and intimacy issues (Adler, 1964; Carlson, Watts, & Maniaci, 2006; Jonyniene & Kern, 2012).

Five main lifestyle attributes are described in the literature: belonging/social interest, going along, taking charge, wanting recognition, and being cautious (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993). Belonging/social interest represents the extent to which an individual felt having belonged in the family of origin (Curlette & Kern, 2010). Individuals who score higher on the belonging/social interest scale tend to view the world more positively and optimistically (Kern, Wheeler, & Curlette, 1993); they are less prone to being exposed to workplace bullying because optimism is a deterrent to workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2009). They also have better social competencies (more effective in solving conflicts, capable of empathizing with others, effective listeners; Peluso, Peluso, Buckner, Curlette, & Kern, 2004; Kern et al., 1993), which has been linked to less exposure to bullying (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Moreover, they are more confident and display higher self-worth (Kern et al., 1993), which was found to be negatively related to the target’s status (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). In addition, belonging/social interest was found to be positively related to three of the Big Five personality dimensions, namely, Extraversion, Emotional stability, and Agreeableness (Gaube, Kern, & Stoltz, 2015). Because previous research findings demonstrated that individuals who are less emotionally stable, less agreeable, and less extraverted may be more prone to becoming targets of bullying (Glass, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007) or incivility (Milam, Spitzmueller, & Penney, 2009), the idea arose that belonging/social interest may be negatively related to exposure to workplace bullying.

Individuals with low scores on belonging/social interest are more introverted, sad, less self-confident, and may feel a sense of alienation (Kern et al., 1993). According to Kern et al. (1993), these lower-scoring individuals “could have difficulties communicating with people and feeling like they belong and are worthwhile” (p. 25). This could be linked to the role of the submissive target (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Hence, our first hypothesis was: Belonging/social interest is negatively related to exposure to workplace bullying: Individuals who score higher on belonging/social interest will report less exposure to workplace bullying.
Hypothesis 2

The second lifestyle theme is going along. Individuals who score higher on going along learned that, in order for them to belong, they need to follow the rules, be respectful, polite, and forgiving (Kern et al., 1993). These characteristics seem to deter exposure to workplace bullying. Individuals with low scores on the going along scale learned to be defensive and even offensive based on their understanding of the world as a dangerous and hostile place (Kern et al., 1993). These individuals may be aggressive, which makes them more prone to being exposed to workplace bullying (Baldacci et al., 2009; Gandolfo, 1995; Vartia, 1996). Being rebellious, challenging rules, decisions, and opinions may be related to the provocative target status (Aquino, 2000; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Previous empirical studies demonstrated that low-scoring individuals tend to display less acceptable and rule-focused behavior. For example, Peluso and Kern (2002) found that males who did not complete their domestic violence treatment program were significantly lower on the going along scale. Lewis and Wachter (2006) found that a lower score on the going along scale was related to a higher likelihood for heavy drinking. This led to the proposition that individuals with lower scores on the going along scale are exposed to a higher level of bullying due to their more aggressive and more provocative behavior. Based on the theoretical framework of individual psychology, our second hypothesis is: Going along is negatively related to exposure to workplace bullying: Individuals who score higher on going along will report less exposure to workplace bullying.

Hypothesis 3

Taking charge represents how much an individual wants to be in charge and tell others what to do (Kern et al., 1993). High scorers may be considered bossy and directive (Peluso et al., 2004). They may be pushy, strive to get their way, and be competitive (Kern et al., 1993). Competition increases the potential for workplace bullying (Björkqvist et al., 1994); they may therefore be more prone to becoming the target of bullying.

In addition, an elevated score on the taking charge scale was found to be related to antisocial behavior (Kemp & Center, 2000) and an inmate personality profile (Slaton, Kern, & Curlette, 2000). Research on workplace bullying has demonstrated that, because of aggressive behavior, some individuals may become either targets or perpetrators or both at the same time (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). This led to our proposition that individuals displaying a higher level of taking charge are more likely to display aggressive behavior and become provocative targets (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Based on theoretical and empirical arguments, our third hypothesis is: Taking charge is positively related to exposure to workplace bullying: Individuals who score higher on taking charge will report greater exposure to workplace bullying.

