GENDERED COPING RESPONSE OF TARGETS TO WORKPLACE BULLYING WITH ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A MODERATED MODERATION MODEL

**Levia  and Gurvinder Kaur***

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, Patiala 147001, India

* Correspondence: gurvinder@thapar.edu

**ABSTRACT**

The study aims to understand the reactance of targets to workplace bullying with respect to active coping response of exit and voice using moderated moderation, emotional intelligence and gender as the two moderators. With the integration of reactance theory and gender socialization (identity theory), the study was carried on 206 junior employees working in Indian IT sector and identified as targets to workplace bullying. The study was conducted in two phases. It was found that people with higher emotional intelligence preferred exit over voice. Also, males with higher emotional intelligence preferred exit as a coping response and females with high emotional intelligence chose to raise voice, implicating stronger identification to their gender identities. The research finds number of theoretical contributions particularly focusing on integration of two theories and is rare attempt of employing moderated moderation. With certain managerial implications, the study concludes with the understanding of how gender identity brings significant change in choosing coping response to workplace bullying.

*KEYWORDS*: Workplace Bullying, Coping Response, Emotional Intelligence, Gender, Exit, Voice

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying has been defined as a situation where employees persistently feel exposed to negative behaviors at work (Einarsen et al., 2011), usually perpetrated by individuals at superior designations (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2005). With the emergence of workplace bullying as well-observed phenomenon, initially in western world, found growing consideration in eastern context as well (Rai and Agarwal, 2018). The unique sociocultural framework of eastern nations demonstrated workplaces to be propagating negative behaviors at work (Rai and Agarwal, 2018). The confluence of Indian culture with the western industrialism (Sinha 1982, 1990, 1994, 1997; Kakar and Kakar, 2007), and emerging crossvergence (Budhwar, 2009; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2012) brought Indian ethos to light where acquiescence and discomfort towards those in superior positions can be witnessed (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013), IT sector marks no exception.

With the glut of research available on antecedents to workplace bullying across the world (Rai and Agarwal, 2018), research focus has shifted from understanding the causes to studying the outcomes and preventive measures for the same (Nielsen et al., 2020). Over recent years analyzing coping responses to the negative behaviors at work has broadly gained popularity (Nielsen et al., 2020). Coping has been defined as cognitive and behavioral response to conflicting situations in order to mitigate the loss and prevent the resource depletion from such demanding experiences (Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010; Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Nielsen et al., 2020).

The research in workplace bullying arena has expanded its horizon to study the interventions involved in the process (Farley et al., 2023) through mediation and moderation analysis. Moderation studies, in particular help in identifying the boundaries and conditions under which the bullying prevails (Gardner et al., 2021). Previous studies clearly called researchers to emphasize on the factors that intervene in the impact and cause of bullying (Mikkelsen et al., 2020; Nielsen and Einarsen, 2018).

This study therefore, addresses number of research gaps portrayed in previous literature. One, the study empirically evaluates the mechanism that might explain the relationship of workplace bullying and the particular coping response, specified as research gap (Rai and Agarwal, 2019). Two, the study integrates two theories of gender socialization and reactance in order to bring clearer picture with respect to self-identification, enriching theoretical perspective. Thirdly, current study explored moderated-moderation, which has not yet gained much popularity. The researchers have tried to integrate different categories of moderators, identity based (gender) and personality-based (emotional intelligence), as mentioned by Zhong at al., (2022).  Fourth, study has been

centered to understand multiple perspectives simultaneously, as from the targets point of view and their gender identification. Fifth, attempts have been made to study relation between gender and workplace bullying, however, gendered coping response of targets to workplace bullying in particular remains unexplored. This study attempts to explore the same. The paper begins with theoretical underpinning to the variables and hypothesis development from the same. Followed by research methodology illustrating moderated moderation. The results are depicted then in the next section and discussion and implications of the study have been duly underlined. Lastly the study ends with conclusion, highlighting future research directions and limitations.

## 2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 Workplace Bullying and Coping Response

The bullying literature illustrates it as the situation, where person on the receiving end of negative actions, finds hard to defend oneself and identifies himself as helpless in the situation (Nielsen et al., 2020; Nielsen et al., 2017). However, when it was seen from the perspective of targets, their attempt to handle the situation depended on the perception of success of being able to put an end to it (Nielsen et al., 2020). Further, it has been understood that several factors come to interplay for the coping strategies to be followed by the targets to workplace bullying (O'lafsson and Jo'hannsdo'ttir, 2004). According to the theory of reactance (Miron and Brehm, 2006), when the individuals feel hindrance to their free behavior, the motivation to react psychologically goes up and the reaction to the situation is aimed at refurbishing the freedom. Therefore, based on the theory, when targets find themselves in the situation of bullying at work, their psychological motivation to control the situation and regain the free behavior arises and hence targets indulge in coping strategies. Such coping reactions have also been attributed to the severity and the kind of bullying being dealt with (Nielsen et al., 2020).

While coping at the initial stage, potential for challenge is appraised cognitively. When the employee perceives situation as harmful, available and adequate alternatives are explored (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Such coping alternatives have been broadly classified into problem focused and emotion focused (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) or active (exit and voice) and passive (loyalty and neglect) (Withey and Cooper, 1989) coping responses. Established in the previous study, initially targets focus on active response of voice, underpinning the theory of reactance, however when over the period of time helplessness (Seligman, 1975) is learnt they move to neglect response (Levia and Kaur, 2023). Zapf and Gross (2001), found that targets try a varied range of coping alternatives starting with constructive options and usually end up with neglect and exit behaviors. This study based on the theory of reactance, focuses on active coping responses (Hagedoorn et al., 1999) of Exit and Voice particularly.

