"I just feel like I can't connect": understanding targets' organizational identification through experiences with destructive workplace behaviors

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Introduction: Destructive workplace behaviors are a pervasive problem in organizations within the United States. This project aimed to make both theoretical and practical contributions focusing on individuals' experiences as targets of destructive workplace behaviors.

Methods: This study conducted a thorough examination of how forty-nine individuals' experiences relate to their organizational identification (i.e., connectedness). The following research question was posed: How do targets' experiences with destructive workplace behaviors relate to their perceived organizational identification? The research examined participants' experiences through qualitative research utilizing semi-structured interviews and provides a communicative understanding of the relationship between destructive workplace behaviors and organizational identification.

Results: Data from this study provide empirical evidence that experiencing destructive workplace behaviors matters because it informs how targets identify with their organization. First, participants experienced and described a wide array of destructive workplace behaviors. Second, the relationship between destructive workplace behaviors and organizational identification varied among participants. Some participants experienced organizational disidentification while others remained identified with the organization by applying relational organizational identification tactics, including separating the organization from the perpetrator and/or connecting with trusted individuals.

Discussion: Findings uncovered the tensions participants experienced between identification and disidentification to the organization and examined the ways that participants negotiated these tensions. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

KEYWORDS

bullying, destructive workplace behavior(s), organizational identification, sexual harassment, workplace incivility

1 Introduction

Given current political and social climates, wherein treating others with disregard, contempt, and derision has seemingly become commonplace, destructive workplace behaviors are a relevant and timely topic that require further investigation, particularly given that the current knowledge economy and competitive business is driven by systems of relationships. According to a Pew Research Study, feeling disrespected at work was cited as a cause for organizational exit

by 57% of participants (Parker and Menasce Horowitz, 2022). This supports other research findings that incivility in the workplace (Dolev et al., 2021; Linvill and Connaughton, 2018; Linvill, 2008) and job dissatisfaction (Farrell, 1983) precipitate organizational exit. This is particularly important as United States businesses continue to realize labor shortages due to the changing work landscape brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent "Great Resignation." The shifting nature of work environments has necessitated that organizations establish supportive environments across a wide range of working contexts, encompassing both in-person, remote, and hybrid settings.

Destructive workplace behaviors are a pervasive problem in organizations within the United States. The 2021 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey indicated that an astonishing 79.3 million people in the United States were affected by workplace bullying, as either (direct) targets[1] or (indirect) witnesses[2] of destructive behaviors at work (Namie, 2021). The current study provides empirical evidence that one outcome of destructive workplace behavior is that individuals feel less connected to their organization and/or organizational members. For example, one participant shared that she was unable to connect to her coworkers in a meaningful way because of disrespect and rudeness. Her experiences as a target of these behaviors subsequently caused her to feel less connected to her organization. She shared the following thoughts, "It feels horrible, and I just feel like I cannot connect to my coworkers as much as I would be able to."

Importantly, United States organizations routinely lose billions of dollars annually due to events and outcomes related to destructive workplace behaviors (Namie, 2017). As the United States workforce moved to a largely remote work model in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is no surprise that the 2021 WBI survey found that 43.2% of those affected were bullied during remote work. It is thus clear that destructive workplace behaviors continue to overwhelm both employees and employers in all sectors and carry with them various tangible costs, from employee health concerns to employer costs.

A strong connection exists between organizational identification and employee satisfaction and organizational commitment has already been found and is presented in seminal work related to organizational identification (Cheney and Tompkins, 1987; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Pratt, 1998; Scott et al., 1999). Additionally, current scholarship continues to examine the nuances between organizational identification and varying aspects of employee satisfaction and commitment (Nakra, 2006; Ashforth, 2020; Yue et al., 2021; Ashford et al., 2018; Ashforth et al., 2024).

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1 The terms "target" and "victim" have both been used throughout scholarly literature (Namie, 2003) regarding bullying, incivility, aggression, and violence in the workplace. In this study, the term target is used as a way to indicate those individuals who have been victimized by their direct experiences with various destructive workplace behaviors.

2 The author notes that experiences of third-party organizational members, often referred to as witnesses (Harvey et al., 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Pearson et al., 2000; Thomas, 2005), are not considered within this study. While witness' stories are important— as those who witness destructive workplace behaviors or even hear about them secondhand may also experience stress, decreased productivity, health issues, or engage in exiting the organization (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006)— these accounts exceed the scope of this study.

While the current body of research regarding destructive workplace behaviors continues to grow, gaps in scholarship exist regarding the relationship between individuals and organizations that support employees' perceived job satisfaction and commitment to the organization when destructive workplace behaviors are present. Specifically, existing scholarship examines positive organizational culture and communication (Yue et al., 2021), and how workplaces shape work experiences and outcomes (e.g., organizational identification, well-being, boundary management, and territoriality) and identify the holistic and immersive experiences that result (e.g., identification via sensemaking processes) (Ashforth et al., 2023). In these studies, research often focuses on organizational identification with the focus on the organization itself as the centerpiece of individuals' work-related identity (Ashforth et al., 2023).