Hypothesis 4

Wanting recognition represents how much an individual is concerned with positive recognition and praise from others (Kern et al., 1993). High scorers are more sensitive to negative feedback (Kern et al., 1993). If they do not receive recognition, they may be highly discouraged (Kern et al., 1993). Striving for constant approval from others may demonstrate unstable self-esteem, which was previously related to the target’s status (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). In addition, unstable self-esteem may create challenges in defending oneself, which create the right circumstances for victimization (Niedl, 1995, as cited in Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). Finally, individuals with higher scores on wanting recognition are achievement-focused, strive for success (Kern et al., 1993), are thus productive and potentially better liked by supervisors and clients, may instigate jealousy, competition, and have greater exposure to workplace bullying (Astrauskaite & Kern, 2011; Björkqvist et al., 1994). Our fourth hypothesis was: wanting recognition is positively related to exposure to workplace bullying: Individuals who score higher on wanting recognition will report greater exposure to workplace bullying.

Hypothesis 5

Being cautious represents a lack of belonging in the family of origin (Curlette & Kern, 2010). This experience creates a suspicious, hypervigilant approach to life in an individual. Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007) demonstrated that targets of bullying are anxious, tense, and suspicious of others, tend to experience difficulties coping with personal criticism, may be easily upset, and view the world as threatening. Several other researchers have presented similar descriptions of potential targets (Balducci et al., 2009; Brodsky, 1976; Glasø et al., 2007; Persson et al., 2009). Hence, the sensitivity and hypervigilance of individuals scoring higher on being cautious seem to increase the likelihood of exposure to workplace bullying.

In addition, these individuals may have lower self-esteem and lack stress management skills (Kern et al., 1993). Lower self-esteem was found to be related to target status (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Stress and coping with stress were suggested as being among the most important antecedents of bullying (Baillien et al., 2009). Thus, high scorers on the being cautious scale may be more prone to being exposed to workplace bullying. Finally, being cautious was found to be positively related to neuroticism (Gaube, Kern, & Stoltz, 2015), which has been linked to greater exposure to workplace bullying in previous studies (Glasø et al., 2007; Milam et al., 2009; Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). Based on theoretical arguments and empirical findings, our fifth hypothesis was: being cautious is positively related to exposure to workplace bullying: Individuals who score higher on being cautious will report greater exposure to workplace bullying.
In summary, we assume that individuals who score lower on belonging/social interest and going along, and higher on taking charge, wanting recognition, and being cautious, report greater exposure to workplace bullying.

**Lifestyle, Conflict-Solving Styles, and Workplace Bullying**

In 2009, Baillien et al. introduced the three-way model, in which they suggested that individual characteristics may directly stimulate exposure to workplace bullying or affect conflict management and in turn increase or decrease bullying. Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2011) agreed that individual factors may contribute to the lack of the target’s coping strategies and trigger bullying. However, no empirical evidence was provided to support such claims.

Previous research demonstrated that conflict management and ineffectively managed conflicts are among the most important antecedents of workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2009; Leymann, 1996; Zapf, 1999). In the three-way model, Baillien et al. (2009) argued that an employee may adopt either escalative or deescalative conflict-solving styles. While the escalative conflict-solving style may result in the individual becoming the target of workplace bullying, the deescalative style may prevent it (Baillien et al., 2009).

Conflict-solving styles are usually characterized by a five-part typology (Blake & Mouton, 1964) that includes the avoiding (withdrawal), yielding (giving into the wishes of the opponent), compromising (middle-of-the-road solution), problem-solving (identifying both parties’ needs and reconciling), and forcing (striving for one’s own benefits) conflict-solving styles (Van de Vliert, 2004).

**Hypothesis 6**

According to individual psychology theory, conflict-solving styles are closely entwined with one’s lifestyle (Morris-Conley & Kern, 2003; Smith, Kern, Curlette, & Mllis, 2001). Adlerians argue that an individual has different means of reacting to conflict situations from which to choose, and that these decisions are based on the private logic inherent in one’s lifestyle (Leggett, Roberts-Pittman, Byczek, & Morse, 2012; Peluso & Kern, 2002). Individuals with an elevated score on the belonging/social interest lifestyle theme are more likely to employ problem solving and compromising and less likely to employ forcing, yielding, and avoiding, which should in turn deter exposure to workplace bullying.