### 2.1.1 Exit

Previous studies have described that difficult situations at work are created when bullying occurs (Rai and Agarwal, 2019). The conflicting situations of loss of dignity, low supervisor support, unfair treatment, low self-esteem, etc. influences the targets' choice to leave the job (Houshmand et al., 2012). Exit has been defined as direct or implicit withdrawal from the discorded happening by moving to temporary new location or permanently disentangling oneself from the conflict (Lee et al., 2021). Since reactance to a situation is the state of motivation, it sways the individuals towards reinstating the free behavior (Miron and Brehm, 2006). Further, according to the reactance theory, such freedom may be restored by engaging in the elimination directly or by observing what others does (Miron and Brehm, 2006). Workplace bullying and exit or intention to leave has shown positive relationship in earlier studies (Rai and Agarwal, 2019; Rasool et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2019). Targets to workplace bullying were found to explore fresh appointments by exiting the current position (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013). Particularly to Indian context, finding new jobs was preferred over delving into the legal channel. With the given traces of bribery and politicization, refraining oneself from engaging into any conflicting situation paved the way to exit, aided by concern of blight reputation (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013). Literature further indicates that participants who choose to leave, end up with the sense of insecurity, of not being able to handle the situation but at the same time experience liberation from trapped sensation (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2010). Number of instances have been reported in the literature where exit has been recommended as the effective choice (Meglich-Sespico et al., 2007). Focusing only on work-related bullying specifically for this study, it is hypothesized that:

$H_1$: *Work-related bullying is positively associated to exit as a coping response.*

### 2.1.2 Voice

Raising of voice has been described as a behavior (Weiss and Morrison, 2019) that is constructive and change oriented directed towards improvement of the conflicting situation (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001) often practiced voluntarily (Grant et al., 2009). Voice as a coping response involves active hunt for solution by bringing the problem in notice of the supervisor or employer, threatening the troublemaker to tell others, asking the offender to discontinue unfair acts or bringing into someone's knowledge about the situation (Ng and Feldman, 2012; Lee et al., 2021). Niedl (1996) also found that for when a conflicting situation arose, most of the employees preferred to raise voice, however over the period of time the coping response changed to exit or neglect, when raising of voice brought no significant results. Raising voice can affect individual's standing in the organization both positively and negatively and can cause domino effect as a challenge to existing state of affairs (Van Dyne and Ang, 1998; Weiss and Morrison, 2019). Raising voice can propose ways to solve the problems with organizational involvement (Maynes and Podsakoff, 2014) and can influence positive change in the work environment, increase work efficiency and improve job satisfaction (Ashford et al., 2009; Grant and Ashford, 2008). Thus targets to bullying may resort to raising voice in order to bring a change in standard practices of the organization (Liang and Yeh, 2020; Liang, 2021). Further, according to the theory of reactance, when free behavior is endangered, individual gets motivated to reinstate the freedom by psychological reactance (Miron and Brehm, 2006). Understanding that at the reactance stage employees prefer to encounter the situation actively, following hypothesis has been framed:

*H₂: Work-related bullying is positively associated to voice as a coping response.*

### 2.2 Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence and Gender

The emotional intelligence construct was proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and has been defined as a person's ability to observe and discriminate among one's own and that of others' feelings and emotions and further to interpret and guide oneself accordingly. In previous studies, a link between emotional intelligence and coping styles can be found (Noorbakhsh et al., 2010; Schutte et al., 2007; Saklofske et al., 2007). According to Fteiha and Awwad (2020), understanding one's competence with respect to self-awareness, motivation and self-control, forms important factor in determination of how the person manages one's affairs. Positive relationship has been reported between emotional intelligence and active and passive problem coping (Fteiha and Awwad, 2020). Also, because of increased emotional intelligence, emotional evaluation and perception improvises (Noorbakhsh et al., 2010), due to which higher emotional intelligence indicated increased use of positive coping methods and efficient coping styles (Roger et al., 1993; Albesher and Alsaeed, 2015; Moradi et al., 2011; Noorbakhsh et al., 2010). The link between emotional intelligence and stress can also be seen in earlier studies (Gohm et al., 2005; Moradi et al., 2011; Bar-on and Parleer, 2000; Noorbakhsh et al., 2010; Ciarrochi et al., 2002). Bar-on and parleer (2000) reported that emotional intelligence is the root to stress management and adaptation ability. According to the theory of reactance, individuals' reaction is aroused out of the motivation to reinstate the free behavior and since emotional intelligence drives the cognitive ability to understand and interpret the emotions, it is hypothesized that:

*H₃: Emotional intelligence significantly moderates the relationship between work-related bullying and coping response of exit and voice.*

The reactance theory is established on the base of motivation to take action (Miron and Brehm, 2006). The study by Bell (2004) underpins that there exists an unconscious part of an individual that motivates one and of which individuals are unaware. Such aspect has been linked to the gender under the psychoanalytic theory of treatment of gender (Carter, 2014). Gender can be referred to numerous identities assumed by people along with their identification as man and woman (Salin and Hoel, 2013). According to the theory of gender socialization (Carter, 2014), social identity assumed by males and females determine how they act differently (Carter, 2014) and helps in understanding the basis of intergroup differences (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Number of studies have successfully established the difference of emotional intelligence across two genders with larger evidence of females being more emotionally intelligent than males (Ahmad et al., 2009; Duckelt and Raffalli, 1989; Tapia, 1999; Dunn, 2002; Sandhu and Mehrotra, 1999). Further, better interpersonal relations, higher empathy, greater social responsibilities were also more strongly associated to females (Ahmad et al., 2009; Duckelt and Raffalli, 1989; Tapia, 1999; Dunn, 2002; Sandhu and Mehrotra, 1999). On characterizing gender as salient indicator of workgroups, it is highly likely to impact group cohesion and conflicting perspectives (Salin and Hoel, 2013). Therefore, given the gender socialization theory, difference of emotional intelligence between genders and its impact on perception of situations, following is hypothesized:

*H₄: Gender significantly interacts with emotional intelligence which further moderates the relationship between*
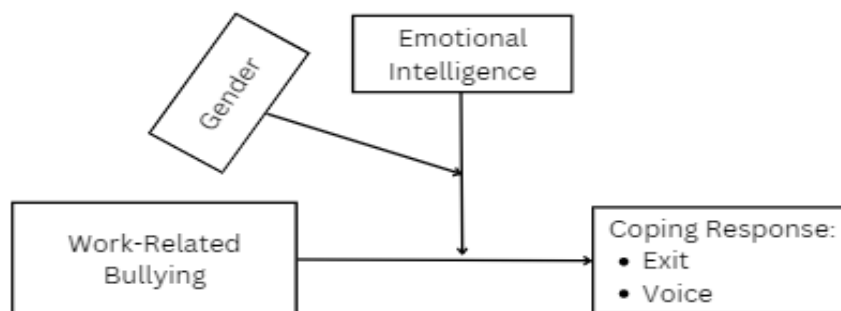
*work-related bullying and coping response of exit and voice.*

**2.3 Proposed Model**

The figure 1 shows the hypothesized moderated moderation model with emotional intelligence and gender as the two interaction variables.

