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Rational Counterattack: The Impact of Workplace Bullying on Unethical Pro-organizational and Pro-family Behaviors

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Abstract

In business ethics research, little is known about why and how employees engage in unethical behavior, especially unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) and unethical pro-family behavior (UPFB). Based on cognitive-affective personality system theory and conservation of resources theory, this study aims to explore the mechanisms underlying the effects of workplace bullying, as a negative event, on UPB (Study 1) and UPFB (Study 2). In Study 1, workplace bullying negatively correlated with UPB where emotional exhaustion and organization-oriented moral disengagement played chain-mediating roles in this relationship. In Study 2, workplace bullying positively correlated with UPFB where emotional exhaustion and family-oriented moral disengagement played chain-mediating roles in the relationship. In both studies, perceived forgiveness climate, as a conditional factor, was found to weaken the positive impact of workplace bullying on both emotional exhaustion and the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB. Overall, this study explains why, how, and when employees exhibit UPB and UPFB. The implications for theory and practices that could enable organizations to reduce employees' unethical behavior are discussed.

Keywords Workplace bullying · Emotional exhaustion · Moral disengagement · Unethical pro-organizational behavior · Unethical pro-family behavior

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Introduction

Employee unethical behavior is a great challenge for individuals, organizations and society (Gino et al., 2011; Lu et al., 2018; Umphress et al., 2010; Zhang, 2020a), and has received increasing attention in research and practice (Birch & Chiang, 2014; Jacobs et al., 2014; Paterson & Huang, 2019; Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Zaal et al., 2019). Though undesirable, unethical behavior is quite common. About 60 million people witness some form of unethical behavior every day in the United States (Schwartz, 2015). In the UK, three former executives at Barclays Bank were charged with conspiracy to commit fraud during the 2008 financial crisis (Serious Fraud Office, 2020). In Germany, Volkswagen employees deliberately developed software that could distinguish between typical driving conditions and laboratory test conditions in order to evade environmental authorities (Castille et al., 2018). The same is true in the Eastern context. According to the Chinese government's official media, 33 of 200 officials in the Tianjin Justice Bureau helped 440 of their relatives secure employment (Jiang, 2017). Two types of unethical behaviors were

identified in the existing research on the cases above, i.e., unethical pro-organization behavior (UPB, Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress & Bingham, 2011) and unethical pro-family behavior (UPFB, Cheng et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). UPB refers to the type of unethical behavior employees engage in to safeguard the interests of the organization, e.g., deliberately exaggerating product performance to help increase sales (Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). UPFB refers to the type of unethical behaviors employees engage in to safeguard the interests of the family, e.g., appropriating company assets or supplies for family use (Cheng et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). As an emerging type of unethical behavior, research is warranted to better understanding UPFB in the workplace (Cheng et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). Both UPB and UPFB are examined in this study.

Given its importance to people and organizations, scholars in business ethics have investigated how to reduce employees' engagement with unethical behaviors (Dang et al., 2017; Gino et al., 2011; Paterson & Huang, 2019; Zhang, 2020a). Extensive research has mainly focused on the role played by individuals (Johnson & Umphress, 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2020). For example, individual employees receive moral education, training and influence from their families, organizations, and society, which leads to less unethical behaviors (Kouchaki & Wareham, 2015; Liu et al., 2019, 2020). However, workplace-related factors may also influence employee unethical behavior (Qi et al., 2020; Zhang, 2020b). Recently, Qi et al. (2020) and Zhang (2020b) found that workplace exclusion can significantly incentivize employees to exhibit unethical behavior. Drawing on existing research, this study proposes workplace bullying as a key driver for employee unethical behavior. Workplace bullying refers to the aggressive behavior that employees experience in the workplace, such as being humiliated and threatened by colleagues or supervisors (Einarsen et al., 2009). Similar to workplace ostracism, workplace bullying, as a negative event, has become common and exerts a highly negative impact on employees' emotions and cognition, ultimately yielding inappropriate behavior such as absenteeism and knowledge hiding (Magee et al., 2017; Yao et al., 2020a). In this regard, we expect that workplace bullying has an impact on employee unethical behavior. Following an event such as workplace bullying, employees may experience emotions, thoughts or cognitive changes, which in turn lead to unethical behavior as a rational counterattack to the event (Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b).

To better understand why and how workplace bullying influences employee unethical behavior, this study draws upon cognitive-affective personality system theory (CAPS, Mischel & Shoda, 1995). CAPS claims that individual behavior is influenced by situations as well as "a mediating unit which activates specific subsets of other mediating units, generating distinctive cognition, affect, and behavior in response to different situations" (Mischel & Shoda, 1995, p. 254). Our research proposes that when individuals experience bullying, they will encode this situation by influencing their affective unit (e.g., emotion-related factor), which in turn influences their cognitive unit (e.g., beliefs), and ultimately affects their behavior (e.g., UPB and UPFB). We adopt emotional exhaustion as an emotion-related factor to represent the affective unit and we adopt moral disengagement, i.e., an individual's cognitive tendency about their moral beliefs, to represent the cognitive unit (Bandura, 1999; Liu et al., 2020). Thus, we propose a model linking situation/event (workplace bullying), affective pathway (emotional exhaustion), cognitive pathway (moral disengagement), and behavior (UPB/UPFB) to unlock employee unethical behavior. This model is also supported by the conservation of resources theory (COR, Buchwald & Hobfoll, 2004; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989).

COR suggests that negative events would consume individual resources. Applying COR to the context of workplace bullying, we suggest that workplace bullying consumes emotional resources (leads to emotional exhaustion) and cognitive resources (leads to moral disengagement) of employees. These resources consumed will further affect individuals' unethical behaviors (Liu et al., 2020; McDowell et al., 2019; Qi et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2020a). Existing studies have found that following workplace bullying, individuals will consume emotional resources extensively, leading to emotional exhaustion and individual behavior such as demission or knowledge hiding (Srivastava & Agarwal, 2020; Yao et al., 2020a). In this study, we propose that workplace bullying consumes individual resources, leading to emotional exhaustion which in turn influences employee unethical behavior, i.e., the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in workplace bullying and employee unethical behaviors link. Consumed resources by the negative event—workplace bullying also leads to the change in a specific cognitive orientation of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999; Liu et al., 2020), which leads to unethical behaviors, i.e., the mediating role of moral disengagement in the workplace bullying and employee unethical behaviors link. Moreover, following consumption of emotional resources (e.g., emotional exhaustion), individuals could develop rational cognition (e.g., moral disengagement). In other words, emotional exhaustion affects moral disengagement (Huang et al., 2019; Striler et al., 2020). Overall, this study constructs a chain-mediating pathway to elucidate the entire process linking workplace bullying to employee unethical behavior via the chain-mediating role of emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement.

Furthermore, this study extends our understanding of employee unethical behavior (UPB/UPFB) by exploring the boundary condition under which workplace bullying increases employee emotional exhaustion. Drawing on the
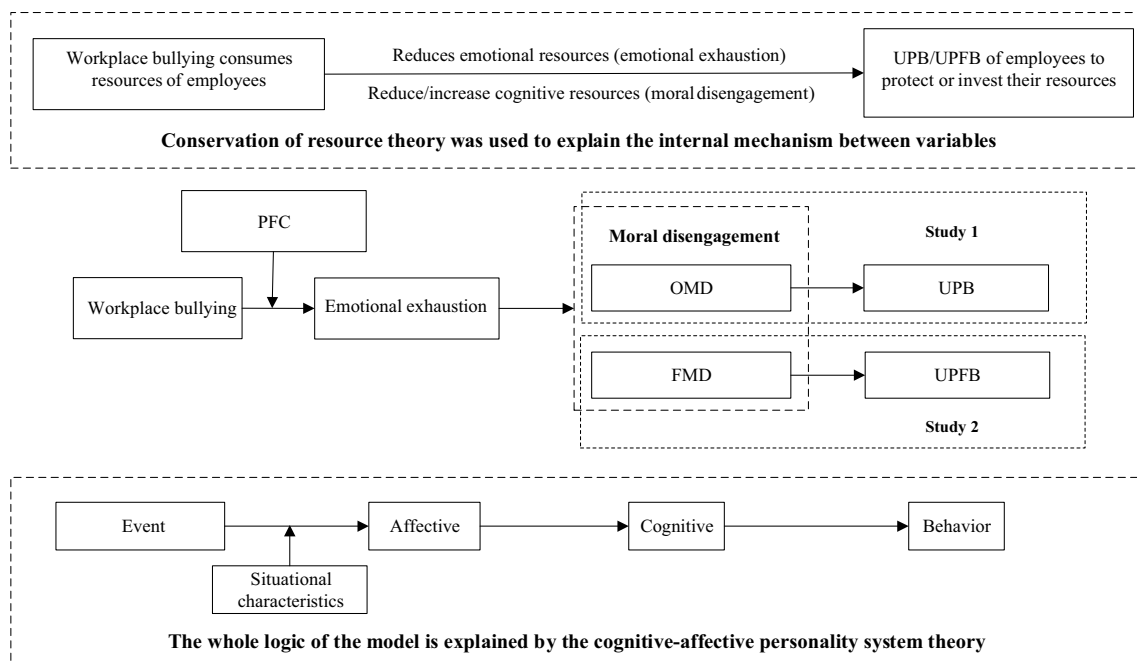
Fig. 1 Theoretical model

existing research on forgiveness (Guchait et al., 2016, 2019; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b), this study proposes that employee perceived forgiveness climate (PFC), e.g., the extent to which organizations forgive employees for mistakes and misconduct, act as a moderator between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion. Some studies demonstrate that when a strong PFC exists in an organization, even if employees experience workplace bullying, they would be more likely to regulate their emotions and behave in a manner that is beneficial to the organization (Guchait et al., 2019; Yao et al., 2020a). When the level of PFC in the organization is low, employees who experience workplace bullying tend to consume more of their emotional resources and exhibit behaviors that are more beneficial to themselves (Guchait et al., 2016, 2019; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). Thus, we propose that PFC moderates the chain-mediation model linking workplace bullying to unethical behavior (UPB/UPFB) via the chain-mediators of emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement.