Given this, the current study examines how individuals' experiences relate to their organizational identification (i.e., perceived feelings of connectedness) as targets of these behaviors. Specifically, the current study sought to explore the links between destructive workplace behaviors and individuals' organizational identification from the individual perspective while noting the importance of the organization's role as well. The following provides a brief overview of relevant scholarship and provides context for this study.

2 Background literature

2.1 Destructive workplace behaviors

A review of North American scholarship identified commonly used terms and definitions related to various destructive workplace behaviors, including (but not limited to) harassment, workplace deviance, workplace incivility, workplace bullying, employee mistreatment, and ostracism (Keashly et al., 2020). This research notes that a large number of these constructs can be positioned on a continuum of increasing severity, ranging from low-intensity incivilities to high-intensity physical violence, noting that harassment and bulling are positioned between these two ranges (Keashly et al., 2020). This is keeping with Sypher's (2004) seminal work regarding workplace incivility that positioned these behaviors on a continuum of low- (indirect, verbal, passive) to high- (active, direct, aggressive) intensity and intentionality. Importantly, Keashly et al. (2020) state that positioning destructive workplace behaviors on a continuum is "rarely based on empirical evidence, in part due to the difficulty with measuring severity" (p. 37). Given this, the current study followed existing scholarship by examining all forms of destructive behaviors (including verbal and/or nonverbal) that are perceived as unwanted and harmful by the target (Linvill and Connaughton, 2018; Lutgen-Sandvik and Sypher, 2009), including low-intensity, uncivil behaviors such as rudeness and disrespect (Sypher, 2004), as well as high-intensity, direct, and aggressive behaviors such as bullying (Sypher, 2004), microaggressions (Sue, 2010), and sexual harassment (Dougherty, 2009).

Importantly, destructive workplace behaviors are often motivated by one's need to hold or gain power or control over others within an organization (Gallegos et al., 2022; Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy, 2012; Tracy et al., 2006; Thomas, 2005; Sypher, 2004; Namie, 2003; Cortina et al., 2001; Pearson et al., 2000; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983) or when an organization seeks to control or influence others' thoughts and/or actions (Oguz et al., 2023; Van Dijk, 1993).

Perpetrators are often in leadership or supervisory positions (Kurtulmuş, 2020; Medina et al., 2020; Namie, 2003), which supports the notion that destructive workplace behaviors are used to gain power or control (Mannix-McNamara, 2021; Hodgins et al., 2020; Tracy et al., 2006; Thomas, 2005; Namie, 2003;). Targets often perceive their experiences with bullying as the perpetrator's intent to control them or force them out of the organization (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005).

Dynamics of power and control manifest in both interpersonal and depersonalized forms of destructive workplace behavior. For instance, interpersonal bullying occurs when an individual perceives that they have been persistently subjected to harassing behavior by another person within the organizational hierarchy, leading to the targeted individual's sense of powerlessness (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2015; Einarsen et al., 2011). In contrast, depersonalized bullying occurs when a member of the organization, often managers or supervisors, employ destructive workplace behavior as a mechanism for exerting control over employees in pursuit of meeting organizational objectives (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2015). In this scenario, the target may perceive the organization itself as the perpetrator of the bullying behavior (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2015; Einarsen et al., 2011). Specifically, in depersonalized contexts, traditional interpersonal workplace bullying escalates through an organizational process where targets seek support from the organization, only to have their complaints downplayed, rejected, or ignored (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2015). As a result, the target may eventually experience disidentification from the organization due to the perceived lack of support or lack of action. Finally, in some instances, both interpersonal and depersonalized bullying occur simultaneously, referred to as "compounded bullying" (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2012).

Considering the distinctions between interpersonal and depersonalized manifestations of destructive workplace behaviors, it is important to note here that further complicating the relationship between targets' perceived experiences with destructive workplace behaviors and the inherent issues of power and control (loss) may be dependent upon situational context. For example, a target of bullying or sexual harassment, both interpersonal forms of destructive workplace behaviors, might experience these actions differently from someone who perceives themselves as the target of an abusive behavior involving scarcity of organizational resources and/or a lack of job support (both depersonalized destructive workplace behaviors). Additionally, relational forms of social support have been empirically proven to serve as effective coping mechanisms for individuals experiencing destructive workplace behaviors (Linvill and Connaughton, 2018) and can serve as additional situational context for how individuals perceived their experiences as targets of these behaviors. Specifically, individuals will engage in dyadic coping when there is a communicative interaction between two individuals so that one individual's experienced stress is recognized by the other individual who then reacts through a communicative interaction to provide helpful (or possibly unhelpful) social support or engage in mutual problem solving (Maguire and Sahlstein, 2009).