For example, individuals who have developed belonging and social feeling as part of their lifestyle are concerned with contributing to the well-being of others, while at the same time caring for their own needs (Adler, 1964; Dreikurs, 1971). Therefore, they would be more likely to select problem solving and compromising to solve a conflict (Kern, Gormley, & Curlette, 2008; Kern et al., 1993; Peluso et al., 2004). Barclay and Wolff (2011) argued that individuals with higher scores on belonging/social interest tend to reconcile differences and cooperate, which appears to reflect problem solving and compromising. In an empirical study conducted by Kazakevičiūtė, Ramanauskaitė, and Venskutė (2013), belonging/social interest was observed to be positively related to compromising. Moreover, individuals who displayed higher conscientiousness (related to belonging/social interest in Gaube, Kern, & Stoltz, 2015) appeared to be more likely to engage in relationship-focused coping and to report using compromise and problem solving (Lee-Baggley, Preece, & DeLongis, 2005). In addition, individuals who displayed a higher level of belonging/social interest were found to not withdraw from a conflict (Barclay & Wolff, 2011) and to use active conflict-solving techniques (Kern et al., 1993). Hence, avoiding and yielding seem to be used less frequently. Finally, individuals who displayed a higher level of belonging/social interest appeared to use forcing less frequently (Kazakevičiūtė et al., 2013; see above Figure 1, Path a).

Problem solving and compromising as nonaggressive and nonsubmissive conflict-solving styles should in turn prevent an individual from becoming victimized (Aquino, 2000). In previous empirical studies, low exposure to workplace bullying was linked to a high tendency to apply problem solving (Baillien & De Witte, 2009) and compromising (Baillien et al., 2009). In addition, some of the previous studies demonstrated that more frequent use of avoiding and yielding (Baillien & De Witte, 2009; Baillien et al., 2009; Zapf, 1999) and of forcing (Aquino, 2000; Baillien, Bollen, & De Witte, 2011; Baillien et al., 2009; Ölfsson & Jóhannsdóttir, 2004; Zapf, 1999) were related to greater exposure to workplace bullying (see above Figure 1, Path b). Our sixth hypothesis was: individuals who score higher on belonging/social interest will report less exposure to workplace bullying via more frequent use of problem solving and compromising and less frequent use of forcing, avoiding, and yielding.

**Hypothesis 7**

According to Kern et al. (1993), individuals with high scores on the going along scale are less individualistic, rebellious, and aggressive. Hence, they seem to be less likely to use forcing and more likely to use problem solving and compromising. Empirical studies have found that individuals with higher scores on the going along scale are more likely to use compromising and less likely to use forcing (Kazakevičiūtė et al., 2013). In addition, they avoid hurting people, and they may give in to the wishes of the other party at their own expense (#Kern et al., 1993). Hence, they seem to use avoiding and yielding more often (see Figure 1, Path b).

Less frequent use of forcing does not intensify the conflict
Hypothesis 8

Individuals who score higher on taking charge may be seen as more aggressive, pushy, and even hurtful (Kern et al., 1993). They are not afraid to disagree (Kern et al., 1993) and thus appear to use forcing more often. In an empirical study, Kazakevičiūtė et al. (2013) demonstrated that a higher level of taking charge was related to more frequent use of forcing. The need to control others (Kern et al., 1993) contravenes problem solving, compromising, avoiding, and yielding. Hence, individuals who score higher on the taking charge scale appear to be less likely to use the aforementioned conflict-solving strategies (Figure 1, Path a).

Some studies have demonstrated that more frequent use of forcing (Baillien & De Witte, 2009; Baillien et al., 2009) and less frequent use of problem solving (Baillien & De Witte, 2009), compromising (Baillien et al., 2009), avoiding, and yielding (Zapf & Gross, 2001) are linked to an increased likelihood of exposure to workplace bullying (Figure 1, Path b).

Our eighth hypothesis was: individuals who score higher on taking charge report greater exposure to workplace bullying via less frequent use of problem solving, compromising, avoiding, and yielding and more frequent use of forcing.