Overall, this study aims to unlock what, why, how, and when employees engage in unethical behaviors. Based on CAPS and COR theories, this study proposes a moderated chain-mediation model where workplace bullying increases emotional exhaustion, which in turn influences moral disengagement, and ultimately employee unethical behavior (UPB/UPFB), moderated by employee PFC. This study focuses on two types of unethical behaviors (UPB/UPFB) and therefore, it adopts two corresponding types of moral disengagement where individuals compromise their ethical standards/beliefs for the interests of either organizations (i.e., organization-oriented moral disengagement, OMD) or families (i.e., family-oriented moral disengagement, FMD). Two studies are conducted to test separately for organization and family-related unethical behavior and moral disengagement. Study 1 examines the impact of workplace bullying on UPB via emotional exhaustion and OMD, moderated by PFC. Study 2 examines the impact of workplace bullying on UPFB via emotional exhaustion and FMD, moderated by PFC. An additional reason for these two studies is that the model focusing on organizations and families is complicated. Although the model is tested separately via organization and family-related pathways, both studies fully address the overall theoretical moderated chain-mediation model linking workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, moral disengagement and unethical behaviors, moderated by PFC. Figure 1 shows our research model.

Our research primarily provides three major contributions to existing research on ethics. First, previous research on antecedents of unethical behavior mainly focuses on individual factors and lacks a discussion on organizational factors (Graham et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Existing research also has been focusing on only one type of unethical behavior—mainly UPB (Chen et al., 2016; Effelsberg & Solga, 2015; Zhang, 2020b). This study extends current research on employee unethical behaviors by identifying the under-appreciated organizational factor—workplace bullying as the antecedent of employee unethical behavior. In addition, this study extends existing research by examining

the other type of unethical behavior (i.e., UPFB) which is an important topic and has received increased attention to. Second, by examining the indirect relationships between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB, this study furthers our understanding of the mechanisms through which workplace bullying affects unethical behavior. Drawing upon COR and CAPS, we theorize that UPB/UPFB is a rational behavior as a result of workplace bullying and such behavior takes places after employees experience changes in emotion (e.g., emotional exhaustion) and cognition (e.g., moral disengagement) (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Yao et al., 2020a). The chain-mediation model of workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, moral disengagement and unethical behaviors (UPB/UFB) leads to a better understanding of why and how employees who suffer from workplace bullying display unethical behaviors. It also directs managers and scholars curb these unethical behaviors from an emotional and cognitive standpoint. Finally, this study introduces a moderator (i.e., PFC) in studying the outcomes of workplace bullying. Doing so answers the question of when workplace bullying leads to employee unethical behaviors and it also extends CAPS model which has been focusing on the mediating process by identifying the boundary condition in an individual's system of events, affective, cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Guchait et al., 2016, 2019; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Workplace Bullying and UPB/UPFB

Two types of employee unethical behaviors have been identified in the literature, i.e., UPB and UPFB. UPB implies the behavior that employees deliberately violate moral rules, laws, and norms of the society or the organization to protect or amplify the interests of the organization in actual work (Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress et al., 2010). UPFB implies the behavior that an employee deliberately violates moral rules, laws, and norms of an organization at work to benefit the entire family or a specific family member (Cheng et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020). Both behaviors have the following two core components: (i) employees exhibit this behavior to protect the interests of the organization or family; and (ii) both behaviors are unethical, indicating that they violate social and organizational ethics, as well as exert a negative impact on the long-term healthy development of the organization (Graham et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020).

Workplace bullying implies that employees are psychologically and/or physically subjected to aggressive behaviors in the workplace, such as being excluded, mortified, intimidated, accused, and unfairly treated by other organizational members (Einarsen et al., 2009). An as extremely harmful practice, workplace bullying has a negative impact on employee behaviors, such as job satisfaction (Giorgi et al., 2015; Vukelic et al., 2019), job performance (Devonish, 2013; Olsen et al., 2017), and organizational citizenship behavior (Goodboy et al., 2015; Ozturk & Ascigil, 2017). The rationale is that workplace bullying leads to withdrawing behavior by employees (Magee et al., 2017; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Tynes et al., 2013; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). Similarly, we expect that workplace bullying would influence employee unethical behavior. In this study, we draw on existing research on the impact of workplace bullying on employee behavior and focus on both UPB and UPFB.

According to COR, resources are important in predicting employee behavior and negative events (e.g., workplace bullying) would consume an individual's resources (Buchwald & Hobfoll, 2004; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). When faced with threat or resource loss, individuals tend to protect themselves in two ways. One way is to conserve the remaining resources to avoid falling into a "loss spiral". The other way is to invest existing resources to help them acquire additional resources in order to resist the harm incurred by resource consumption, the so-called "gain spiral" (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989; Jin et al., 2018). Applying COR in the workplace bullying context, when employees experience workplace bullying, their resources are consumed (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Yao et al., 2020b). To prevent the consumption of resources, employees have to save the remaining resources, and are unlikely to consume further resources for the benefit of the organization and so avoid falling into the "loss spiral" (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hunter et al., 2017). In this regard, employees will be less likely to engage with UPB where they engage in unethical behavior to protect or benefit their organizations as doing so will consume more of their resources (Graham et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2019). The alternative means for employees to cope with workplace bullying is through the "gain spiral" where they invest their surviving resources (Einarsen et al., 2009). When employees experience workplace bullying, they are dubious about acquiring new resources from the organization to supplement the previously consumed resources, but they still need support. One possible resource would be family support where families offer unconditional support and help them replenish their consumed resources (Carlson et al., 2019; Ghislieri et al., 2017). In exchange for support by families during these challenging times, employees are more likely to undertake actions that benefit their family but which may violate societal and organizational moral norms, i.e., UPFB (Leana & Meuris, 2015; Liu et al., 2020).

Based on the above review, we argue that when employees experience workplace bullying, their resources are consumed. To prevent further consumption of resources,

employees are less likely to take unethical actions to protect the interests of their organizations (i.e., UPB) as not taking this type of action could help them conserve their resources and avoid falling into a "loss spiral". Instead, employees actively invest resources in their families to attain additional resources in order to achieve the "gain spiral". So they are more likely to exhibit unethical behavior for the benefit of their families, i.e., UPFB. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a Workplace bullying negatively correlates with UPB.

Hypothesis 1b Workplace bullying positively correlates with UPFB.

The Mediating Effect of Emotional Exhaustion

COR emphasizes the important role of resources, especially when individuals are facing negative events. Similarly, CAPS argues that when individuals experience negative events, this will first result in affective changes. Applying both theories to this study, when employees are subjected to workplace bullying, they are more likely to consume their emotional resources and may feel emotionally exhausted. Emotional exhaustion implies a state of fatigue in which employees consume significant emotional resources at work (Lam et al., 2010; McDowell et al., 2019). Existing research has found that employees are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion after being bullied by their colleagues or superiors (Yao et al., 2020a). For example, employees experience bullying by their co-workers, e.g., being asked to finish overloaded work in a short time frame (Attell et al., 2017; Halbesleben et al., 2014). In this scenario, they are more likely to consume their emotional resources, feeling emotionally drained and leading to emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989; Jin et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2018; Yao et al., 2020a). Therefore, we expect a positive relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion.

Emotional exhaustion has been found to affect employees' behaviors (Qi et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2020a). Emotional exhaustion is a manifestation of an employee's extreme lack of emotional resources. According to COR (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989), employees need to save or protect any remaining resources and invest in new ones when facing threats or negative situations. Emotional exhaustion can be regarded as a threat to employees in the workplace. When employees are emotionally exhausted, they attempt to maintain their resource level or prevent further loss of resources and consequently would be less likely to engage in any behavior that continues to consume these resources. In this regard, employees are less likely to exhibit

"pro-organizational" behavior tendencies including UPB (Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). For example, emotionally exhausted employees would not misrepresent the truth to make their organizations look good. Thus, we expect a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and UPB.