**Figure 1**

*Hypothesized Model*



**3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 Research Design and Sample**

The study follows cross-sectional and multilevel descriptive design. The data was collected from IT sector employees in the region of Punjab. The study employed purposive sampling, in order to identify targets to workplace bullying.

**3.2 Data Collection**

**3.2.1 Phase 1**

The data was collected using electronic survey, consisting of workplace bullying and demographic information, was sent to 562 employees working at junior level with minimum working experience of 6 months as per the definition of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2011). Anonymity and confidentiality was declared and consent was taken. A total of 516 responses were received completely filled therefore, considered for the study with minimum 6 months of experience. Of these 516 respondents, targets to workplace bullying were identified based on the cut-off score of 33 (Gupta et al., 2017; Rosander and Blomberg, 2019).

**3.2.2 Phase 2**

In the second phase, these 206 respondents identified as targets were re-approached and items relating to exit, voice and emotional intelligence were measured.

**3.3 Measures**

**3.3.1 Workplace Bullying**

To measure workplace bullying, NAQ-R, 22 item widely accepted scale was used (Einarsen et al., 2009). Cut-off scores previously defined were implemented in the study (Gupta et al., 2017; Rosander and Blomberg, 2019). The Cronbach's Alpha was noted to be 0.873, depicting good reliability (Cronbach, 1970). The scale was based on 5-point timeline with 1 as 'never' to 5 as 'daily'. The scale measures three factors of work-related bullying (7 items), person-related bullying (12 items) and physically-intimidating bullying (3 items). This study in particular uses the NAQ-R, 22 item scale for the identification of targets to workplace bullying and the work-related

bullying sub-scale with 0.6 Cronbach's alpha (Ghazali, 2008), for further data analysis.

### 3.3.2 Exit

To measure the coping response of Exit, 4 items of the EVLN typology by Rusbult et al., (1988) were used. The Cronbach's Alpha was noted to be 0.921.

### 3.3.3 Voice

To measure the coping response of Voice, 4 items of the EVLN typology by Rusbult et al., (1988) were used, with the Cronbach's Alpha of 0.785.

### 3.3.4 Emotional Intelligence

The Wong and Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) was used (Wong and Law, 2002). The scale constitutes 16 items and Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.921.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

For the data analysis SPSS and PROCESS MACRO were used to conduct descriptive analysis and Moderated-Moderation analysis was conducted using Model 3 (Hayes, 2017).

### 3.4.1 Control Variables

The demographic variables of Age and Experience were controlled. Experience of working in the current organization was considered.

### 3.4.2 Common method variance

To address the CMV among the variables (Podsakoff et al., 2012), Harman's single factor test was used. 17.19% of the total variance extracted after factor analysis was accounted by first factor. No concern for CMV was noted (Harman, 1960).

### 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Preliminary Analysis

### 4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics

The sample constituted larger number of males than females due to population of males being more than females in IT sector. Also the employees with the experience of 1 to 5 years and age between 20 and 35, particularly dominated the study. Table 1 shows the demographic details of the respondents.

### TABLE 1

*Demographic Characteristics*

| DEMOGRAPHY | NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS | PERCENTAGE |
|---|---|---|
| **GENDER** | | |
| Male | 147 | 71.4 |
| Female | 59 | 28.6 |

| AGE | | |
|---|---|---|
| 20-35 | 150 | 72.8 |
| 35-50 | 50 | 24.2 |
| 50-65 | 6 | 3 |
| **EXPERIENCE** | | |
| 6 months to 1 year | 54 | 26.2 |
| 1 year to 5 years | 85 | 41.3 |
| More than 5 years | 67 | 32.5 |

### 4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations
The table 2 shows descriptive statistics and correlation among the variables.

**TABLE 2**

*Descriptive Statistics*

| VARIABLES | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | MEAN | STD. DEV |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Gender | 1 | 0.054 | 0.177[*] | 0.174[*] | 0.191[*] | 1.29 | 0.473 |
| 2. Work-Related Bullying | 0.054 | 1 | 0.038 | 0.194[*] | 0.154 | 2.53 | 0.646 |
| 3. Emotional Intelligence | 0.177[*] | 0.038 | 1 | -0.062 | 0.277[**] | 3.68 | 0.752 |
| 4. Exit | 0.174[*] | 0.194[*] | -0.062 | 1 | 0.116 | 2.45 | 1.145 |
| 5. Voice | 0.191[*] | 0.154 | 0.277[*] | 0.116 | 1 | 3.28 | 0.932 |

*Coefficient significant at $p<0.05$

** Coefficient significant at $p<0.01$

### 4.2 Identification of targets to workplace bullying

Of the total 516 respondents, 206 were found to be the targets to workplace bullying, giving the bullying percentage as 39.92% prevalent amongst junior employees in IT sector of Punjab. Further, 22.6% were at risk of

being bullied, with cut-off score between 33 and 40; 50.4% were occasionally bullied with score between 40 and 56 and 27.1% severely bullied with score greater than 56 (Gupta et al., 2017; Rosander and Blomberg, 2019).