Although scholars have provided insights into destructive workplace behaviors, there is still much work needed to help enable organizations and their members to address destructive behaviors. The first step towards minimizing the occurrence of destructive behaviors in the workplace is to understand destructive communicative behaviors from a variety of perspectives (e.g., organizational, individual, target, leaders). Doing so allows for further theorizing and aids in identifying effective strategies to prevent destructive behaviors. A deeper understanding of destructive workplace behaviors is both socially and organizationally important because people spend most of their days either at work or thinking about work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2013) and often find themselves working with individuals who can be best described as "troublesome others" (Fritz, 2002, p. 411) or as "bullies" who inflict emotional and/or physical pain on targets (Tracy et al., 2006). Considering the existing scholarship related to various types of destructive workplace behaviors, the researcher wondered how participant's perceived experiences might relate to their organizational (dis)identification and how organizational identification might vary across different contexts (i.e., interpersonal and depersonalized manifestations of destructive workplace behaviors).

Examining organizational identification through the lens of destructive workplace behaviors is particularly important given that previous scholarship found organizational identification to have a positive connection with job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors (Pratt, 1998; Mael and Ashforth, 1995), employee satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Scott et al., 1999; Cheney and Tompkins, 1987), while also being negatively associated with undesired outcomes such as turnover intention and actual employee exit (Pratt, 1998; Mael and Ashforth, 1995). The next section reviews the lens of organizational identification that further guided the study.

2.2 Organizational identification

Organizational identification originates from Tajfel and Turner's (1979) seminal work on Social Identity Theory and is described as the "perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member" (Mael and Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). Organizational identification is created based upon an individual's lived experiences in the workplace (Ashforth, 2016; Mael and Ashforth, 1992), and is a discursive process that occurs when individuals share their organization's beliefs and values in order to connect with other members who have also identified with the organization (Connaughton, 2004; Connaughton and Daly, 2004; Fairhurst, 2008; Larson and Pepper, 2003; Gossett, 2002; Scott et al., 1998; Scott et al., 1999). Importantly, organizational identification enables an individual to connect with the organization and begin to consider the organization's goals as their own (Ellemers et al., 2004; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000). Identity sources can be at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004).

Identifying with an organization can support individuals in several important ways. For example, individuals often identify with an organization to satisfy psychological affiliation, self-enhancement, and/or holistic needs (Pratt, 1998). Identification with an organization may also contribute to whether an individual's sense of self-worth or self-enhancement is achieved (Pratt, 2001). For these reasons, individuals often select organizations with which to identify based on the latter's position being relevant to their own (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). However, as a fluid process, organizational identification often shifts as individuals discursively align themselves with others to make sense of their lived reality (Larson and Pepper, 2003).

Previous research found that individuals may respond to tension or contradictions by repositioning their sources of identity (Kuhn and Nelson, 2002) or by disidentification, wherein the individual does not feel connected to the organization because they do not hold the same

values or principles that they link to the organization (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001). Individuals may disidentify with the organization as a whole or with particular aspects of the organization (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004).

Identification can also be conflicted or ambivalent, which means that individuals can simultaneously feel connected to (i.e., identified with) and disconnected with (i.e., disidentified with) their organization (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004; Elsbach, 2001; Pratt, 2001). Finally, individuals may hold neutral identification where there is an explicit absence of both identification and disidentification with an organization or with the groups or individual members within the organization (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). That individuals may reposition or simultaneously feel connected to and disidentified with their organization and/or organizational members is not surprising given that organizations are as "multifaceted" as the individuals that comprise them (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004).

It is important to note that prior scholarship identified the role of organizational culture—that which consists of a set of norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions—as the social glue holding organizational members together and guiding their behaviors and interactions with each other (Yue et al., 2021). This is specifically true regarding emotional culture, a phenomenon that is socially constructed within an organizations (Yue et al., 2021). Emotional culture sets the tone for whether organizational members feel connected to the organization (Yue et al., 2021). In this way, organizational communication is fundamental to both the creation of the emotional culture and organizational identification (Yue et al., 2021).

Cultivating members' organizational identification is important for organizations because member cooperation allows for the organization's goals to be met (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Dutton et al., 1994; Cheney, 1983). For example, supervisors in one study noted "higher interpersonal cooperation and work effort" when members were identified with the organization (Bartel, 2001, p. 379). Whereas disidentification due to feelings of isolation, anonymity, and alienation is often part of a process of organizational disengagement (Jablin, 2001) that is associated with an intent to leave an organization (Tett and Meyer, 1993) and actual organizational exit (Jablin, 2001). Experiences with destructive workplace behaviors can create difficulty for organizational members to form and/or maintain a sense of connectedness with the organization and/or its members. This is important as intent to leave has been characterized as a predecessor to voluntary turnover (Jablin, 2001).