In addition to conserving remaining resources, individuals can protect themselves from threats to these by investing resources elsewhere (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). When faced with resource shortages such as emotional exhaustion, employees actively invest a part of their remaining resources in acquiring additional resources from sources such as their families (Jin et al., 2018). Families can often efficiently supplement employees' emotional resources. If employees invest resources in their families, they could easily attain the emotional resources they need (Deery et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2016). Employees often aspire to contribute more resources to their families (Deery et al., 2017; Halbesleben et al., 2012; Tang et al., 2016). When emotional resources are exhausted at work, employees tend to display the "pro-family" behavioral tendency (Halbesleben et al., 2012, 2014). To supplement their consumed resources, employees might engage in "pro-family behavior", including taking indecorous measures to relieve the family's financial pressure (Leana & Meuris, 2015; Liu et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2019). In this regard, emotionally exhausted employees would be more likely to compromise their internal moral codes to undertake actions that benefit their families, i.e., exhibit UPFB. One example is that employees take company assets/supplies home to help their families. Such behavior can help employees efficiently enhance the quality of their marriage or family relationship (Liu et al., 2020). Therefore, we expect a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and UPFB.

Based on the above analysis, we argue that workplace bullying is linked to a higher level of emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion leads to less UPB and more UPFB. Therefore, we expect a mediation model where workplace bullying decreases UPB and increases UPFB via emotional exhaustion, hypothesized as below.

Hypothesis 2a Emotional exhaustion mediates the negative relationship between workplace bullying and UPB.

Hypothesis 2b Emotional exhaustion mediates the positive relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB.

The Mediating Effect of Moral Disengagement

CAPS claims that individual behaviors are influenced by situations with cognition being a mediating unit (Kell, 2018; Lee & Pee, 2015; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Yao et al., 2020a). In this study focusing on employee unethical

behavior, we adopt the concept of moral disengagement as a cognitive unit of individuals. Moral disengagement refers to an individual's cognitive tendency to redefine whether his/her behavior is morally correct or to decrease his/her psychological distress after committing an immoral act (Bandura, 1999, 2002). It describes an individual's desire to protect the interests of a specific group as a moral justification for immoral standards and unethical behaviors (Chen et al., 2016). Two types of moral disengagement are proposed in this study. One is the (OMD) where employees disengage themselves from self-sanctioning their moral violations in order to benefit their organizations. For example, employees feel that they cannot be blamed for misbehaving for the sake of their companies and that telling small lies to someone to help their organization does not really hurt them. The other type of moral disengagement is FMD (Liu et al., 2020). It is similar to OMD except that FMD involves family as the main beneficiary. FMD claims that employees disengage themselves from self-sanctioning their moral violations in order to benefit their families. For example, employees with FMD would consider that abusing their power for family gain is not a major wrong.

Workplace bullying is argued to have a varying impact on different orientations of moral disengagement. It is a negative event, which causes great stress to employees and consumes considerable resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Yao et al., 2020a). It could also lead to individuals consuming large amounts of resources in order to support their adherence to the moral code, and this would affect their level of moral disengagement (Caravita et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017, 2020). As the resource consumption of employees is due to the actions of organizational members via bullying, it is unlikely that the victims would break their internal moral code to help the organization (Emerson, 1976; Gouldner, 1960). According to COR, to cope with the pressure from workplace bullying, employees need to save resources. They will be less likely to compromise their moral standards or morally disengage themselves to benefit their organizations. In other words, workplace bullying leads to employees being less likely to engage in OMD. Meanwhile, individuals actively seek new ways to acquire resources to uphold the stability of their resources, e.g., turning to families. Families often act as a charging station for employees, complementing the resources consumed in the organization (Carlson et al., 2019; Zhou & Buehler, 2016). Employees often work to support their family expenses (Schwartz et al., 2012; Stein, 1992). Employees who experience workplace bullying often need to be "healed" by their families (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). In this scenario, employees may have more FMD where they compromise their moral standards or morally disengage themselves to benefit their

families. Workplace bullying can then be considered to increase employee FMD.

When employees have moral disengagement, they are more likely to engage in unethical behavior (Bandura, 1999; Dang et al., 2017; Schaefer & Bouwmeester, 2020). According to COR, when employees are morally disengaged against their moral standards, they feel guilty and endure psychological agony, which would consume many of their resources (Bandura, 1999, 2002; Yang et al., 2020). Hence, to replenish the consumed resources, employees are more likely to engage in unethical behavior (Bandura, 1999; Dang et al., 2017; Schaefer & Bouwmeester, 2020). Fida et al. (2015) find that moral disengagement significantly positively correlates with unethical behavior. Based on recent research (Schaefer & Bouwmeester, 2020; Yang et al., 2020), moral disengagement mitigates the guilt of violating moral norms, thereby encouraging individuals to exhibit unethical behavior.

Moral disengagement could have diverse consequences depending on its orientation. Notably, OMD can make employees feel less guilt and less psychological agony due to moral constraints when safeguarding the interests of the organization. Employees with OMD are more likely to exhibit UPB in order to safeguard the interests of the organization (Dang et al., 2017; Hsieh et al., 2020). For instance, organizations often provide various types of support to employees. To repay the organization, employees actively enhance their organization's competitive advantage through various means, some of which may be unethical. Employees attempt to assuage their guilt by passing on the accountability for these unethical behaviors to the organization (Hsieh et al., 2020; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). A positive relationship between OMD and UPB is expected. FMD could cognitively obscure the obligation of employees to attribute their unethical behaviors to their families, thereby making them more likely to exhibit UPFB (Chen et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2020). Some studies report that when families experience immense financial pressure, employees tend to consider it a fundamental social value to help them resolve this pressure (Schwartz et al., 2012; Stein, 1992), leading to UPFB (Cheng et al., 2021). Regarding moral cognition such as FMD, employees prioritize the families' interest, and show cognitive awareness of being responsible for the family. In such cases, it is easier for employees to take whatever measures deemed fit to benefit their families, even if they are unethical. We expect a positive relationship between FMD and UPFB.

Based on the above analysis, when employees experience workplace bullying, they are less likely to morally disengage themselves from organizations (i.e., OMD), which decreases their engagement in unethical behaviors that benefit their organizations (i.e., UPB). Meanwhile, employees who are bullied in the workplace are more likely to morally

disengage themselves from families (i.e., FMD), which in turn increases their engagement in unethical behaviors that benefit their families (i.e., UPFB). Thus we propose two mediation hypotheses as below.

Hypothesis 3a OMD mediates the negative relationship between workplace bullying and UPB.

Hypothesis 3b FMD mediates the positive relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB.

The Chain-Mediating Effect of Emotional Exhaustion and Moral Disengagement

We have postulated an indirect effect of workplace bullying on employee unethical behavior mediated by its effect on emotional exhaustion (affective unit) and moral disengagement (cognitive unit). Two main theoretical frameworks support these mediating mechanisms, namely COR (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989) and CAPS (Kell, 2018; Lee & Pee, 2015; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Yao et al., 2020a). To further explore how workplace bullying influences employee unethical behavior, we now turn to the combined effects of emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement.

According to COR, resources are important to predict individual behavior when facing threats or negative events (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989). The emotional resources of employees who encounter workplace bullying will be significantly consumed. They are less likely to morally disengage themselves from their own moral standards to protect or to benefit their organizations (i.e., OMD). Doing so will help them conserve their resources, and not fall into a "loss spiral" of resources. With increased moral disengagement, employees will be less likely to engage in any unethical behaviors to protect or benefit their organizations (i.e., UPB). Conversely, when subjected to workplace bullying, employees who feel emotionally exhausted will invest in new resources to achieve a "gain spiral" of resources which help them to cope with the pressure and threat caused by workplace bullying. In this study, we propose that families are the main parties that individuals could turn to for these new resources. Workplace bullying leads to a higher level of emotional exhaustion which in turn leads to additional moral disengagement for the benefit of the family (i.e., FMD). So FMD will lead employees to undertake unethical behavior that benefits their families (i.e., UPFB).

CAPS provides further support for the above arguments. When individuals face an event or a situation, their affective-cognitive units can influence each other, leading to changes in their behavior (Lee & Pee, 2015; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Applying this to the context of workplace bullying and employee unethical behavior, we propose that workplace bullying leads to emotional exhaustion (affect), which in turn

influences moral disengagement (cognition), ultimately leading to employee unethical behavior. Therefore, we hypothesize a chain-mediation model where emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement chain-mediate the relationships between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB.

Hypothesis 4a Workplace bullying decreases UPB through the chain-mediating role of emotional exhaustion and OMD

Hypothesis 4b Workplace bullying increases UPFB through the chain-mediating role of emotional exhaustion and FMD.