### 4.3 Test of Hypotheses

As depicted in table 3, on studying the impact of work-related bullying on exit intentions of junior employees a significant relation ($p<0.05$) was found. However, the relation was observed as negative, rejecting $H_1$. Further work-related bullying depicted a significant positive relation with voice as a coping response. Hence $H_2$ was accepted. When emotional intelligence was allowed to moderate between the relationship of work-related bullying and coping response of exit and voice, significant moderation ($p<0.05$) was observed (Table 3), accepting $H_3$. The moderation of emotional intelligence strongly impacted the relation and the coping responses. For testing the $H_4$ Gender was added as the second moderator and the coping responses between the genders were found to significantly differ based on their emotional intelligence. Therefore, $H_4$ was accepted for the junior employees working in the IT sector. Table 3 and Figure 2 demonstrate the quantitative and graphic results.

**TABLE 3**

*Interaction effect of Emotional Intelligence and Gender*

| Variables and Steps | Exit | Voice |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Control Variables** | | |
| Age | -0.26 | -0.0304 |
| Experience | -0.1082 | 0.0013 |
| **2. Independent Variables** | | |
| Work-related Bullying | -7.564* | 5.997* |
| Emotional Intelligence | -5.785* | 3.7502* |
| Gender | -13.785* | 10.162* |
| **3. Interaction Term** | | |
| Work-related bullying X Emotional Intelligence | 2.249* | -1.4887* |
| Work-related bullying X Gender | 5.735* | -4.3275* |
| Gender x Emotional Intelligence | 4.005* | -2.4976* |
| Work-related bullying X Emotional Intelligence X Gender | -1.623* | 1.0984* |

**Figure 2**
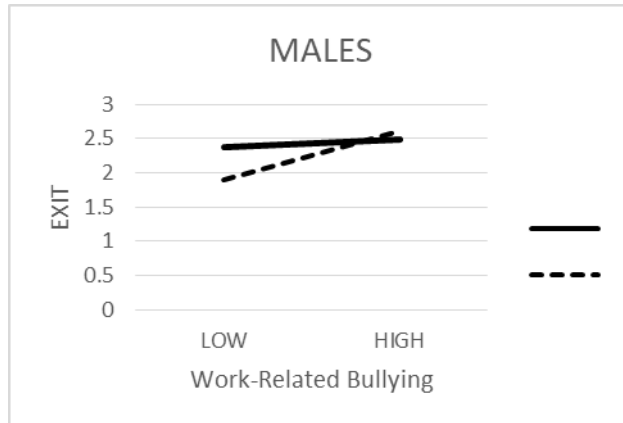


*Note: (a) Exit response of males to work-related bullying with low and high EI*
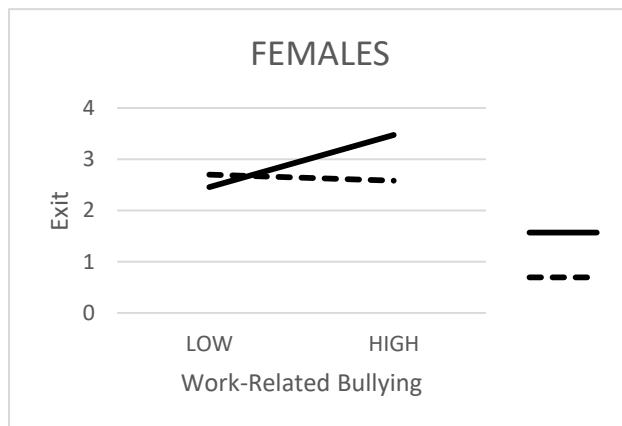


*Note: (b) Exit response of females to work-related bullying with low and high EI (*



*Note: (c) Voice response of males to work-related bullying with low and high EI*
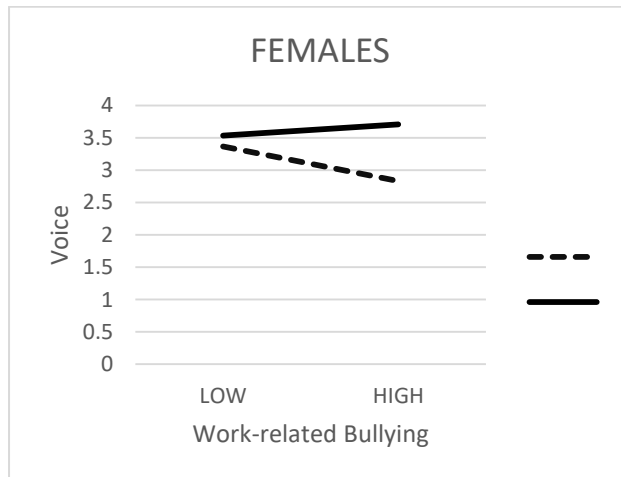
## FEMALES



*Note: (d) Voice response of females to work-related bullying with low and high EI*

Originally, work-related bullying showed a negative relation to exit and positive relation to voice, which indicate preference for voice over exit. When emotional intelligence interacted with work-related bullying, it was found that the interaction had positive relation with exit and negative with voice, indicating that emotional intelligence impacts the coping decision where people high on emotional intelligence tend to prefer exit over voice. Further to understand the gender differences, significant moderating gender difference was found as shown in the graph, where males with high emotional intelligence and females with low emotional intelligence preferred to exit. However, males with low emotional intelligence and females with high emotional intelligence were found to choose voice.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As the study focuses on junior employees, who are target to workplace bullying, negative relation of work-related bullying with exit can be understood as their early stage experience to work and they try to adjust to the organizational culture. Also highlighted in certain previous studies that to permanently shun the workplace is usually a last resort for the targets exposed to workplace bullying (Rosander et al., 2022; Glambek et al., 2023; Berthelsen et al., 2011; Djurkovic et al., 2008; Salin and Notelaers, 2017). Also, considering to raise voice as a coping response to work-related bullying can be validated as employees initially encountering bullying situation, try to take control and improve the situation (Nielsen et al., 2020; Niedl, 1996). Thus, underpinning the reactance theory, motivation to regain the free behavior arises and employees tend to choose voice as the coping strategy.