Experiences and sensemaking are deeply intertwined (Weick, 1995). In any work context, individuals need a sense of who they are— what identity or identities are most salient – that is, relevant and valued – to navigate the workplace (Ashforth, 2020). However, merely transactional relationships with a workforce are not sufficient for any organization's long-term welfare and creates the need for organizational members to feel connected to the greater organizational collective (Ashforth, 2020). Given this, the process of workplace identification matters because it is likely to affect work-based well-being, serve as a foundation for other work-based identities and identifications, influence the boundary management of multiple identities, and ignite territoriality (Ashforth et al., 2023). The process of sensemaking allows individuals to understand the workplace and situate themselves within the workplace, constructing identity narratives (Ashforth et al., 2023).

To further contribute to existing scholarship the nuances of organizational identification within different workplace contexts should be examined. One area of study that has not been previously explored is the connection between destructive workplace behaviors and targets' organizational identification. Specifically, the current study examined how individuals' experiences (i.e., perceived feelings of connectedness) as targets of destructive workplace behaviors relate to their organizational identification. The following research question was posed:

> *Research Question:* How do targets' experiences with destructive workplace behaviors relate to their perceived organizational identification?

3 Materials and methods

After receiving approval for human subjects research from the author's Institutional Review Board, data was collected from 49 participants. To begin the study, a network of individuals known to the researcher (convenience sampling) through personal and professional contacts was used to recruit participants. Eligible participants were individuals who perceived themselves to be targets of some type of destructive workplace behavior and held a professional position in any sector (e.g., public, private, government, academic). This method ensured that a high degree of trust was built relatively quickly between the researcher and participants (Creswell, 2014). Additional participant recruitment notices were placed in a section on the researcher's university news service that seeks research participants from a broad audience. All participants were asked to pass the research announcement on to others who might inform the study (snowball sampling) (Creswell, 2014). These recruitment methods generated the total number of participants between 2018 and 2023.

Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the research interview. All names used herein are pseudonyms. Participants self-identified as targets of destructive workplace behaviors and identified and defined the specific destructive workplace behaviors that they had experienced at the start of the research interview. This allowed the researcher to be certain that individuals' definitions of destructive workplace behavior met the eligibility requirements for participation in the study.

The current study examined participants' experiences, in their own words, through qualitative research involving one-on-one, in-depth interviews. Participants were guided in an in-depth discussion using a semi-structured interview script that asked initial questions and allowed for the researcher to further probe individual's perceptions and experiences (Taylor and Lindlof, 2017; Creswell, 2014). In keeping with similar studies that have examined participant experiences as targets of various forms of destructive workplace behavior, including bullying (Branch et al., 2007; Tracy et al., 2006), incivility (Linvill and Connaughton, 2018; Linvill, 2008), and sexual harassment (Scarduzio and Geist-Martin, 2010), the overall sample size allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants experiences with destructive workplace behaviors. Participants were asked to tell their stories regarding their experience(s) (real or perceived) as a target of destructive workplace behaviors. This method allowed for the collection of a thick, rich description of

participants' experiences, and provided a robust understanding of the nuances of participants' experiences (Taylor and Lindlof, 2017; Creswell, 2014). Interviews were approximately one- to two-hours in length and were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. This resulted in a Word document containing 910 pages of single-spaced text for data analysis.

3.1 Phronetic iterative approach to data analysis

To answer the research question, Tracy's (2020) phronetic iterative approach was employed. The data analysis process began by first engaging existing literature on related concepts (e.g., bullying, destructive workplace behaviors, incivility, organizational identification, etc.) and considering the various lenses that informed the study (e.g., social constructionism). During the qualitative interview process, rich qualitative field data emerged allowed the researcher to generate findings. Iteration is a process wherein the researcher repeatedly reflects upon and revisits the data and connects participant stories with *existing* literature while seeking to enhance their own understandings of participants' experiences (Tracy, 2020). As such, data were continually revisited and connected with existing scholarship to enhance the researcher's understanding of the recorded experiences (Tracy, 2020).

Data analysis focused on the discursive nature of the participant interviews and how the respondents described their experiences and perceptions of destructive workplace behaviors. The phronetic iterative approach to data analysis for this study followed a primary-cycle and a secondary-cycle coding processes (See Table 1). First *primary-cycle coding* was utilized to investigate for any initial meaning in the data (Tracy, 2020). The researcher became fully immersed in the data by reading, re-reading, and reflecting upon the data and findings, while refraining from forming any conclusions or opinions (Tracy, 2020). Data were sorted line-by-line and marked into categories, with statements that were found to be unique or interesting being highlighted. Words and phrases that "captured [the] essence" of a given piece of data through a memo writing process (i.e., initial thoughts, reflections, and analytic questions) allowed for initial interpretations and for relationships among concepts to be explored (Tracy, 2020, p. 189). This process focused on "what" was presenting itself in the data, specifically exploring the "who, what, and where," (i.e., focusing on descriptive words that end in "-ing" like "laughing" and "bullying") while excluding the "why" and "how" (Tracy, 2020). Following Tracy (2020), the researcher explored three inter-related questions during the data analysis process, including: (1) "Who is included within this category?" to uncover who is included/excluded and how categories may or may not depend on each other for meaning, (2) "What is happening?" to uncover what is taking place in the scene or story, and (3) "Where are there similarities?" to discover any commonalities across categories that may be conceptually different from one another. The goal in using these questions during this data analysis phase was to think beyond any stand-alone categories. In this phase, the focus began to shift to codes that highlighted participants' interpretations of their own experiences by considering the nuanced language and terms that they had used in the interviews (Tracy, 2020).