The Moderating Effect of PFC

According to COR, exposure to threats or negative events results in the loss of resources by employees. The negative impact of such events can be mitigated if they have access to resources that can replace those that are lost. Workplace bullying is a harmful practice. To what extent employees perceive such practice to be tolerable or forgivable is a key factor influencing the level of resource loss. In this study, we propose PFC, as an extra resource to moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion. PFC is the degree of tolerance an organization expects individuals to display after experiencing a negative event (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Guchait et al., 2019). If the organization strongly supports and rewards employees for exhibiting such tolerance, it suggests a high level of forgiveness climate in the organization. In these organizations, employees are more tolerant and more likely to forgive each other's offenses. PFC helps employees to adjust their emotions and avoid consuming too many emotional resources (Guchait et al., 2016, 2019; Yao et al., 2020a). It can also, to some extent, resolve the trust crisis created by negative workplace events suffered by employees, such as workplace bullying (Guchait et al., 2016, 2019; Yao et al., 2020b). Employees who perceive a higher level of forgiveness climate in their organizations are more likely to forgive others' offenses, leading to less consumption of their resources, i.e., lower level of emotional exhaustion (Yao et al., 2020a). Thus we propose that PFC will weaken the positive relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion.

When perceiving a high level of forgiveness climate in their organizations, employees who have been bullied at the workplace will show a lower level of emotional exhaustion. Similarly, we argue that PFC would weaken the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement in the relationship between workplace bullying and employee unethical behavior, because it is regarded as an extra resource for employees to gain following the experience of negative events. The existing literature has demonstrated that individuals with a higher level of perceived caring and forgiveness climate, tend to attain more resources.

This is because they can rely on the care and comfort of organizational members which helps to replenish the emotional resources consumed by the negative events (Guchait et al., 2019; Halbesleben et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2019; Yao et al., 2020a). According to COR, employees who have more emotional resources in the workplace, will actively contribute to the organization and acquire more resources from the organization to realize the "gain spiral" (Emerson, 1976; Gouldner, 1960; Halbesleben et al., 2014). With extra resources such as PFC in place, employees with a high level of exhaustion tend to break their moral code for the benefit of the organization (OMD), thereby committing some unethical behaviors such as UPB (Hsieh et al., 2020; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). In this regard, PFC will weaken the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and OMD in the negative relationship between workplace bullying and UPB. Conversely, employees consume excessive emotional resources in the workplace such as emotional exhaustion caused by workplace bullying. Any extra resources (e.g., PFC) acquired by employees in the organization will help them to recharge their resources, leading to less moral disengagement which is more beneficial for the organization but not for their families (FMD), and less unethical behavior that benefit their families (UPFB). Therefore, PFC is expected to weaken the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and FMD in the positive relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB.

Based on the above review, we propose the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5a PFC weakens the positive impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion, and then moderates the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and OMD in the negative relationship between workplace bullying and UPB.

Hypothesis 5b PFC weakens the positive impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion, and then weakens the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and FMD in the positive relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB.

Methods and Results

Study Overview

This research proposed a moderated chain-mediation model linking workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, moral disengagement and unethical behaviors, moderated by PFC. This model consists of unethical behaviors and moral disengagement toward two parties, organizations and families. Due to the complexity of the model, as well as these two

distinct parties, we conduct two studies to test this model via organizational and family pathways respectively. Given that this study focuses on employees' experience, particularly with regard to workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, OMD, UPB and PFC, we chose individual employees as our study subject.

Study 1 uses a sample of insurance employees and examines the impact of workplace bullying on UPB via emotional exhaustion and OMD, moderated by PFC (Hypotheses 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, and 5a). Study 2 uses a sample of real estate agents and examines the impact of workplace bullying on UPFB via emotional exhaustion and FMD, moderated by PFC (Hypotheses 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b, and 5b). Both studies adopt time-lagged research design where data were collected cross three time points with 1-month time lag. Although the model is tested separately via organizations and family-related pathways, both studies fully address the overall theoretical moderated chain-mediation model where workplace bullying increases emotional exhaustion, which in turn influences moral disengagement, and ultimately employee unethical behavior (UPB/UPFB), moderated by employee PFC. More details are reported as below.

Study 1: Organizational Pathway

Sample and Procedure

The research sample was obtained from three large insurance companies in the southern part of China. All three insurance companies were established more than 10 years ago and had more than 1000 employees. The choice of these three sample organizations was based on the research team's network. We promised to share our research findings with them to better enlist their support. In order to be competitive in the market, these companies often encouraged their employees to promote their products and services using various means (e.g., using some excellent marketing skills). Their employees had greater autonomy and could give certain discounts on products purchased by customers. A total of 400 frontline employees from the sales positions in the three companies were invited to participate in the survey. Hard copies of surveys were used and researchers visited the company sites to collect data. All participants completed the survey at three time points. At Time 1, they completed the section dealing with basic information and scales of workplace bullying and PFC. A month later, at Time 2, they completed a scale of emotional exhaustion and OMD. Another month later, at Time 3, they completed the UPB scale.

In order to enable participants to complete the questionnaire correctly, we took the following four measures. First, before distributing the questionnaire, we explained to all participants that the data was being collected for academic research only and not for any other purpose. Second, we

promised to pay 66 yuan (~ 10 US dollars) upon correct completion of the three surveys. Third, during the process of completing the questionnaire, one of our members remained close to participants in order to address any queries they had. Finally, after participants completed the questionnaire, we checked the questionnaire to ensure that no data was missing. Then we immediately collected, sealed, and coded the questionnaires.

After eliminating invalid questionnaires, such as consistent answers and three investigation mismatches (some participants could not be reached because of business trips), we collected 366 valid questionnaires at Time 1, 331 at Time 2, and 306 at Time 3. After matching respondents across three time points, the final valid sample size was 306 with a response rate of 76.50%. Among the final sample, males accounted for 57.12% and females 42.88%. The average age was 27.22 years old (SD 5.76). Regarding education, 42.48% of participants did not have a bachelor's degree, and 57.52% had received a bachelor's degree or above. The average tenure of employees was 3.71 years (SD 3.43).

Measures

All items (except for control variables) were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As this study was conducted in China, we translated all scales strictly in compliance with the translation and translator-back procedure suggested by Behr (2017).

Workplace Bullying Nine items were adopted from the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R, Einarsen et al., 2009). The original NAQ-R scale includes 22 items and covers three types of bullying, i.e., work-related, personal-related and physical bullying. This study focuses on the bullying at workplace and adopts the nine items on work-related bullying. Such nine-item measure of workplace bullying has been widely used in the Chinese context (e.g., Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they had been bullied in the workplace during the past 6 months. Example items included "excessive monitoring of my work" and "being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with my work". The Cronbach's α was 0.86.

Perceived Forgiveness Climate (PFC) Four items were adopted from Cox (2011) to measure PFC. Two sample items were "We are forgiving of each other's offenses" and "Regarding offenses from other colleagues, members of the organization are tolerant of each other". In this study, Cronbach's α was 0.87.

Emotional Exhaustion We measured emotional exhaustion with the four-item scale developed by Maslach et al. (2001).

Two sample items were "I feel emotionally drained from my work" and "I feel like I'm at the end of my rope". The reliability alpha coefficient was 0.90.

Organization-Oriented Moral Disengagement (OMD) We measured OMD by adapting the 24-item moral disengagement scale developed by Bandura et al. (1996). This scale was originally used in the education context and we adapted it for the work context of this study. A similar approach has been adopted by studies in other contexts (e.g., Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014; Detert et al., 2008). Sample items included "It is ok to attack someone who threatens your organizational honor" and "A person cannot be blamed if he/she misbehaves for the benefit of the organization". Overall, the scale showed high reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.84).

Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior (UPB) We adopted the UPB scale from Umphress et al. (2010) who developed it in the Western context. Based on the cultural difference between the East and West, some original items were not applicable in the Chinese context. For example, one original item was "If my organization needed me to, I would give a good recommendation on behalf of an incompetent employee in the hope that the person will become another organization's problem instead of my own". In China, organizations recruit new employees through public recruitment and internal recommendation, and rarely through recommendations from employees of other organizations. We retained five items in this study. Two sample items were "If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good" and "If it would help my organization, I would exaggerate the truth about my company's products or services to customers and clients". The Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.92.

Control Variables When employees are exposed to negative events in the workplace, their gender, age, educational background, and tenure might influence their behaviors (Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). These control variables have been used in existing studies on UPB (Chen et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2020; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Zhang, 2020a). Gender was measured by a binary variable (male = 0, female = 1). Age was measured as a continuous variable. Educational background was measured by a binary variable (Leaving certificate and below = 0, bachelor and above = 1). Tenure was measured as the years of work in the current organization.