Social vulnerability ascertained to short span of service also reflects mixed feelings of surprise (Louis, 1980), anxiety (Saks, 1994, 2012), vagueness (Mignerey et al., 1995), and coercion to adapt and absorb quick, through which the employees go through. Therefore, employees tend to stabilize the socialization process and choose the option that allows them to secure more resources, psychological and physical (Ashford et al., 2007; Kammeyer et al., 2013; Fang et al., 2011).

Further to interpret the role of understanding of the emotions by the targets to workplace bullying with respect to coping response, it was found that emotionally intelligent people preferred exit over voice, which is opposite to the direct impact of work-related bullying on exit and voice. Emotionally intelligent people tend to analyze the situation to larger extent and plausibly due to higher analysis choose eliminating themselves from the situation than undergoing through the hard road of voice raising (Ahmad et al., 2009; Singh, 2013; Gautam and Sharma, 2021). As, particularly in India, the supervisor's mistreatment is considered more acceptable at the workplaces and initial in the careers, the employees largely prefer to avoid any conflicting situations (D'Cruz, 2015). Therefore, it can be comprehended that exit becomes a preference for the emotionally intelligent people.

Advancing to the role of gender and difference in their emotional intelligence, results depicted that males with higher emotional intelligence and females with lower emotional intelligence preferred exit. Previous studies depict differences in sense-making as highly relevant (Salin and Hoel, 2013). Additionally, the results also imply that males with lower emotional intelligence and females with higher emotional intelligence choose voice as their coping response. The earlier studies find it more acceptable for women to label themselves as victims because of gender socialization and therefore this can be a major reason as to why women with higher emotional intelligence are more inclined to raise voice (Nixon, 2009). Whereas the self-reliant and independent image of

men and the societal pressure for men to sustain the image make them choose exit as option than to call themselves victim (Salin and Hoel, 2013; Nixon, 2009). Such typical gender typecasts can also plausibly cause variation in perception of the targets (Salin, 2011). Thus, the characteristic behavioral perception of men not being presented with the choice of support and recovery to the same extent as females, might add for men with higher emotional intelligence to ponder over their defined masculinity and chose exit as response.

The former studies have substantially stressed on how the two genders act distinctly with different emotional intelligence (Schutte et al., 2001; Mayer et al., 2003) and higher emotional intelligence allows them to compellingly assume stronger social identities (Schmader and Block, 2015; Engleberg and Sjoberg, 2003). Moreover, according to reactance theory (Miron and Brehm, 2006), the essentiality to restore endangered freedom would govern the magnitude of reactance. Thus grounding to this it can be comprehended that junior employees, with their tripping confidence, desire to 'move on' before they lose the nerve (D'Cruz and Rayner, 2013). Belonging to a particular group can define one's choice based on group preference rather than feel reactance (Miron and Brehm, 2006; Furnham, 2002). Thus, males with higher emotional intelligence try and resort to dominance and control of the situation with exit as an option and females resort to being more expressive (Markus et al., 1989; Chodorow, 1978; Carter, 2014). The studies have also highlighted that though females are more emotionally intelligent (Ahmad et al., 2009), men believed to have higher emotional intelligence indicating a self-derogatory incline in females and self-augmenting bias in males (Zomer, 2012). Such perceptions can be the plausible cause of varied coping response between the two genders based on their emotional perception of self, and can be explored by future researchers.

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

Amongst the strengths of the current study is to employ the integration of two theories, i.e., theory of reactance and social identity theory, focusing on gender socialization. Further this study advances the literature by focusing on how particular coping outcomes are resulted into as opposed to larger previous literature that revolves around coping outcomes alone discarding the mechanism. Next the study addresses the gap of moderation analysis given undue importance till date and highlights the role of moderated-moderation as to how it can enhance the knowledge of particular mechanisms. The study also has been carried on multi-level basis, conducted only on targets to workplace bullying. The study also allows cross-national comparisons and provides reliable base for studying intervention.

### 5.2 Practical Implications

The study recommends, based on the results, for the organizations to tackle with the social vulnerability of junior employees of associating themselves so strongly to their gender identities that the overall emotional response to the negative situations get compromised. This can be implemented foremost, by discontinuing to consider workplace bullying as inter-personal problem of the individuals and bringing is under the organizational umbrella. Further, involving emotional education for employees, enabling the individuals to regulate their emotions better. Also, building safety net and encouraging participation can be added as focus area by the organization which enables in achieving positive trajectory (Li et al., 2023). Organizations can also aspire to formalize conflict management infrastructure in order to channelize the reactance response of the individuals. Also building informal ethical infrastructure can allow junior employees, both males and females, to associate themselves to the work environment strongly while assuming their given identities.

### 5.3 Social Implications

The study provides insights into the behavioral response of the targets to bullying and helps understand the patterns in which males and females respond differently to similar conflicting situations. The societal identity assumed since birth drives the decision making of the individuals throughout their lives and hence, becomes important to understand as a society what kind of roles and values need to be inculcated or associated to particular identity.

### 6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, grounding the study to the theory of reactance and gender socialization, important findings have been pinned. Understanding that difference in emotional intelligence of the two genders significantly impact the coping response of the targets to workplace bullying, gives an advantage in comprehending the reasons as to why the males and females behave respond to the same situations differently. For this study in particular, results indicate exit as preference for males with high emotional intelligence and females with low emotional intelligence. The choice of voice is favored by females with high emotional intelligence and men with lower

emotional intelligence. The paper indicates plausible explanations to the results in the discussion section. The current study also paves the way for further consideration of the numerous interventions that yet are underexplored and adds to the knowledge for the organizations to act pro-active in the conflict management arena.

**6.1 Future Research Directions and Limitations of the study**

The future researchers can further strengthen the study findings by understanding the identity salience relevant to gender socialization. Since the study focuses on work-related bullying, other types of bullying can also be explored to understand their contribution towards choosing particular type of coping response. The self-reporting method of data collection brings the limitation to the study and future researchers might find more relevant methods. Diverse range of interventions and work sectors can be explored in order to review cross-national, cross-culture, cross-group comparisons.