Following Dougherty (2009), the researcher also looked for inconsistencies in participant's' stories that may indicate that a "discursive shift" had occurred (p. 213). For example, participants in this study often shared that they had feelings of identification or connection with the organization but then began to talk about how they became disidentified from the organization. As another example, several participants in this study moved from laughter, saying something similar to, "It's funny!" to crying. When a discursive shift is uncovered, the researcher can then examine when the shift took place and how it operates and creates additional meaning (Dougherty, 2009). Importantly, it was in these moments of discursive shifts that the researcher noted that participant definitions of destructive behaviors and their subsequent feelings of organizational identification varied.

Next, the researcher engaged in *secondary-cycle* coding. By critically reviewing the data under each code, the researcher organized, identified similarities, and categorized data through the process of axial coding (Tracy, 2020). Categories were further refined by connecting similar participant experiences and locating differences among participant stories (Tracy, 2020). Analytic and interpretive second-level codes were identified to "explain, theorize, and synthesize" the data into patterns or groupings (Tracy, 2020, p. 194), including "participants experience organizational disidentification" and "participants remain identified with the organization".

This inductive emic approach involved moving between the data and existing theory to develop theoretical categories that were grounded in the data while remaining informed by pre-existing theoretical concepts; identifying and further conceptualizing key aggregate theoretical dimensions that then served as the basis for the induced theory; and moving between the aggregate dimensions, data, and existing scholarship until interpretations of participant experiences, existing theory, and the proposed theory were consistently linked (Tracy, 2020).

4 Findings

4.1 Participants' descriptions of destructive workplace behaviors varied

In considering the ways participants described their experiences, it is important to note that respondents indicated discursive behaviors that can be positioned on a continuum of low- to high-intensity and intentionality (Sypher, 2004). Low-intensity behaviors were *indirect*, *verbal*, and *passive*, including less intentional types of actions (i.e., not listening, interrupting). High-intensity behaviors were *active*, *direct*, and *aggressive*, including more intentional actions (i.e., bullying, incivilities, rudeness). Interestingly, participants also discussed destructive workplace behaviors that were not included on Sypher's (2004) continuum. These additional behaviors included blaming, shaming, silencing, ostracism, microaggressions, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. It is important to note that all of these behaviors were perceived as high in intensity and intentionality by the participants in this study. In uncovering these additional descriptions of destructive workplace behaviors, this study provides insight into a wide array of destructive workplace behaviors that

TABLE 1 Representative categories and quotations underlying data analysis.

Primary-cycle category	Exemplar quotation	Researcher's initial memo	Participant's discursive shift	Secondary-cycle themes: aggregate dimension
The relationship between destructive workplace behaviors and organizational identification varies among participants (Section 4.2)	Becca: "I do not see that it's going to get any better, and as an employee I just have to weigh the pros and the cons, and, at some point, I'll probably get to the level where I just decide not to be there. And I know I make it sound like it's just awful. *The work is interesting, and my co-workers are wonderful, and for the most part, things are good there. But there are a few people who are um…that just fit into this category for, you know, the topic today so well. I actually really enjoy the work. I like what I do. I like my co-workers. For the most part I like my [other] bosses.*"	"The participant seems to think there's a threshold here that would cause him/her to leave the organization. Does not even seem to be thinking about leaving yet. Still enjoys the job and the other people. So, it seems the job/organization is separate from the way he/she is being treated by his/her boss."	*Discursive Shift*: Meaningful connections with others in the workplace help participants overlook or ignore their experiences as a target of destructive workplace behaviors by separating the organization from the perpetrator.	Participants Separate the Organization from the Perpetrator (Section 4.2.2.1)
	Chad: "So another male coworker in the office knew me. I know [he] has religious ties, although he will not say…he acts like for other reasons, right. We're sitting in a meeting. I already had previously had discussions with him about, you know, not making a big deal about my name change because this was happening. And he could not get it right. He kept using my old name. And so, we were in a meeting and he, like, said my old name. And then, like, proceeded to throw a hissy fit– throwing his hands to the desk saying, [TAPS TABLE] 'Oh, so sorry. So sorry. Oh, I just cannot get it right.' Hits himself in the head and is, like, 'So sorry.' And, I mean, this is a room full of people. So, it made me feel really awkward. …. *I do not know if I could have come out anywhere else. I mean, if all of those things combined, being at [this university] has been surprisingly great. …and then I think I've been able to find a good peer group within my workplace who [sic] allows me to be open. So, I mean [pause] it's okay. And screw anybody else who cares.*"	"The participant previously talks to the perpetrator in an attempt to address and stop the destructive workplace behavior but is unable to do so. Participant feels 'awkward' when the behavior happens in front of witnesses. Participant reflects further and thinks that his/her overall experience with his/her organization has been positive despite the behavior of specific individuals. The participant has connected with other people in the organization in meaningful ways and can ignore the destructive behavior. The social support that he/she receives from those other people helps him/her overlook or ignore his/her experiences as a target of destructive workplace behaviors. The positive talk about the organization being 'surprisingly great' is because he/she can separate the organization from the actions of the perpetrator."		
	Tonya: "*Certain people that are just in place too. So, you cannot really…I cannot say 'Well, [this organization] just sucks.' And there is [sic] certain people that are in place that maybe should not be in place.*"	"Participant indicates that there are select individuals who engage in destructive workplace behaviors, but that they are separate from the organization and other organizational members."		