As all data were collected from one single source, the concern may exist about the common method variance (CMV). To address this potential concern, we followed a number of recommendations during the research design and analysis phases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In the research design phase, we provided assurances about the anonymity

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis in Study 1

Variables	Gender	Age	Edu	Tenure	WB	PFC	EE	OMD	UPB
Gender	–								
Age	− 0.04	–							
Edu	− 0.05	0.15*	–						
Tenure	0.02	0.70**	− 0.08	–					
WB	− 0.10	0.13*	0.01	0.07	*0.86*				
PFC	0.04	0.00	0.16**	0.03	− 0.17**	*0.87*			
EE	0.03	− 0.01	0.06	− 0.03	0.15*	− 0.06	*0.90*		
OMD	0.01	− 0.08	0.05	− 0.05	− 0.38**	0.16**	− 0.59**	*0.84*	
UPB	− 0.00	− 0.08	− 0.02	− 0.05	− 0.22**	0.19**	− 0.54**	0.44**	*0.92*
Mean	0.43	27.22	0.58	3.71	3.93	2.49	3.38	2.68	2.58
SD	0.50	5.76	0.50	3.43	0.64	0.57	0.77	0.31	0.42

Gender (male = 0, female = 1); Education background (below bachelor = 0, bachelor or above = 1)

EE emotional exhaustion

**$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$, two-tailed test

Bold and slanted data on diagonal is Cronbach's alpha for key variables in this study

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis in Study 1

Models		χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Full measurement model (five factors)	WB, PFC, EE, OMD, UPB	1.73	0.92	0.91	0.92	0.05	0.05
Four factors	WB + PFC, EE, OMD, UPB	2.28	0.86	0.84	0.86	0.07	0.08
Three factors	WB + PFC, EE + OMD, UPB	3.05	0.77	0.75	0.77	0.08	0.10
Two factors	WB + PFC, EE + OMD + UPB	4.11	0.65	0.62	0.65	0.10	0.13
Single factor	WB + PFC + EE + OMD + UPB	5.08	0.54	0.50	0.54	0.12	0.14

+ represents the combination of two factors into one factor

of the survey and the confidentiality of the data. Prior to distribution, we tested, revised, and retested the survey among a group of participants in the case organization. In addition, we collected data at three different time points. Finally, during the analysis phase, a series of confirmatory factor analyses were carried out and the results are presented in the results subsection.

Results

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, and reliability values of each variable. In addition, we tested the correlation between all variables.

Measurement Model

Table 2 presents the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results of all variables. The five-factor model showed a very good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.73$; increased fit index

[IFI] = 0.92; Tucker–Lewis index [TLI] = 0.91; comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.92; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.05; the standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = 0.05. We then conducted a series of CFA for alternative models and compared them with the full measurement model. The results in Table 2 show that the full measurement model was evidently better than that of all other models, indicating that the variables in this study had good discriminative validity and that CMV was not a serious concern.

Structural Model for Testing Hypotheses

Main Effect and Mediating Effect We used the structural equation model (SEM) and Bootstrap mediation test in Mplus 7.0 software to test our research hypotheses 1a to 4a. Figure 2 and Table 3 present the results obtained after controlling for gender, age, educational background and tenure.

Hypothesis 1a proposed a negative correlation between workplace bullying and UPB. As shown in Fig. 2, the path coefficient of workplace bullying on UPB was − 0.14
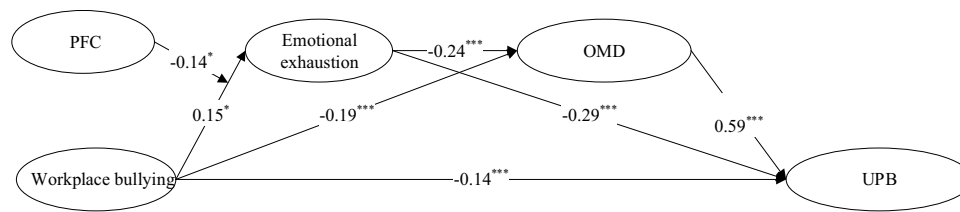
Fig. 2 Model estimation in Study 1. *Note* Control variables were included in the model but not shown here for ease of presentation. *PFC* perceived forgiveness climate, *OMD* organization-oriented moral disengagement, and *UPB* unethical pro-organizational behavior. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

($p < 0.001$), suggesting that workplace bullying was negatively correlated with UPB. Hence, Hypothesis 1a was supported.

Hypothesis 2a proposed that emotional exhaustion would mediate the negative relationship between workplace bullying and UPB. To test for mediating effect, three conditions need to be met (Hayes, 2013). To streamline the presentation of the results and to avoid repetition in the reporting of the results, one detailed example of the findings for the meditational model (Hypothesis 2a) is presented and the results for the additional mediational models are reported in a short section. The first condition is the significant relationship between the independent variable and the mediator. The second condition refers to a significant relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable. The third condition requires the indirect effect of the dependent variable on the independent variable via the mediator to be significant. Figure 2 showed that the path coefficient of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion was 0.15 ($p < 0.05$), suggesting a significant positive correlation between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion, meeting the first condition. The path coefficient of emotional exhaustion on UPB was − 0.29 ($p < 0.001$), suggesting a significant negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and UPB, satisfying the second condition. Together with Hypothesis 1a, the indirect effect was − 0.17 (Bootstrapping = 20,000), with a 95% confidence interval [CI] of [− 0.27, − 0.03] which excluded 0, meeting the third condition. Thereby Hypothesis 2a was supported.

Hypothesis 3a proposed that OMD would mediate the negative relationship between workplace bullying and UPB. Figure 2 shows that workplace bullying was negatively linked with OMD ($b = − 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), and OMD was positively linked with UPB ($b = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of workplace bullying and UPB via OMD was − 0.17, with 95% CI of [− 0.26, − 0.03]. All three conditions were met. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a was supported.

Hypothesis 4a proposed that emotional exhaustion and OMD would chain-mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and UPB. Support for Hypotheses 2a and 3a satisfied the first two conditions. An additional condition for chain-mediation was the significant impact of the first mediator on the second mediator (Hayes, 2013). The path coefficient between emotional exhaustion and OMD was − 0.24 ($p < 0.001$), satisfying the additional condition. The indirect effect of workplace bullying and UPB via emotional exhaustion and OMD was − 0.10, with a 95% CI of [− 0.22, − 0.02]. Therefore, Hypothesis 4a was supported.

In addition, after removing the control variables, we retested our model and found that the model was still stable, and only the value of the regression coefficient changed.

Moderating Effect Hypothesis 5a proposed that the PFC would weaken the impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion. Figure 2 shows that PFC significantly moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion ($b = − 0.14$, $p < 0.05$). In order to illustrate the moderating impact of PFC and overcome the limitations of the traditional simple slope test with random pick a point, we decided to use Johnson–Neyman technique (Carden et al., 2017; Johnson & Neyman, 1936). As shown in Fig. 3, when the level of PFC in the organization was high (above 3.66), the CI for the impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion contained 0, demonstrating that workplace bullying had no significant impact on emotional exhaustion under high levels of PFC. When the level of PFC in the organization was low (below 3.66), the CI of this relationship was all below 0, suggesting that workplace bullying exerted a significant positive impact on emotional exhaus-

Table 3 Bootstrapping mediation effect test in Study 1

Path	Indirect effect estimation	Confidence interval of bias-corrected 95%	
		Lower	Upper
Total indirect effect	− 0.44	− 0.42	− 0.12
Specific indirect effect decomposition			
WB → EE → UPB	− 0.17	− 0.27	− 0.03
WB → OMD → UPB	− 0.17	− 0.26	− 0.03
WB → EE → OMD → UPB	− 0.10	− 0.22	− 0.02

$n = 306$; Bootstrapping randomly sampled 20,000 times
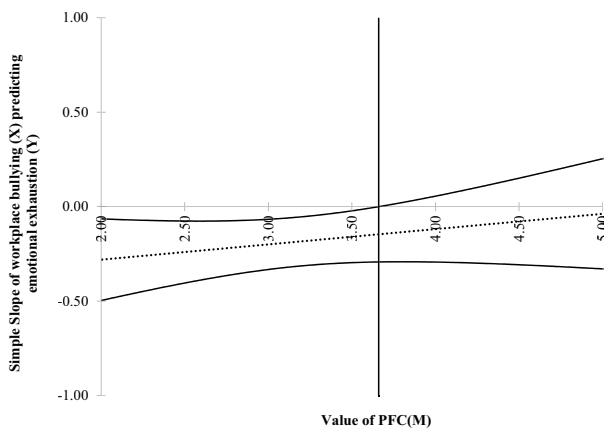
Fig. 3 The moderating effect of PFC in Study 1

Table 4 Analysis of the moderated chain-mediating effects in Study 1

Moderator	Path: WB → EE → OMD → UPB		
	Indirect effect	LLCI	ULCI
High PFC	− 0.10	− 0.11	− 0.05
Low PFC	− 0.19	− 0.25	− 0.09
Discrepancy	0.09	0.08	0.14

tion at low levels of PFC. Hence, the findings suggested that PFC moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion such that the relationship was stronger when PFC was low rather than high, partially supporting Hypothesis 5a.