Hypothesis 9

Individuals who have a higher score on the wanting recognition scale are concerned with positive recognition and praise from others (Kern et al., 1993). Since early childhood they have actively engaged in various strategies in order to win adult approval (Kern et al., 1993). We propose that these individuals may use various conflict-solving styles, for example, yielding, avoiding, problem solving, compromising, or even forcing in order to achieve this recognition. In addition, these individuals, being success- and achievement-oriented (Peluso et al., 2004), may use various conflict-solving strategies to attain their goals (Kern et al., 1993). Hence, in the present study, we hypothesize that an elevated score on the wanting recognition scale is only directly related to exposure to workplace bullying because individuals with elevated scores do not appear to have a particular pattern of preferred conflict-solving styles. Certain conflict-solving styles seem to depend on the given situation and on the expectation of reaching a desirable outcome, for example, praise, positive feedback, or validation of one’s success (Kern et al., 1993). Our ninth hypothesis was: a higher score on the wanting recognition scale is only directly related to exposure to workplace bullying.

Hypothesis 10

Individuals who score higher on the being cautious scale have been found to have felt a lack of belonging in the family of origin, which then led to feelings of inferiority in adulthood (Kern et al., 1993). This experience may prevent them from using collaborative conflict-solving styles (Kern et al., 1993) as well as encourage striving for self-gain (Stone & Drescher, 2004) and avoiding confrontation by withdrawing (Adler, 1964). Because of the challenging childhood experience, they may be more sensitive to being hurt by others and may take on a protective role, downplaying their own needs (Kern et al., 1993) and using yielding. The idea that individuals who score higher on being cautious tend to use both active (i.e., forcing) and passive (i.e., yielding and avoiding) styles is supported by previous studies that demonstrated that neuroticism (which is related to the being cautious attribute in the study by Gaube et al., 2015) was related to active/aggressive (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011) and passive (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Lee-Bagley et al., 2005) forms of coping. In an empirical research study, Morris-Conley and Kern (2003) found that individuals with higher scores on being cautious were less likely to use both active (i.e., forcing) and passive (yielding and avoiding) styles.

Our tenth hypothesis was: individuals who score higher on the being cautious scale may use various conflict-solving styles, for example, yielding, compromising, avoiding, and being less frequent use of problem solving.
solving (Baillien & De Witte, 2009) and compromising (Baillien et al., 2009) may be linked to greater exposure to workplace bullying (see Figure 1, Path b). Our tenth hypothesis was: individuals who score higher on being cautious will report greater exposure to workplace bullying via less frequent use of problem solving and compromising and more frequent use of forcing, avoiding, and yielding.

Method

Participants

The data of 807 employees (14.2% males and 84.1% females) from three Lithuanian organizations and a group of working students were used in the present study. Two organizations were from the service sector (Organization 1, \( n = 95 \); Organization 2, \( n = 521 \)), one from the manufacturing sector (Organization 3, \( n = 171 \)), and the group of working students were from various types of organizations (\( n = 20 \)). In Organization 1, the data were collected online, so the return rate was not calculated. In Organization 2, questionnaires were sent to the supervisors in unsealed envelopes. The supervisors were instructed to hand out the questionnaires to the employees, inform them about the goals of the research and anonymity, and return the completed questionnaires in sealed and undamaged envelopes. The questionnaires in the sealed envelopes were returned within one week and left in boxes (70.21% return rate). In Organization 3, some of the questionnaires were handed out to the employees directly, who then filled out the questionnaires immediately. Other employees received their questionnaire in an unsealed envelope from a company representative who was not their direct supervisor. The questionnaires were filled out within one week and returned in sealed envelopes (80.8% return rate). The working students received a questionnaire before the lecture and filled it out immediately (with a 100% return rate). The average age of the respondents was 37.09 years (SD = 10.45). The average number of years of working experience in a current position was 6.6 years (SD = 6.9).

Most employees (647; 80.2%) were subordinates; 89 (11%) had a supervisory position. The average workload (hours per week) was 41.9 (SD = 9.7).

Instruments

The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised was used to measure exposure to workplace bullying (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). It is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 22 items indicating how often employees have been exposed to negative behaviors at work during the last six months. The respondents rated each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). The present data yielded Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .87 \).

The Dutch Test of Conflict Handling (De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001) consists of 20 items and integrates five scales of four items each. The scales measure five conflict-solving styles: yielding (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .64 \)), compromising (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .63 \)), forcing (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .68 \)), problem solving (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .79 \)), and avoiding (Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .51 \)). The internal consistencies were similar to those found in the validation study (see De Dreu et al., 2001), except for that of the avoiding scale, which was not used in the subsequent data analysis due to low reliability.

The Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success – Adult Form was used to assess the lifestyle themes (Wheeler et al., 1993). The inventory consists of 65 items and includes five primary scales: belonging/social interest (BSI; Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .75 \)), going along (GA; Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .77 \)), taking charge (TC; Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .86 \)), wanting recognition (WR; Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .76 \)), and being cautious (BC; Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .77 \)). The means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1.

To test Hypotheses 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, we used structural equation modeling with Mplus 7. The variable exposure to workplace bullying was skewed (kurtosis = 4.78, skewness = 1.95) so we used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR estimator), which is appropriate for non-normally distributed data. The variables belonging/social interest, going along, taking charge, wanting recognition, and being cautious were simultaneously included in the model as independent variables and yielding, problem solving, compromising, and forcing were simultaneously included in the model as mediators.

Results

The correlations presented in Table 1 demonstrated that all lifestyle themes and conflict-solving styles were significantly related to exposure to workplace bullying (however, the correlations among the variables were weak, viz., \( r < .5 \)). Belonging/social interest was negatively related to workplace bullying and going along, taking charge, wanting recognition, and being cautious were positively related to workplace bullying, supporting Hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 5, but rejecting Hypothesis 2.

In order to identify the best fitting mediation model, four different models were tested. The fit indices of the primary and final models are presented in Table 2.

The results demonstrated that the first model with the five independent variables belonging/social interest, going along, taking charge, wanting recognition, and being cautious and the four mediators yielding, forcing, compromising, and problem solving demonstrated very poor fit to the data. Hence, our second step was to remove the superfluous, insignificant relationships that decreased the Tucker-Lewis co-
The results demonstrated that higher belonging/social interest was only indirectly related to less exposure to workplace bullying (via more frequent use of problem solving and less frequent use of forcing), which partially supports Hypothesis 6. The total indirect effect of belonging/social interest on exposure to workplace bullying was –.047 (with –.036, \( p < .0001 \), for problem solving and –.011, \( p = .05 \), for forcing). Going along was positively directly related to exposure to workplace bullying and via more frequent use of forcing (the indirect effect was .012, \( p = .037 \), rejecting Hypothesis 7. Taking charge was directly and indirectly (via more frequent use of problem solving and more frequent use of forcing) positively related to exposure to workplace bullying, partially supporting Hypothesis 8. However, because the specific indirect effects were of opposite signs (i.e., indirect effect via problem solving was –.018, \( p = .019 \); indirect effect via forcing was .022, \( p = .005 \)), the total indirect effect was non-significant (.004, \( p = .69 \)). Similarly, wanting recognition was related to exposure to workplace bullying via more frequent use of problem solving and more frequent use of forcing (partially supporting Hypothesis 9). The specific indirect effects were significant (i.e., indirect effect via problem solving was –.025, \( p = .002 \); indirect effect via forcing was .014, \( p = .026 \)), but the total indirect effect was nonsignificant (–.011, \( p = .294 \)). Hence, the mediating variables seem to explain the relationship between taking charge and wanting recognition and exposure to workplace bullying, respectively, but it is not possible to assess their combined influence. Being cautious was positively directly as well as indirectly, namely, via less frequent use of problem solving (indirect effect .026, \( p = .001 \)) related to exposure to workplace bullying, partially supporting Hypothesis 10.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations

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<th>Measure</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace bullying</td>
<td>26.78</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging/social interest</td>
<td>36.89</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>–.13**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Going along</td>
<td>16.79</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.2**</td>
<td>–.12**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking charge</td>
<td>20.84</td>
<td>6.23</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wanting recognition</td>
<td>40.13</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being cautious</td>
<td>12.79</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>.2**</td>
<td>–.36**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>–.02</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yielding</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>–.16**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>–.24**</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>15.02</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>–.08*</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>–.03</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>–.2**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.63**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking charge</td>
<td>9.24</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>–.04</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.07*</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note. \( *p < .05, **p < .01 \).