might be measured by *targets' perceptions* of intensity and intentionality in lieu of measuring the severity of the behavior itself.

While participants in this study discussed various forms of destructive workplace behaviors, such as workplace bullying, discrimination, and sexual harassment, they all perceived their own experiences as targets of these behaviors as a significant incident(s) where others exerted power and control, posing a threat to their positive social identity. These critical incidents, in turn, had varying implications for participants' perceived organizational identification.

4.2 The relationship between destructive workplace behaviors and organizational identification varies among participants

All participants ($N = 49$) indicated that they felt connected to or identified with their organization prior to being the target of a destructive workplace behavior. A common theme throughout this study's data was that participants who experience destructive behaviors in the workplace often experience organizational disidentification ($N = 36$). Contrary to this finding, some

participants ($N = 13$) reported that they did not experience organizational disidentification. These findings suggest that the relationship between destructive workplace behaviors and organizational identification varies between individuals but that these experiences often result in organizational disidentification. To further explore this variation, this study examined the nature of these relationships by providing a more detailed account of how participants perceived the relationship between the destructive workplace behaviors they experienced and their own perceived organizational identification.

4.2.1 Participants experience organizational disidentification

Notably, study participants who experienced destructive workplace behaviors often experienced organizational disidentification. Most participants in this study ($N = 36$) described experiencing organizational disidentification after being the target of destructive workplace behaviors. For example, Addison, an attorney who was sexually harassed (verbally) and abused (i.e., physically–touching of the upper leg under her business suit dress) explained that she had experienced disidentification because she felt that the organization, in her words, "failed" to address the individual's behavior. Addison stated that she felt the organization's lack of appropriate response was "inappropriately wimpy." As such, Addison experienced disidentification as her own views no longer reflected the views of the organization.

Another participant, Mya, a marketing professional, explained that she became "so angry at everyone" because "no one [in the organization] believed" that her client was sexually harassing her. She continued to show up for work but felt continuously disconnected from the organization based on her female supervisor's refusal to believe that she was being sexually harassed. As Mya became disidentified from the organization, she began to show up for work and engage in presenteeism by completing freelance work for another employer. This story illustrates Mya's disidentification from her organization and its ramifications through her response behaviors.

Helen, a staff member at a university of higher education, experienced rudeness and disrespect in the workplace. She shared that, as a result, she was unable to connect to her coworkers in a meaningful way and this in turn caused her to feel less connected to her organization. In her words, "It feels horrible, and I just feel like I cannot connect to my coworkers as much as I would be able to." For Helen, destructive workplace behaviors are notably consequential because she cannot make the desired connections with others in the organization and she indicated that this lack of connection with organizational members has in turn caused her to feel less connected to the organization itself.

Similarly, Alan, an openly gay professor who previously worked in the non-profit sector, described his disidentification with the not-for-profit organization by explaining that he "did not feel comfortable there" because the organization's president was openly anti-gay and vocally opposed the LGBTQ community. The president's active, direct, and occasionally aggressive behaviors caused Alan to perceive his experiences as high in intensity and intentionality. Alan explained that he initially experienced high organizational identification related to the work that he was doing for this organization, but that the continual wearing down that came with the president's direct verbal opposition of Alan's most salient identity

served to gradually cause him to experience a state of disidentification with that organization.

Mary, a former student intern in a primarily male-dominated athletics department at an institution of higher education, experienced disidentification with her organization when she recognized that the organization was not interested in what she called "addressing problems" and that members of the organization actively sought to keep any problems as quiet as possible. As she stated, "If you do something wrong to one person, you have wronged the whole organization, and so it's very group think." For Mary, the organizational climate was problematic and caused her to feel disidentified from the organization over a short period of time.