Moderated Mediating Effect Moderation SEM was conducted to test for the moderated mediation model where PFC was proposed to weaken the chain-mediating impact of emotional exhaustion and OMD in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPB (Hypothesis 5a). As a principal advantage of moderation SEM, the latent variable can effectively regulate the measurement error and precisely estimate the mediating and moderating effect simultaneously (Maslowsky et al., 2015; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). We used the algorithm in Mplus developed by Stride et al. (2015) to analyze the chain-mediating effect between emotional exhaustion and OMD from workplace bullying and UPB under varying levels of PFC (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Hayes, 2013, 2018). Table 4 presents the results.

At the high level of PFC (one SD above the mean), the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and OMD in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPB was − 0.10, with a 95% CI of [− 0.11, − 0.05], suggesting a significant chain-mediating effect. At the low level of PFC (one SD below the mean), the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and OMD between workplace bullying and UPB was − 0.19, with a 95% of CI [− 0.25, − 0.09], suggesting a significant chain-mediating effect. The difference in the indirect effect across high and low levels of PFC was significant ($b = 0.09$, [0.08, 0.14]). The chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and OMD in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPB was stronger when PFC was low rather than high. Hence, Hypothesis 5a was supported.

Study 2: Family Pathway

Sample and Procedure

In this study, we targeted employees in the real estate sector in Shenzhen. Due to the increased demands and investment, the housing market in Shenzhen has been placed among the top 3 in China in terms of the number of transactions in 2020. Employees in the real estate sector often had to sacrifice time with their families to get excessive work completed. The intensive competition and work pressure had encouraged employees to engage in unethical behaviors at work. Based on the research team's network, three companies participated in this study. The research design and data collection procedure were similar to Study 1. For example, as in Study 1, we promised to share our findings with them. We distributed hard copies of questionnaires among participants on site, at three time points with the same time lag of 1-month apart. At Time 1, data on control variables, workplace bullying and PFC were collected. At Time 2, we collected data on emotional exhaustion and FMD. At Time 3, participants completed the UPFB scale.

Of 382 questionnaires distributed, after eliminating invalid questionnaires, we obtained 369 valid questionnaires at Time 1, 342 at Time 2, and 328 at Time 3. After matching respondents cross three time points, the final valid sample size was 328 with a response rate of 85.86%. Among the final sample, males accounted for 59.15% and females accounted for 40.85%. The average age was 30.17 years old (SD 4.43). Regarding the educational background, 39.94% had received a leaving certificate or below, and 60.06% had received a bachelor's degree or above. The average tenure was 4.79 years (SD 3.41). Regarding marital status, 33.84% were unmarried, while 66.16% were married. Regarding the number of children, 58.84% had no children, 30.79% had 1 child, 9.76% had 2 children, and 0.61% had 3 children.

Measures

As in Study 1, all items used were measured on a 5-point Likert subscale (except for control variables), ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition, we also translated all scales in strict compliance with the

translator-back translation procedures suggested by Behr (2017).

Three main variables, i.e., workplace bullying, PFC, and emotional exhaustion, were measured using the same scales as in Study 1. To avoid repetition, we do not report the full measurements in this section. All three scales showed good reliability with high Cronbach's αs (0.91 for workplace bullying, 0.88 for PFC, and 0.85 for emotional exhaustion).

Family-Oriented Moral Disengagement (FMD) Similar to OMD in Study 1, we adapted the 24-item moral disengagement scale developed by Bandura et al. (1996) into our research context. A similar approach has been adopted by other studies (e.g., Liu et al., 2020). Two sample items were "It is alright to fight to protect your family interests" and "It is OK to steal to take care of your family's needs". The Cronbach's α was 0.84.

Unethical Pro-family Behavior (UPFB) To measure UPFB, seven items were adopted from Liu et al. (2020). Two sample items were "To help my family, I took company assets/supplies home for family use" and "To help my family, I submitted my family's household receipts (e.g., gas) to my company for the reimbursement". This scale had good consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$).

Control Variables As in Study 1, we controlled for gender, age, educational background and tenure which have been found to influence employee unethical behavior (Allen & Finkelstein, 2014; Warren & Catherine, 1999). In addition, in order to capture the impact of family factors as they may influence family-based experience and behaviors, we controlled marital status, and the number of children as suggested by Liu et al. (2020) in studying UPFB as they may influence employees' decisions on family-related issues.

Data were collected from a single source and CMV may exist. As in Study 1, we followed the recommendations by Podsakoff and his colleagues during the research design and analysis phases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To avoid repetition, please refer to "Measures" section in Study 1.

Results

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Table 5 presents the mean, standard deviation, and reliability values of each variable. In addition, we tested the correlation between these variables.

Measurement Model

CFA was performed on all five variables (Table 6) which showed a very good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.84$; IFI $= 0.92$;

TLI $= 0.91$; CFI $= 0.91$; RMSEA $= 0.06$; SRMR $= 0.06$). We then conducted a series of CFA for alternative models and found that the full measurement model was better than all the alternative models. These findings suggested that CMV was not a serious concern in this study.

Structural Model for Testing Hypotheses

Main Effect and Mediating Effect As in Study 1, we used the SEM and Bootstrap mediation test to test our study hypotheses. Figure 4 and Table 7 present the results obtained by using SEM and Bootstrap mediation after controlling for gender, age, education, tenure, marital status and the number of children. We found that marital status ($b = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$; $b = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$; $b = 0.11$, $p < 0.1$) and number of children ($b = 0.15$, $p < 0.1$; $b = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$; $b = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) significantly affected emotional exhaustion, FMD, and UPFB.

Hypothesis 1b which proposed a positive relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB was supported by finding the significant path between them ($b = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2b proposed that emotional exhaustion would mediate the positive relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB. Figure 4 showed that workplace bullying was significantly linked to emotional exhaustion ($b = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$), and emotional exhaustion was positively linked to UPFB ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of workplace bullying and UPFB via emotional exhaustion was 0.22, with a 95% CI of [0.08, 0.27]. Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Hypothesis 3b proposed that FMD would mediate the positive relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB. Figure 4 showed that workplace bullying was positively linked with FMD ($b = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$) and FMD was positively linked with UPFB ($b = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of workplace bullying and UPFB via FMD was 0.20, with 95% CI of [0.05, 0.25]. All three conditions were met. Therefore, Hypothesis 3b was supported.

Hypothesis 4b proposed that emotional exhaustion and FMD would chain-mediate the relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB. Support for Hypotheses 2b and 3b satisfied the first two conditions. Emotional exhaustion was found to be significantly associated with FMD ($b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of workplace bullying and UPFB via emotional exhaustion and FMD was 0.12, with a 95% CI of [0.05, 0.22]. Therefore, Hypothesis 4b was supported.

In addition, after removing the control variables, we retested our model and found that the model was still stable; however, the value and significance of some regression coefficients were enhanced to some extent.

Moderating Effect Hypothesis 5a proposed PFC would weaken the impact of workplace bullying on emotional

Table 5 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis in Study 2

Variables	Gender	Age	Edu	Tenure	Marital status	Children	WB	PFC	EE	FMD	UPFB
Gender	–										
Age	0.03	–									
Edu	− 0.03	0.07	–								
Tenure	− 0.01	0.43**	− 0.11	–							
Marital status	− 0.04	0.54**	− 0.00	0.18**	–						
Children	0.01	0.65**	0.01	0.21**	0.547**	–					
WB	− 0.10	0.03	− 0.08	− 0.02	0.08	0.09	*0.91*				
PFC	0.06	− 0.12*	0.00	− 0.07	− 0.15**	− 0.15**	− 0.32**	*0.88*			
EE	0.02	0.10	− 0.02	0.06	0.08	0.14**	0.36**	− 0.53**	*0.85*		
FMD	− 0.07	0.06	− 0.09	0.08	0.10	0.02	0.47**	− 0.24**	0.14**	*0.84*	
UPFB	− 0.05	0.04	− 0.12*	0.05	0.12*	0.05	0.22**	− 0.36**	0.44**	0.33**	*0.84*
Mean	0.41	30.17	0.60	4.79	0.66	0.52	3.08	2.39	4.00	3.11	3.66
SD	0.49	4.43	0.49	3.41	0.47	0.70	0.46	0.82	0.75	0.36	0.41

Gender (male = 0, female = 1); Education background (below bachelor = 0, bachelor or above = 1); Marital status (unmarried = 0, married = 1); Number of children (no children = 0, 1 child = 1, 2 children = 2, 3 children = 3)

**p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, two-tailed test

Bold and slanted data on diagonal is Cronbach's alpha for key variables in this study

Table 6 Results of confirmatory factor analysis in Study 2

Models		χ^2/df	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Full measurement model (five factors)	WB, PFC, EE, FMD, UPFB	2.84	0.92	0.91	0.91	0.06	0.06
Four factors	WB + PFC, EE, FMD, UPFB	3.51	0.85	0.82	0.85	0.07	0.08
Three factors	WB + PFC, EE + FMD, UPFB	3.83	0.81	0.79	0.81	0.07	0.08
Two factors	WB + PFC, EE + FMD + UPFB	4.43	0.75	0.72	0.75	0.08	0.10
Single factor	WB + PFC + EE + FMD + UPFB	4.52	0.74	0.71	0.74	0.08	0.12