**7. REFERENCES**

Ahmad, S., Bangash, H., & Khan, S. A. (2009). Emotional intelligence and gender differences. *Sarhad J. Agric, 25*(1), 127-130.

Albesher SA and Alsaeed MH (2015) Emotional intelligence and its relation to coping strategies of stressful life events among a sample of students from the college of basic education in the state of Kuwait. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Sciences 16*(04), 273–395. DOI:10.12785/jeps/160409.

Ashford, B. E., Sluss, D. M., & Harrison, S. H. (2007). Socialization in organizational contexts. In G. P. Hodgkinson & J. K. Ford (Eds.), *International review of industrial and organizational psychology 22*,1–70. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470753 378.ch1

Ashford, S.J., Sutcliffe, K.M. and Christianson, M.K. (2009), Speaking up and speaking out: the leadership dynamics of voice in organizations, in Greenberg, J. and Edwards, M. (Eds), *Voice and Silence in Organizations,* Emerald, Bingley, 175-202

Bar-on, R., & Parleer, D. (2000). The handbook of emotion intelligence. San Francesco: Jossy-Bass Books

Bell, Leslie C. (2004) Psychoanalytic theories of gender. *In The Psychology of Gender*. Edited by Alice H. Eagly, Anne H. Beall and Robert J. Sternberg. New York: The Guilford Press, 145– 68.

Berthelsen, M., Skogstad, A., Lau, B., & Einarsen, S. (2011). Do they stay or do they go? A longitudinal study of intentions to leave and exclusion from working life among targets of workplace bullying. *International Journal of Manpower, 32*(2), 178–193. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437721111130198

Budhwar, P. S., (2009). Introduction: human resource management in the Indian context. In: P. S. Budhwar and J. Bhatnagar, eds., The changing face of people management in India. London: Routledge, 3–19.

Carter, M. J. (2014). Gender socialization and identity theory. *Social sciences, 3*(2), 242-263.

Carver. C. S. and Connor-Smith. J. (2010) Personality and coping. *Annual Review of Psychology, 61,*679-704.

Chodorow, Nancy. (1978) The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysts and the Sociology of Gender. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ciarrochi, J., Dean, F. P., & Anderson, S. (2002). Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between stress and mental health. *Personality and Individual Differences, 32,*197–209.

Cronbach, L. J. (1970). Essentials of psychological testing.

D'Cruz, P. (2015). India: A paradoxical context for workplace bullying. In Workplace abuse, incivility and bullying, 55-70, Routledge.

D'Cruz, P. and Noronha, E., (2012). High commitment management practices re-examined: the case of Indian call centres. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 33* (2),185–205.

D'Cruz, P., & Rayner, C. (2013). Bullying in the Indian workplace: A study of the ITES-BPO sector. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 34*(4),597-619.

D'Cruz, P., & Noronha, E. (2010). The exit coping response to workplace bullying: The contribution of inclusivist and exclusivist HRM strategies. Employee Relations.

Djurkovic, N., McCormack, D., & Casimir, G. (2008). Workplace bullying and intention to leave: The moderating effect of perceived organizational support. *Human Resource Management Journal, 18*(4),405–422. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2008. 00081.x

Duckelt, E. and M. Raffalli. (1989). Taking care, maintaining the self and the home in adolescents. *J. Youth and Adolescence. 18*(6), 549

Dunn, P. (2002). The impact of starting a new venture on the entrepreneur and their family: Expectations, reality, and willingness to start again. Presented at the Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Annual Conf.

Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised. *Work & stress, 23*(1),24-44

Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. L. (2011). The concept of bullying and harassment at work: The European tradition. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace: Developments in Theory, Research, and Practice 2nd edition: 3-39, Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press

Engleberg, E., & Sjoberg, L. (2003). Emotional intelligence, affect intensity and Social adjustment. *Personality & Individual Differences, 37*, 533-542

Fang, R., Dufy, M. K., & Shaw, J. D. (2011). The organizational socialization process: Review and development of a social capital model. *Journal of Management, 37*(1): 127–152. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/0149206310384630

Farley, S., Mokhtar, D., Ng, K., & Niven, K. (2023). What influences the relationship between workplace bullying and employee well-being? A systematic review of moderators. *Work & Stress*, 1-28.

Folkman. S. and Lazarus, R. S. (1980) An analysis of coping in a middle-aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior. 2*(3), 219-239.

Fteiha, M., & Awwad, N. (2020). Emotional intelligence and its relationship with stress coping style. *Health Psychology Open, 7*(2), 2055102920970416.

Furnham, A., Pertrides, K., & Spencer-Bowdage, S. (2002). The effects of different types of social desirability on the identification of repressors. *Personality and Individual Differences, 33*,119- 130

Gardner, W. L., Karam, E. P., Alvesson, M., & Einola, K. (2021). Authentic leadership theory: The case for and against. *The Leadership Quarterly, 32*(6), 101495. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua. 2021.101495

Gautam, C. K. A., & Sharma, S. R. (2021) Gender Influence On Emotional Intelligence and Its Sub-Scales: An Empirical Study.

Ghazali, D. (2008) Kesahan dan kebolehpercayaan dalam kajian kuantitatif dan kualitatif. *J. Inst. Perguru. Islam, 203,* 58–79.

Glambek, M., Einarsen, S. V., Gjerstad, J., & Nielsen, M. B. (2023). Last in, first out? Length of service as a moderator of the relationship between exposure to bullying behaviors and work- related outcomes. *Current Psychology*, 1-13.

Gohm, C. L., Corser, G. C., & Dalsky, D. J. (2005). Emotional intelligence under stress: Useful, unnecessary, or irrelevant? *Personality and Individual Differences, 39*,1017–1028.

Grant, A. M., Parker, S., and Collins, C. (2009). Getting credit for proactive behavior: supervisor reactions depend on what you value and how you feel. Pers. *Psychol. 62*, 31–55. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6570.2008.01128.x

Grant, A.M. and Ashford, S.J. (2008), The dynamics of proactivity at work, *Research in Organizational Behavior, 28*,3-34.