Table 2. Fit indices for the primary and final mediation models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>Scaling correction factor for MLR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>350.73</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>–1.73</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>1.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>285.84</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>285.84</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 4</td>
<td>285.84</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( df = \) degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; MLR = maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors; Model 1 = all independent variables, all mediators; Model 2 = excluding yielding and compromising, problem solving not regressed on going along; Model 3 = forcing not regressed on being cautious, being cautious not correlated with wanting recognition; Model 4 = workplace bullying not regressed on belonging/social interest and wanting recognition, problem solving correlated with forcing.
The main aim of the present study was to identify the direct and indirect relationships (via conflict-solving styles) between lifestyle attributes and exposure to workplace bullying. Overall, the findings of the present study supported the proposed three-way model, suggesting that individual characteristics may directly as well as indirectly (i.e., via conflict-solving styles) stimulate workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2009).

The results demonstrated that a higher level of belonging/social interest was related to more frequent use of problem solving, less frequent use of forcing and, in turn, to less exposure to workplace bullying. This supports the notion from individual psychology theory that individuals who experienced belonging in the family of origin and consequently developed social feeling as a part of their lifestyle (Kern et al., 1993) are concerned with contributing to mutual well-being and cooperation (Adler, 1964; Dreikurs, 1971), which is further linked to healthier interpersonal relationships and less exposure to workplace bullying (Baillien & De Witte, 2009). At work, these individuals are able to empathize with others, talk straight with others, and are solution-oriented (Kern et al., 1993). This encourages problem solving and discourages self-centered forcing, which assist in preventing exposure to workplace bullying.

Contrary to our expectations, going along was positively related to exposure to workplace bullying. Hence, individuals who are rule-focused seem to report greater exposure to workplace bullying. A possible explanation may be found in Coyne et al. (2000), who proposed that moralistic, rule-concerned, organized individuals may annoy colleagues by their traditional and often perfectionist view, which then leads to workplace bullying. Similarly, Lind, Glaso, Pallesen, and Einarsen (2009) demonstrated that some targets may be characterized as organized, self-disciplined, hardworking, moralistic, and rule-bound individuals. In Zapf’s (1999) study, some targets admitted that they were overly accurate and pedantic, which may have caused the negative attitudes toward them and led to bullying.

In addition, individuals who displayed higher levels of going along were more likely to use forcing, which resulted in greater exposure to workplace bullying. This demonstrates that individuals who are concerned about rules and regulations may be strict about others following the rules or defend rules rigorously (Kern et al., 1993). Consequently, this may be linked to forcing, which put them into the role of provocative targets (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007).

As hypothesized, taking charge was positively related to...
workplace bullying, indicating that control, bossiness, or even aggressiveness (Kern et al., 1993) may annoy fellow workers (Coyne et al., 2000) and put an individual in a provocative target position (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Moreover, by telling others what to do, being critical, and having the last word (Kern et al., 1993), they may threaten colleagues’ self-esteem and instigate retaliatory responses that lead to bullying (Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). The findings of the present study are in line with previous research that found that aggressive (Zapf, 1999), rude, less agreeable individuals (Lind et al., 2009) are more likely to be exposed to workplace bullying.

The taking charge scale was also indirectly related to workplace bullying. Interestingly, on the one hand, it was related to less exposure to workplace bullying via more frequent use of problem solving. On the other hand, it was related to greater exposure to workplace bullying via more frequent use of forcing. The findings may indicate that individuals who display higher levels of taking charge may be exposed to higher or lower levels of workplace bullying depending on the conflict-solving style they use. Similarly, wanting recognition also had two opposing effects. On the one hand, it was positively related to exposure to workplace bullying via more frequent use of forcing. On the other hand, it was negatively related to exposure to workplace bullying via more frequent use of problem solving.

We propose that, among the individuals with higher scores on the taking charge and wanting recognition scales, the use of a particular conflict-solving style may depend on the particular situation. Hence, situational moderators should be taken into account in future studies. For example, Baillien et al. (2009) proposed that work-related characteristics may affect the way employees cope with conflicts. According to Baillien, Neyens, and De Witte (2008), low workload and high autonomy may encourage constructive conflict management while task-oriented leadership, hierarchy, and lack of social support may encourage dysfunctional conflict solving (Baillien et al., 2008). In addition, Astrauskaitė, Kern, and Notelaers (2014) argued that, especially under the stressful circumstances, some individuals may be more likely to use active self-defense strategies and less likely to use collaboration or problem solving. Thus, under stressful circumstances, individuals who display higher levels of taking charge and wanting recognition may be more likely to use forcing, which is consequently linked to greater exposure to workplace bullying. Under conditions of no or low stress, they are more likely to use problem solving, which rescues them from bullying. For individuals who display higher levels of taking charge, stressful circumstances may appear in situations in which control, use of power, or being in charge is not available (Kern et al., 1993). For individuals who score higher on the wanting recognition scale, stressful circumstances may be created when they do not receive positive recognition and feedback from others (Kern et al., 1993).