+ represents the combination of two factors into one factor
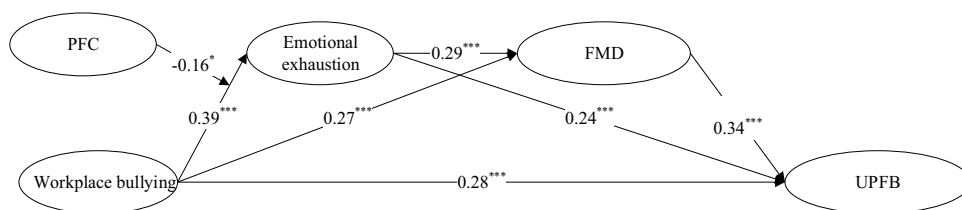

Fig. 4 Model estimation in Study 2. *Note* Control variables were included in the model but not shown here for ease of presentation. *PFC* perceived forgiveness climate, *FMD* family-oriented moral dis- engagement, and *UPFB* unethical pro-family behavior. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

exhaustion. Figure 4 shows that PFC significantly moderated the correlation between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion ($b = 0.16, p < 0.05$). We adopted the Johnson–Ney-man technique for testing the moderation effect. As shown in Fig. 5, when PFC was high (above 4.14), the 95% CI of the impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion contained 0. This suggests that the influence of workplace bul-lying on emotional exhaustion was not significant under high levels of PFC. Conversely, when PFC was low (below 4.14), the 95% CI of the impact effect was always above 0. This sug-gests that workplace bullying exerted a significant and posi-tive impact on emotional exhaustion under low levels of PFC. The results suggested that PFC moderated the relationship between workplace bullying and emotional exhaustion such

Table 7 Bootstrapping mediation effect test in Study 2

Path	Indirect effect estimation	Confidence interval of bias-corrected 95%	
		Lower	Upper
Total indirect effect	0.54	0.15	0.49
Specific indirect effect decomposition			
WB→EE→UPFB	0.22	0.08	0.27
WB→FMD→UPFB	0.20	0.050	0.25
WB→EE→FMD→UPFB	0.12	0.050	0.22

$n = 328$; Bootstrapping randomly sampled 20,000 times
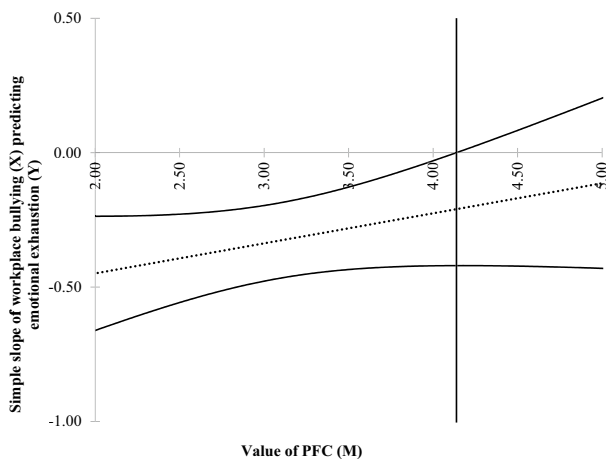
Fig. 5 The moderating effect of PFC in Study 2

that the relationship was stronger when PFC was low rather than high.

Moderated Mediating Effect Moderation SEM was conducted to test the moderated chain-mediation model where PFC was proposed to weaken the chain-mediating impact of emotional exhaustion and FMD in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB (Hypothesis 5b). Table 8 presents the results.

At the high level of PFC (one SD above the mean), the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and FMD in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB was 0.16, with a 95% CI of [0.16, 0.34], suggesting a significant chain-mediating effect. At the low level of PFC (one SD below the mean), the chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and FMD between workplace bullying and UPFB was 0.31, with a 95% of CI [0.23, 0.49], suggesting a significant chain-mediating effect. The difference in the indirect effect across high and low levels of PFC was significant ($b = -0.15$, [0.10, 0.28]). The chain-mediating effect of emotional exhaustion

Table 8 Analysis of the moderated chain-mediating effects in Study 2

Moderator	Path: WB→EE→FMD→UPFB		
	Indirect effect	LLCI	ULCI
High PFC	0.16	0.16	0.34
Low PFC	0.31	0.23	0.49
Discrepancy	− 0.15	0.10	0.28

and FMD in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPFB was stronger when PFC was low rather than high. Hence, Hypothesis 5b is supported.

Discussion

This study set out to unlock what, why, how, and when employees engage in unethical behavior. Based on two main theoretical frameworks concerning negative events and resources, i.e., CAPS and COR, this study proposed a moderated chain-mediation model where workplace bullying increases emotional exhaustion, which in turn influences moral disengagement, and ultimately employee unethical behavior (UPB/UPFB), moderated by employee perceived forgiveness climate. Results from two studies across three time points provided support for the above model. This study generates valuable implications for business ethical theory and practices. Overall, workplace bullying decreases UPB and increases UPFB via increased emotional exhaustion and changes in moral disengagement. Emotional exhaustion decreases OMD, leading to less UPB; and increases FMD leading to more UPFB. PFC weakens the positive impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion and the mediating effect of workplace bullying on UPB/UPFB via emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement. Implications for theory and practice are discussed below.

Theoretical Implications

Firstly, we extend our understanding of why employees exhibit unethical behavior by examining the role of an organizational factor—workplace bullying—in predicting two types of unethical behaviors, i.e., UPB and UPFB. Previous research on employee unethical behavior explained it mainly from individual factors such as job insecurity, self-compassion, and self-control depletion (Gini et al., 2020; Lawrence & Kacmar, 2017; Yang et al., 2020). Recent research looked at external factors such as leadership (Graham et al., 2015; Hsieh et al., 2020), and family financial pressure (Liu et al., 2020). In this study, we extend our understanding of why employees exhibit UPB and UPFB

by examining a common negative event experienced by employees in the workplace, i.e., workplace bullying. Owing to their pro-organizational and pro-family characteristics, UPB and UPFB are often overlooked by organizations, families, and many scholars (Arasli & Tumer, 2008; Chen et al., 2016; Umphress et al., 2010). Existing limited research on unethical behavior mainly focuses on UPB, while UPFB has not been studied until recently. As the first scholar to propose the concept of UPFB, Liu et al. (2020) focused on the perspective of family financial pressure as the main driver for UPFB. Indeed, UPFB was not necessarily caused only by family factors, and could be attributable to organizational factors. In this regard, Cheng et al. (2021) found that a supervisor's family-supportive behaviors could reduce UPFB. In this study, we extend such research by identifying the negative event, i.e., workplace bullying, as a key driver for both UPB and UPFB. In addition to the new variables, this research draws on the resources-based view and introduces COR and CAPS to employee unethical behavior research, providing additional insights to the existing research which mainly used social exchange and leadership theories. By doing so, this research extends the theoretical base and research scope on why employees exhibit unethical behavior.

Secondly, this study contributes to our understanding of how and why workplace bullying influences employees' unethical behavior (UPB/UPFB). Many previous studies considered that a certain factor (e.g., leadership style or family financial pressure) would affect employees' cognition (e.g., organizational identification and moral disengagement) and ultimately affect employees' behavior (Chen et al., 2016; Dang et al., 2017; Effelsberg & Solga, 2015; Hsieh et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Miao et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2019). Nevertheless, previous studies ignored the fact that humans are particularly emotional animals, and that their emotional units are often influenced before their cognitive development (Kell, 2018; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Yao et al., 2020a). In this study, we used COR to examine the entire process of resource gains and losses between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB, as well as using CAPS to connect all variables, thereby elucidating the impact mechanism of workplace bullying on UPB/UPFB. First, we validated the separate mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB using COR. Among them, emotional exhaustion represented the depletion of employees' emotional resources, while moral disengagement represented the gains and losses of employees' cognitive resources, which, to some extent, confirms part of the research conclusions of Liu et al. (2020). Second, we used CAPS to test the efficiency of the event–affective–cognitive-behavior process in describing the chain-mediating effect between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB, enabling us to better discover the alteration between individual

cognitive and affective units, as well as the internal connection between gains and losses of individual resources. Thus, we could elucidate the intermediating mechanisms between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB in terms of internal mechanism and overall logic. Hence, this study not only broadens the scope of CAPS in management but also complements the mediating variable between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB. Drawing on the COR, we proposed and found support for the impact of workplace bullying on moral disengagement. In particular, when employees experience workplace bullying as a negative event, they are more likely to have a lower level of OMD to save their resources and a high level of FMD to gain more resources. Moral disengagement was found to lead to unethical behaviors such as UPB and UPFB. We acknowledge that there may be other unethical behaviors such as bullying others which moral disengagement leads to. Such research indicates the impact of moral disengagement on bullying (Gini et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017, 2020). As commonly said, what goes around comes around. Thus, we call for future research to more systematically examine the casualty of bullying and moral disengagement.

