

Chapter 14

Workplace Cyberbullying and Cross-Cultural Differences: Examining the Application of Intercultural Communication Theoretical Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an overview of cultural factors that contribute to the understanding of workplace bullying and cyberbullying including gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. Each of these cultural factors explain the dynamics that occur among cyberbullies, cybervictims, and cyber-bystanders. Additionally, because there has been a lack of theoretical incorporation in the workplace bullying and workplace cyberbullying literature, this chapter provides an overview of three intercultural communication theories including conflict face negotiation theory, intercultural workgroup communication theory, and anxiety uncertainty management theory. Recommendations and future directions are also offered to encourage the application of intercultural communication theories in explaining and predicting workplace cyberbullying behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace cyberbullying has become an increasing social problem in organizations across the globe. D'Souza, Forsyth, Tappin, and Catley (2017) define *workplace cyberbullying* as “involving perceived unwanted or aggressive behavior(s) perpetrated at any time through electronic media, that may harm, threaten, or demoralize the intended target(s) of this behavior(s)” (p. 841). Receiving such hurtful messages in a workplace context may have psychological consequences for the receiver, such as a reduction of self-esteem, motivation, and self-confidence to do his or her job effectively (Rajalakshmi & Naresh, 2018). Additionally, receiving these types of harmful digital messages from a peer, supervisor, or a customer can lead to negative work outcomes such as increased job turnover, absenteeism, reduced work performance and commitment (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Coyne, Craig, & Smith-Lee Chong, 2004; Giumetti, Hatfield, Scisco, Schroeder, Muth, & Kowalski, 2013; Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2011; Kivimaki, Elovainio, & Vahtera, 2000).

In an organizational context, the risk of workplace cyberbullying has been enhanced by the increased use of technological devices (Kowalski, Toth, & Morgan, 2018). This includes smartphones, iPads, and the Internet via social networking sites (i.e., Facebook), blogs, and websites (Schimmel & Nicholls, 2014). Workplace cyberbullying; however, can be understood from a cross-cultural or intercultural communication perspective. Cross-cultural or intercultural communication is defined as the communication patterns that occur between individuals of different cultures (Hall, 2005). Prior researchers have focused primarily on criminology, sociology, and psychological theories (Coyne, Farley, Axtell, Sprigg, Best, & Kwok, 2017); however, not many researchers have examined workplace cyberbullying from an intercultural communication perspective. As such, the first purpose of this chapter is to define the cultural factors including gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation, which are relevant to cross-cultural communication and workplace cyberbullying. The second purpose of this chapter is to examine the applicability of intercultural communication theories such as conflict face negotiation theory, intercultural workgroup communication theory, and anxiety uncertainty management theory, and finally provide implications to stimulate future research on workplace cyberbullying.

Defining Cultural Factors and Workplace Cyberbullying

Cultural factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation will be examined to understand this phenomenon of workplace cyberbullying. These factors are important because they can guide our understanding of the victimization and perpetration of workplace bullying given these cultural characteristics. In addition, because the research has primarily focused on traditional workplace bullying (Samnani & Singh, 2012), this review of the literature will help to better understand workplace cyberbullying from a cross-cultural perspective.

Gender and Cyberbullying

Studies reveal mixed findings regarding bullying and gender differences in the workplace. According to the World Health Organization (2020), the definition of gender is associated with societal expectations of attributes, roles, activities, and appropriate behaviors for women and men. Gender studies suggest that females are more likely to experience workplace bullying when compared to men, especially in male dominated careers given the negative gender stereotypes held by coworkers and supervisors

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