As hypothesized, our findings indicate that employees who displayed a higher level of being cautious reported greater exposure to workplace bullying. This seems to suggest that a lack of feeling of belonging in the family of origin (Curlette & Kern, 2010), lower self-esteem (Carter-Sowell et al., 2010), and viewing the world as a hostile place (Adler, 1964) may contribute to exposure to workplace bullying. The significant positive relationship between being cautious and workplace bullying echo previous findings. For example, Brodsky (1976) claimed that seeing hostility in others and expecting to be attacked results in actual exposure to workplace bullying. Astrauskaitė and Kern (2011) found that greater exposure to work harassment was linked to a higher level of cautiousness. Matthiesen and Einarsen (2001) identified a cluster of targets that were described as being suspicious toward the outside world. Persson et al. (2009) demonstrated that bullied people were more impulsive, mistrusting, and irritable.

Our results also demonstrated that individuals who display a higher level of being cautious are less likely to use problem solving, which in turn was related to greater exposure to workplace bullying. This finding suggests that, because of a lack of belonging in the family of origin and underdeveloped social interest, these individuals are more likely to strive for their own needs (Stone & Drescher, 2004) and less likely to use problem solving, which in turn is linked to greater exposure to workplace bullying. In addition, these individuals seem to have a lack of trust and be more suspicious (Kern et al., 1993), which discourages them from using problem solving (Karakus & Savas, 2012; Lee, Stajkovic, & Cho, 2011). The present findings partially mirror Morris-Conley and Kern’s (2005) and Kazakevičiūtė et al.’s (2013) results, which demonstrated that a higher level of being cautious was significantly related to less frequent use of the collaborative conflict-solving style. However, the present findings extend this knowledge by demonstrating that individuals who displayed an elevated score on the being cautious scale not only used the collaborative conflict-solving style less often, but that the being cautious scale was related to greater exposure to workplace bullying.

It is important to highlight the finding that only two out of four conflict-solving styles significantly explained the indirect relationship between lifestyle and exposure to workplace bullying. The two conflict-solving styles of problem solving and forcing are both related to the availability of power, both include high concern for one’s own needs and, hence, are considered to be assertive conflict solving styles (Baillien, Bollen, Euwema, & De Witte, 2014). According to some researchers, forcing, as a way of not giving in and fighting, should be related to a perpetrator’s role, whereas problem solving, being a de-escalative conflict-solving style, should prevent an individual from being either a target or a perpetrator (Baillien et al., 2014). The findings of the present study demonstrated that forcing could also be related to target status, or perhaps to the role of the provocative target (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). The nonsignificant mediating effect of yielding and compromising highlights the need to consider situational and cultural moderators (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006), which may help us to understand the conditions under
which these conflict-solving styles prevail and are related to exposure to workplace bullying.

The present study contributes to the field of workplace bullying in at least two ways. First, previous studies focused on the direct effects of personality on exposure to workplace bullying (Baldacci et al., 2009; Gandolfo, 1995; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001, 2007; Vartia, 1996) and the relationships between personality and conflict-solving styles (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Ejaz, Iqbal, & Ara, 2012; Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006; Wood & Bell, 2008). There was little knowledge about the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between personality and workplace bullying. The present study shows that certain conflict-solving styles may partially explain the relationship between lifestyle and workplace bullying and supports one of the pathways in Baillien et al.’s (2009) three-way model.

Second, previous studies on workplace bullying have rarely addressed protective personality traits that may deter bullying (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2008). The findings of the present study show that belonging/social interest, an adaptive lifestyle attribute, may have a protective role in terms of exposure to workplace bullying.