Finally, we increase the understanding for research on employee unethical behaviors by examining the boundary condition when employees exhibit UPB/UPFB. Previous studies on boundary conditions of unethical behavior often selected variables associated with employee morals, including organizational identification and moral identification (Chen et al., 2016; Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014; Effelsberg & Solga, 2015; Graham et al., 2020; Johnson & Umphress, 2019; Umphress et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2019). Nevertheless, individuals often ignore their moral standards because of the interaction between events and situational characteristics (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). It has been claimed by many scholars that PFC, as a distinct situational characteristic, could effectively enhance the individual's emotional control ability and cognitive regulation ability (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012; Guchait et al., 2016, 2019; Yao et al., 2020a, 2020b). Theoretically, by finding the moderating effect of PFC on the chain-mediation model, we demonstrated that the interaction between events and situational characteristics can effectively affect an individual's cognitive-affective personality system. By doing so, this research enriches the research results of CAPS, which has been focusing on the mediating mechanisms between events and behaviors. In ethics research, this finding unlocks how organizations could reduce the indirect impact of workplace bullying on employee unethical behavior. Both UPB and UPFB are unethical and they would cause significant losses to the organization in the long run. This study contributes to solving this puzzle by proposing and finding that PFC weakens the indirect impact of workplace bullying on employee unethical behavior.

Practical Implications

Several lessons can be learned by practitioners from this study. Overall, both UPB and UPFB are unethical behaviors. Organizations should invest more in organizational policies and practices to prevent UPB/UPFB as they ultimately damage the interests of organizations. Thus, organizations must also take some measures to eliminate UPB and UPFB.

Firstly, employees who experience workplace bullying tend to morally rationalize their unethical behaviors to protect the interests of their families and are more likely to exhibit UPFB. In addition, employees who experience workplace bullying are even more reluctant to consume their resources to protect the interests of the organization, thereby inhibiting UPB. Such negative events should not be tolerated by the organization. Organizations need to actively monitor, effectively manage and prevent bullying at the workplace. For example, organizations could create an anonymous reporting mechanism (e.g., anonymous phone lines and letter boxes). At the same time, if organizations receive reports or complaints about workplace bullying, timely investigation needs to be organized along with professional psychological counselors to comfort and guide victims (Einarsen et al., 2009; Escartin et al., 2011; Yao et al., 2020a). Moreover, the organization also should provide the essential skills of conflict management training to its members, e.g., emotional regulation skills to help them manage their emotions; interpersonal communication skills to promote mutual understanding; as well as problem-solving skills to attain mutual understanding and mutually beneficial solutions (Leon-Perez et al, 2016; Tjosvold et al., 2014).

Organizations should enhance the level of forgiveness climate. Based on our findings, the positive impact of workplace bullying on emotional exhaustion is mitigated at higher levels of PFC. Thus, organizations should incorporate mutual assistance, tolerance, and forgiveness among their members into the organizational culture. Meanwhile, in case of conflicts among organizational members, if employees can be inclusive, forgive and tolerate each other's behaviors, the organization should provide them with timely encouragement or reward (Guchait et al., 2019; Salvador, 2020; Yao et al., 2020a). In addition, managers must use these results cautiously, as a high-level PFC can result in more UPBs among employees. Thus, managers must take difficult decisions between suppressing UPB and UPFB (Guchait et al., 2019; Salvador, 2020); however, we believe that it is more appropriate for managers to suppress one of these two immoral behaviors by other measures, and then decide whether to enhance the level of PFC in organizations.

Finally, the organization should enhance the moral quality of its members and timely supplement the emotional resources consumed by its employees. For new employees, the organization can integrate their moral code into the recruitment index to ensure that new employees have a high level of moral quality. For existing organizational members, the organization should frequently invite ethics professors to provide training to help them enhance their moral quality. Moreover, the organization must articulate some punishment measures against UPB and UPFB so that employees cannot find excuses for moral disengagement (Chen et al., 2016; Detert et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2020). In addition, the organization should also supplement the emotional resources consumed by employees in a timely manner which will prevent them from resorting to unethical behavior. Leaders should always focus on and care for employees. When employees are depressed, leaders should extend them timely comfort (Xu et al., 2018). Organizations should also create places for employees to vent their emotions and a mechanism to supplement emotional resources, which can not only assist them to vent their negative emotions but also help them supplement emotional resources when emotional resources begin to be consumed. This can efficiently prevent employees from falling into a state of emotional exhaustion (Yao et al., 2020a).

Limitations and Future Research

This study on the moderated chain-mediation model of workplace bullying to employee unethical behavior via emotional exhaustion and moral disengagement, moderated by PFC, provides valuable insights into why, how and when employee unethical behavior occurs. Despite the contribution it has made, some limitations exist.

First, this research is limited to a single source data collection, a small sample size, and the research context is one country. Data were collected from employees who know their own experience of workplace bullying, emotional exhaustion, moral disengagement, and PFC. The single source data collection may cause CMV. Even though this study used varied methods (e.g., multiple time points data collection and a series of CFA), and ruled out the concerns about such bias, future research would benefit from adopting a more rigorous research design to avoid CMV (e.g., multiple subject evaluations and experience sampling method). The sample sizes in both studies were very small and the data were collected from one country—China. The generalizability could be limited. In addition, Eastern and Western countries have cultural differences. Chinese employees (including those in Japan and South Korea) are profoundly influenced by Confucian culture. For instance, in an enterprise, must be loyal to the organization, and all actions must prioritize the interests of the organization. At the same time, Chinese people are accountable to their families and actively fulfill family obligations of supporting their children and parents. Examining UPB and UPFB in the Chinese context was appropriate (Cheng et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, challenges exist in generalizing the findings to other countries. We call for future research to test the model in other countries. In addition, the measurement of workplace bullying needs more attention. This study adopted a more commonly used measurement and asked respondents to recall their experience during the past 6 months. Attention is needed to more precisely capture and measure experience with workplace bullying (Notelaers et al., 2019). For example, future research may consider use event-trigger method. Once employees experience workplace bullying, they are invited to evaluate their emotional, cognitive and behavioral outcomes.

In addition, we found the mediating effects of emotional and cognitive resources in the relationship between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB by using CAPS. Nevertheless, both resources contain multiple variables, such as job security and moral disengagement; employees try their best to exhibit UPB for fear of losing their jobs or to gain recognition and affirmation from the organization through shortcuts. Otherwise, employees can feel intense job insecurity and, consequently, may unscrupulously engage in UPFB for the benefit of their families (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018; Lin & Ding, 2003; Liu et al., 2020). In addition to these two variables, some emotional resources (e.g., relationship identification and organizational identification) and cognitive resources (e.g., interpersonal trust and psychological distress) warrant verification through investigation in future studies (Shen et al., 2019; Yao et al, 2020a, 2020b). Furthermore, we investigated the underlying mechanism between workplace bullying and UPB/UPFB primarily on a personal level. Indeed, many other factors at the team or organizational level affect unethical behavior among organizational members. Thus, future research could expand to the team or organizational level. For instance, the existing studies have demonstrated that leadership style exerts a significant impact on organizational members' unethical behavior (Chen et al., 2016; Dang et al., 2017; Effelsberg & Solga, 2015; Hsieh et al., 2020; Miao et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2019). The question could be asked if leaders themselves are exhibiting UPB/UFPB. As leaders have greater power and freedom (Liu et al., 2020), they might focus more on the interests of the organization; but they might also be better placed to obtain benefits from the organization for their families. All of these factors warrant further investigation.

The above limitations on the possibility of other variables influencing workplace bullying, and employee ethical behaviors, portray the endogeneity issue in management research.[1] According to Hill et al. (2020) and Wooldridge (2010) four sources cause endogeneity. They are the omitted variables, simultaneity, measurement error and selection. This research has addressed endogeneity to some extent. For example, we used the control variables in the analysis to address omitted variable bias. Nonetheless, there might be

other predictors or constructs influencing the outcome variables of UPB and UPFB. Future research needs to consider the use of instrumental variables to eliminate the threat of endogeneity. Our research has addressed the measurement error issue at both the design (e.g., using valid scales) and analysis (e.g., addressing the CMV and using SEM) stages (see Online Appendix A for more details). The time-lagged research design also helps to reduce the simultaneity issue. Despite with our great efforts, endogeneity still exists and is a threat in management research We call for future research to pay more attention to the endogeneity issue by following the recommendations and solutions proposed by existing studies (e.g., Hill et al., 2020; Ketokivi & McIntosh, 2017; Larcker & Rusticus, 2010; Wooldridge, 2010).

Conclusion

This study found a moderated chain-mediation model where workplace bullying led to more emotional exhaustion, which influences moral disengagement, ultimately affecting employee unethical behavior (UPB/UPFB), moderated by PFC. Our findings thus extend the knowledge of why, how, and when employees engage in unethical behaviors by focusing on the resource perspective. Several suggestions are provided for managers and organizations to follow in order to prevent and reduce unethical behavior, and to build an ethical place to work.

Declarations

This paper and all authors compliance with ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee.

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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