As another example, Kenna, a multi-lingual receptionist at a healthcare clinic in a large metropolitan region on the west coast, experienced disidentification from her organization that was directly related to a shortage of workers in the healthcare field that began to affect her clinic during the pandemic. Kenna shared that, over a period of months during the Covid-19 pandemic, her organizational identification decreased. As she stated:

> When we talk to [the manager] he's like, "Okay, we're gonna try and hire more people." But what about the days when, like three receptionists call out sick, and I'm here by myself? Yeah, you like a band-aid solution. I can't just keep waiting for someone to show up [and] for you to hire someone. I need like immediate help today. …And so then I went like one manager level up and talked to the next manager. This manager is [also] trying to find these band-aid solutions. It's not enough. …And he's like, "Oh, I hear where you're coming from…." And in that conversation, I was being brushed off. …He doesn't see how hard it is, and he's not willing to actually do something about it. He's just apologetic about it. So, in that conversation I was like, "I'm so sorry. What do I need to do to turn in my two weeks [notice]?"

For Kenna, being under-resourced on the job and feeling that her organization did not care that she was overworked, were examples of destructive workplace behaviors. Once she realized that the answers that her managers were providing to her on behalf of the organization were not going to improve her difficult work situation, her identification with the organization rapidly deteriorated and she terminated her employment. Kenna attributed this decrease in organizational identification directly to the short staffing issues that her clinic experienced and a lack of sufficient organizational response.

Similarly, Janice, a corporate recruiting coordinator on the west coast, also experienced organizational disidentification. Janice attributed her organizational disidentification directly to her work experiences with the CEO of her company verbally abusing her and her colleagues, calling them "idiots" and other disparaging names. The CEO would also verbally berate Janice for her work performance, both directly and to other members of the organization. Janice reported this behavior to HR and the response that they provided on behalf of the organization was that "[the CEO] has a bold personality, [and] he's going to say those things, and you just have to deal with it." Janice went on to share the following:

> I cared about staying. I really did for the longest time. Until, you know, the [Covid-19] pandemic happened. And the focus of my job shifted in such a way that was so, so great that it was hard

for me to keep up. So then I started to feel more of a disconnect during the pandemic."

Janice then left the organization mid-pandemic because she realized that other opportunities were available to her and she no longer felt a genuine connection to the organization.

As demonstrated through the exemplar quotes above, participants overwhelmingly indicated that they identified with their organization and organizational members early in their employment. However, experiencing communicative acts of destructive workplace behaviors lessened participants' connection to others (Scott et al., 1999) and was related to organizational disidentification as participants' views seemingly no longer align with the views being communicated within their workplace (Fairhurst, 2008; Connaughton, 2004; Connaughton and Daly, 2004; Larson and Pepper, 2003; Gossett, 2002; Scott et al., 1999; Scott et al., 1998). Participant experiences as targets of various types of destructive workplace behaviors manifest in differing ways, yet often created feelings of disidentification with the organization.

In these cases, individuals perceived destructive workplace behaviors as either a mechanism for communicating interpersonal mistreatment (e.g., personalized bullying as in Chad's case) or the organization itself as the "bully" (e.g., depersonalized/organizational bullying noted by Kenna) because of a lack of organizational resources or support due to organizational processes (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2015). Participants in this study indicated that they experienced organizational disidentification over time because of a continual wearing down that came with their adverse experiences, and when they turned to the organization for support, their complaint was trivialized and/or rejected. The organization's lack of (re)action or support then initiated a process of organizational disidentification for individuals (as noted by Mary and Kenna) who do not feel as if their organization is supportive of them. These data provide empirical evidence that participants' organizational identification may decrease when destructive workplace behaviors occur because the latter can create feelings of disidentification from colleagues and the organization alike (Jablin, 2001; Pearson et al., 2000).

4.2.2 Participants remain identified with the organization

However, not all participants experienced organizational disidentification as some maintained a sense of connection with their organization ($N = 13$). In these cases, participants indicated that they found other factors to be more salient (Pratt, 1998) which allowed them to reposition their identification with the organization (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). Some participants (like Tonya and Becca) discursively connected with others and with the organization to preserve their positive social identity (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). In these cases, participants' stories focused on the relational outcomes of experiencing destructive workplace behaviors and how their organizational identification was relationally and communicatively constituted. This is in keeping with viewing organizational identification as a fluid process that can shift as participants align themselves with others to make sense of their lived reality (Larson and Pepper, 2003).

Importantly, two themes emerged for participants who remained identified with their organization, including (1) participants separated the organization from the perpetrator, and (2) participants

created a circle of trusted individuals. The participant stories below showcase the relational aspects of the outcomes of experiencing destructive workplace behaviors and highlight how these relational aspects mitigate the potential outcomes of destructive behaviors (i.e., organizational disidentification).