Gupta, R., Bakhshi, A., & Einarsen, S. (2017). Investigating workplace bullying in India: Psychometric properties, validity, and cutoff scores of negative acts questionnaire–revised. *Sage Open, 7*(2), 2158244017715674.

Hagedoorn, M., Van Yperen, N. W., Van de Vliert, E., & Buunk, B. P. (1999). Employees' reactions to problematic events: A circumplex structure of five categories of responses, and the role of job satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior, 20*(3), 309-321.

Harman, H. H. (1960). Modern factor analysis. Chicago: Univer. Chicago Press, 3,65-1

Hayes, A. F. (2017). Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach. Guilford publications.

Houshmand, M., O'Reilly, J., Robinson, S. and Wolff, A. (2012), "Escaping bullying: the simultaneous impact of individual and unit-level bullying on turnover intentions", *Human Relations, 65*(7),901-918.

Kakar, S., & Kakar, K. (2007). The Indians. New Delhi: Penguin.

Kammeyer-Mueller, J., Wanberg, C., Rubenstein, A., & Song, Z. (2013). Support, undermining, and newcomer socialization: Fitting in during the first 90 days. *Academy of Management Journal, 56*(4), 1104–1124. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0791

Lazarus, R. S. and Folkman, S. (1984) Stress, appraisal and coping. New York: Springer.

Lee, J., Lim, J. J., & Heath, R. L. (2021). Coping with workplace bullying through NAVER: Effects of LMX relational concerns and cultural differences. *International Journal of Business Communication, 58*(1), 79-105.

Lee, J.; Lim, J.J.; Heath, R.L. (2019) Negotiating faces in coping with workplace bullying: A cross-cultural investigation. *J. Intercult. Commun. Res., 48*,112–131.

LePine, J. A., and Van Dyne, L. (2001). Voice and cooperative behavior as contrasting forms of contextual performance: evidence of differential relationships with big five personalities characteristics and cognitive ability. *J. Appl. Psychol. 86*, 326–336. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.86.2.326

Levia, L.; Kaur, G. (2023) Targets' Coping Responses to Workplace Bullying with Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Tolerance: A Two-Phased Study of Faculty in Higher Education Institutions. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health, 20,* 1083. https://doi.org/10.3390/ ijerph20021083

Li, Y., Tuckey, M. R., Neall, A. M., Rose, A., & Wilson, L. (2023). Changing the underlying conditions relevant to workplace bullying through organizational redesign. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 20*(5), 4373.

Liang, H. L. (2021). Does workplace bullying produce employee voice and physical health issues? Testing the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. *Frontiers in psychology, 12*, 610944.

Liang, H. L., & Yeh, T. K. (2020). The effects of employee voice on workplace bullying and job satisfaction: The mediating role of leader–member exchange. *Management Decision, 58*(3), 569-582.

Louis, M. R. (1980). Surprise and sense making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 25*(2): 226–251. https://doi.org/10.2307/2392453

Lutgen-Sandvik, P., Tracy, S. J., & Alberts, J. K. (2005). Burned by bullying in the American workplace: A first time study of US prevalence and delineation of bullying "degree." In Annual conference, Western States Communication Association, San Francisco

Markus, Hazel, and Daphna Oyserman. (1989) Gender and thought: The role of the self-concept. In Gender and Thought: Psychological Perspectives. Edited by Mary Crawford and Margaret Gentry. New York: Springer-Verlag, 100–27.

Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., Caruso, D. R., & Sitarenios, G. (2003). Measuring emotional intelligence with the MSCEIT V2.0. *Emotion, 3*,97-105.

Maynes, T. D., and Podsakoff, P. M. (2014). Speaking more broadly: an examination of the nature, antecedents, and consequences of an expanded set of employee voice behaviors. *J. Appl. Psychol. 99*:87–112. doi: 10.1037/a0034284

Meglich-Sespico, P., Faley, R. H., & Knapp, D. E. (2007). Relief and redress for targets of workplace bullying. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, 19*,31-43.

Mignerey, J. T., Rubin, R. B., & Gordon, W. I. (1995). Organizational entry: An investigation of newcomer communication behavior and uncertainty. *Communication Research, 22*(1),54–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/009365095022001003

Mikkelsen, E. G., Hansen, ÅM, Persson, R., Byrgesen, M. F., & Hogh, A. (2020). Individual consequences of being exposed to workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. Cooper (Eds.), Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Theory, research and practice (3rd Edition: 163–208). CRC Press.

Miron, A. M., & Brehm, J. W. (2006). Reactance theory-40 years later. *Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie, 37*(1), 9-18.

Moradi, A., Pishva, N., Ehsan, H. B., & Hadadi, P. (2011). The relationship between coping strategies and emotional intelligence. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 30,* 748-751. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.146.

Ng, T. W. H., and Feldman, D. C. (2012). Employee voice behavior: a meta−analytic test of the conservation of resources framework. *J. Organ. Behav. 33*, 216–234. doi: 10.1002/job.754

Niedl, K. (1996). Mobbing and well-being: Economic and personnel development implications. *European journal of work and organizational psychology, 5*(2), 239- 249

Nielsen, M. B., & Einarsen, S. V. (2018). What we know, what we do not know, and what we should and could have known about workplace bullying: An overview of the literature and agenda for future research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 42*, 71–83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2018. 06.007

Nielsen, M.B.; Mikkelsen, E.G.; Persson, R.; Einarsen, S.V. (2020) Coping with bullying at work: How do targets, bullies and bystanders deal with bullying? In Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace; CRC Press: Boca Raton, FL, USA, 563–591.

Nielsen. M. B., Gjerstad. J., Jacobsen. D. P. and Einarsen. S. V. (2017) Does ability to defend moderate the association between exposure to bullying and symptoms of anxiety? *Frontiers in Psychology, 8.*

Nixon, D. (2009), I can't put a smiley face on: working class masculinity, *Gender, Work and Organization, 16*(3), 300-22.

Noorbakhsh SN, Besharat MA and Zarei J (2010) Emotional intelligence and coping styles with stress. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 5*, 818–822. DOI: 10.1016/j. sbspro.2010.07.191.