Practical Implications

The results of the present study have several possible practical applications. First, the findings pinpoint lifestyle attributes that may make an individual more likely to become the target of workplace bullying. In the present study, we found that being less sociable and lacking social skills (as represented by a lower level of belonging/social interest), being rule-focused (as represented by a higher level of going along), being more controlling and directive (as represented by a higher level of taking charge), being very concerned about positive recognition and praise (as represented by a higher level of wanting recognition), and being suspicious, mistrusting, anxious as well as having a more negative attitude (as represented by a higher level of being cautious) may be related to greater exposure to workplace bullying. This knowledge can be used to teach people to be more aware of their lifestyle attributes and train them to demonstrate more social interest, balance cautiousness, recognize rigidity regarding rules, the need for positive evaluation, and the need to control. People could also be taught to be aware and tolerant of others’ lifestyle attributes. For example, knowing that bossiness or rigidity regarding rules may provoke one’s aggression, a person could learn to control his/her reactions and, instead, behave more appropriately.

Organizations may wish to create circumstances that encourage functional conflict solving and balance stress. For example, using encouragement instead of punishment may increase social interest and collaboration among members of an organization (Ferguson, 2006). In addition, Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1964) found that, in stressful situations, people are more likely to demonstrate the dysfunctional sides of their lifestyle/personality. Hence, by balancing strenuous working conditions, organizations may prevent the nonadaptive and nonproductive behaviors, encourage problem solving, discourage forcing, and prevent bullying.

Prevention in organizations could be directed toward making individuals more aware of their use of conflict-solving styles and teaching them new skills (Leka & Houdmont, 2010). Fox and Stallworth (2009) promoted dispute resolution as one of the main preventative strategies for workplace bullying. Hence, organizations may wish to consider an employee training focused on collaborative conflict solving.

Limitations

The present research has several limitations. First of all, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow us to make causal assumptions about the identified relationships. Hence, additional studies using longitudinal, diary, or an experimental study design should be conducted (Roe, 2012).

A diary study may also be useful to avoid errors related to retrospective reporting. Connor-Smith and Flachsbart (2007) commented that retrospective reports may be inaccurate due to memory errors, difficulty aggregating across events, and poor insight. Hence, daily and immediate coping reports may be helpful in identifying a more accurate pattern of the relationship between personality and conflict-solving styles.

In addition, previous studies with schoolchildren (Ólafsson, Ólafsson, Bjornsson, 1999, as cited in Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, 2004) and adults (Zapf & Gross, 2001) showed that the use of coping strategies changes as the bullying experience increases in severity. The cross-sectional nature of the present study did not allow us to identify whether conflict management strategies change over time, how they relate to bullying at different stages of the phenomenon, and whether an individual sticks to the preferred conflict-solving style over time, despite the increased severity of bullying.

In the present study, we measured the frequency of negative behaviors, but we did not take self-reported bullying into account. Including this measure in future studies would provide a better understanding of the lifestyle attributes and conflict-solving styles that make an individual more sensitive to behavior by colleagues that is interpreted as bullying.

Individual characteristics explained only a small proportion of the variance in workplace bullying, lending support for Leymann’s (1996) idea that individual factors are of relatively little importance in explaining workplace bullying. On the other hand, the present findings are in line with those of previous studies, which found that individual characteristics have rather low explanatory power (Lind et al., 2009; Milam et al., 2009).

In the present study, we aimed at identifying whether certain lifestyle attributes encourage certain conflict-solving styles that
are related to greater exposure to workplace bullying. Understanding individual personality/lifestyle characteristics is important, but may provide a somewhat limited understanding (Wood & Bell, 2008). Hence, an important next step would be to analyze how different lifestyle/personality profiles are related to a preference for certain conflict-solving styles and exposure to workplace bullying.

Finally, situational moderators should be taken into account in future studies. For example, Baillien et al. (2009) argued that work-related characteristics may affect employees’ decisions to use certain conflict-solving styles. Individual psychology theorists have argued that stressful circumstances may encourage active or passive self-defensive behaviors and make people less aware of the various choices they have for solving the conflict at hand (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Dreikurs, 1977). Connor-Smith and Flachsbart (2007) argued that coping may be motivated by situational demands and that the relationship between personality and conflict-solving styles can be partially explained by the frequency, intensity, and nature of stressors. Hence, stressful working conditions along with other situational moderators should be controlled for in future studies.

References


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