O'lafsson, R. and Jo´hannsdo´ttir, H. (2004), Coping with bullying in the workplace: the effect of gender, age and type of bullying, *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,32*(3),319-33.

Podsakoff, P.M.; MacKenzie, S.B.; Podsakoff, N.P. (2012) Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annu. Rev. Psychol., 63,*539–569.

Rai, A., & Agarwal, U. A. (2018). A review of literature on mediators and moderators of workplace bullying: Agenda for future research. *Management Research Review, 41*(7), 822–859. https://doi.org/10. 1108/MRR-05-2016-0111

Rai, A., & Agarwal, U. A. (2019). Linking workplace bullying and EVLN outcomes: Role of psychological contract violation and workplace friendship. International Journal of Manpower.

Rasool, F.; Hasan, A.; Rafi, A.; Kashif, A.R. (2013) Workplace bullying and intention to leave: The moderating effect of the organizational commitment. *Inf. Manag. Bus. Rev., 5,*175–180.

Roger, D., Jarvis, P., & Najarian, B. (1993). Detachment and coping: The construction and validation of a new scale for measuring coping strategies. *Personality and Individual Differences, 15*, 619-626.

Rosander, M., & Blomberg, S. (2019). Levels of workplace bullying and escalation–a new conceptual model based on cut-off scores, frequency and self-labelled victimization. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 28*(6): 769- 783

Rosander, M., Salin, D., & Blomberg, S. (2022). The last resort: Workplace bullying and the consequences of changing jobs. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology.* https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12794

Rusbult, C. E., Farrell, D., Rogers, G., & Mainous III, A. G. (1988). Impact of exchange variables on exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: An integrative model of responses to declining job satisfaction. *Academy of Management journal, 31*(3), 599-627.

Saklofske, D. H., Austin, E. J., Galloway, J., & Davidson, K. (2007). Individual difference correlates of health-related behaviors: Preliminary evidence for links between emotional intelligence and coping. *Personality and Individual Differences, 42*, 491–502

Saks, A. M. (1994). Moderating effects of self-efficacy for the relationship between training method and anxiety and stress reactions of newcomers. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 15*(7), 639–654. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030150707

Saks, A. M., & Gruman, J. A. (2012). Getting newcomers on board: A review of socialization practices and introduction to socialization resources theory. In C. R. Wanberg (Ed.), The Oxford handbook of organizational socialization 27–55. Oxford University Press

Salin, D. (2011), The significance of gender for third parties' perceptions of negative interpersonal behavior: labelling and explaining negative acts, *Gender, Work, and Organization,18*(6), 571- 91.

Salin, D., & Hoel, H. (2013). Workplace bullying as a gendered phenomenon. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 28*(3), 235-251.

Salin, D., & Notelaers, G. (2017). The effect of exposure to bullying on turnover intentions: The role of perceived psychological contract violation and benevolent behavior. *Work and Stress, 31*(4) 355–374. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2017.1330780

Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 9*, 185-211

Sandhu, P. and N. Mehrotra. (1999). Time pattern of female students with special reference to leisure time activities. *Ind. J. of Social Res. 40*(4), 285-296.

Schmader, T., & Block, K. (2015). Engendering identity: Toward a clearer conceptualization of gender as a social identity. *Sex Roles, 73*, 474-480.

Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Bobik, C., Coston, T. D., Greeson, C., Jedlicka, C. Rhodes, E. & Wendorf, G. (2001). Emotional intelligence and interpersonal relations. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 141,* 523-536. doi: 10.1080/00224540109600569

Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Thorsteinsson, E. B., Bhullar, N., & Rooke, S. (2007). A meta-analytic investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and health. *Personality and Individual Differences, 42,* 921–933

Seligman, M.E.P. (1975). Helplessness: On depression, development, and death. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman.

Singh, B. (2013) Gender difference in emotional intelligence: A comparative study of college students, *Shodh Prerak, 3*(4), 130-135.

Sinha JBP (1994) Power dynamics in Indian organizations. In: Kanungo RN and Mendonca M (eds) Work Motivation. New Delhi: Sage,213–229.

Sinha JBP (2008) Culture and Organizational Behavior. New Delhi: Sage.

Sinha, J.B.P., (1982). The nurturant task leader. New Delhi: Concept

Sinha, J.B.P., (1990). Work culture in the Indian context. New Delhi: Sage.

Sinha, J.B.P., (1997). A cultural perspective on organizational behavior in India. In: C. P. Earley and M. Erez, eds., New perspectives on international industrial/organizational psychology. San Francisco, CA: Lexington Press, 53–74.

Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (1979), An integrative theory of intergroup conflict, in Austin, W.G. and Worchel, S. (Eds), The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations, Brooks Cole, Monterey, CA,94-109.

Tapia, M.L. (1999). A study of the relationships of the emotional intelligence inventory (intelligence tests). Dissert. Abst. Int

Van Dyne, L., and Ang, S. (1998). Organizational citizenship behavior of contingent workers in Singapore. *Acad. Manag. J. 41*,692–703. doi: 10.2307/256965

Weiss, M., and Morrison, E. (2019). Speaking up and moving up: how voice can enhance employees' social status. *J. Organ. Behav. 40*,5–19. doi: 10.1002/job.2262

Withey. M. J. and Cooper. W. H. (1989) Predicting exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 34*(4), 521-539

Wong, C. S., & Law, K. S. (2002). The effects of leader and follower emotional intelligence on performance and attitude: An exploratory study. *The leadership quarterly, 13*(3), 243-274.

Zapf, D. and Gross, C. (2001) Conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying: A replication and extension. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 10*, 497-522.

Zhong, R., Lian, H., Hershcovis, M. S., & Robinson, S. L. (2022). Mitigating or Magnifying the Harmful Influence of Workplace Aggression: An Integrative Review. *Academy of Management Annals*, (ja).

Zomer, L. (2012). The relationships among emotional intelligence, gender, coping strategies, and well-being in the management of stress in close interpersonal relationships and the workplace. University of Toronto (Canada).