4.2.2.1 Participants separate the organization from the perpetrator

Notably participants who remained identified with the organization ($N = 13$) indicated that they looked for ways to make meaningful connections with others within the organization. Doing so helping them overlook or ignore their experiences as a target of destructive workplace behaviors by separating the organization from the perpetrator.

For example, Sam, a director within higher education, ignored the destructive workplace behaviors and instead connected with other members of the organization. Sam stated:

> With the organization overall, I still had a strong affinity to, because the way I developed as a person I knew it was not the organization doing this to me. I knew that the organization itself was still good, and we serve the larger purpose. I knew that bad leaders didn't last forever.

Sam was able to separate the organization from the individual perpetrator(s) to maintain his own sense of organizational identification. While he thought that those leading the organization could have minimized the amount of destructive workplace behaviors that he experienced, he also rationalized that they would not be in their role(s) as leaders "forever."

Similarly, Sarah, the creative director of a marketing team, had a strong initial connection to her organization. She expressed that she was able to connect with other people in the organization, specifically her seven team members, through their collaborative work. As Sarah described:

> I had personally a fantastic team. I was managing seven direct reports. And they were great, and so, and that's honestly when people would tell me like, 'Why don't you go somewhere else?' You know, I just couldn't imagine there being another role or another group of people for me to manage [during the pandemic] that would be a better fit [or] better suited for me.

Sarah was able to connect with other people in the organization, specifically her subordinate team members, and with the work that she was doing to help her maintain her organizational identification. As Sarah further described, "I was always still very strongly connected. It did not affect my connection to the organization because I still believed in what we were doing. I still loved the work that I did." In this way, Sarah was able to mitigate her experiences as a target of destructive workplace behaviors by remaining strongly connected to her work and the organization's mission. Doing so helped her maintain her organizational identification.

In a similar instance of separating the organization from its members engaged in destructive workplace behaviors, Chad, a staff member at an institution of higher education who had described experiencing bullying, disrespect, microaggressions, rudeness, and being ignored in the workplace, stated,

> I don't know if I could have come out anywhere else. I mean, all of those things combined, being at [this university] has been surprisingly great. …and then I think I've been able to find a good peer group within my workplace who [sic] allows me to be open. So, I mean [pause] it's okay. And screw anybody else who cares.

Even though Chad's work colleagues ignored his pronoun and name preferences, he still highly identified with his LGBTQ-friendly organization by separating the perpetrator from the organization and other organizational members.

Gavin, an academic advisor in higher education who had experienced rudeness and disrespect surrounding his sexual orientation, stated that even though those workplace experiences felt "awkward," he did not feel any resulting disidentification from his organization because the students that he serves are his most important focus. In staying at the university and working with those students, he feels fulfilled and thus remains identified with the organization's overall mission.

Sharon, a lecturer at a large institution of higher education in the midwestern United States, explained that her identification with her organization had not decreased due to her ability to separate the organization from the perpetrator. As Sharon shared:

> I love my university, but my university is not my colleague. [Those are] different things. So I sometimes…I still hate my position. But I love my university like, maybe because I'm a graduate from there. Having a higher education has really change[d] my life, and that's where I took my undergrad and Masters [degrees]. So I love my university because of that…because of what they did [for] me. Sometimes I feel like I'm not gonna let these bad things happen in the place that I love, you know, but that's hard. That's why, when I told you not everyone will survive here, not because I'm wrong, but because with me, for one reason it will be a different story. My reason is that because this university gives a lot to me. That's my reason, so that I need to find a way how to survive. I want others [to] feel happy in the university, you know, just like what I experienced.

Sharon strongly identifies with her university because of her prior experiences there as a student and because she believes in the mission of higher education to make a difference in the lives of others. These two factors allowed her to maintain her identification with the organization despite her experiences therein as a target of destructive workplace behaviors.

Becca, a paralegal at a law firm, also shared that forming relationships with her colleagues served to moderate her experiences with destructive workplace behaviors. She stated:

> The work is interesting, and my co-workers are wonderful, and for the most part, things are good there. But there are a few people who are um…that just fit into this category for, you know, the topic today so well. I actually really enjoy the work. I like what I do. I like my co-workers. For the most part I like my [other] bosses. [Laughs] It does feel like it's uh…a missed opportunity for management. I think they could be much more, um, involved, and they could change how they function to make their employees feel better about their positions.

While Becca was able to separate destructive workplace behavior perpetrated by specific individuals from her organization based on her enjoyment of the work involved and her connections with her colleagues, she did note that the organization was missing out on opportunities to consider how organizational members are affected by destructive workplace behaviors and how these behaviors may then lead to disidentification from the organization.

Another participant, Tonya, a staff member in higher education who experienced bullying, disrespect, rudeness, and microaggressions, shared how she began to feel disidentified from her organization when she realized that certain parts of her identity, including being a black woman, were not welcome in the workplace. As Tonya shared:

> It was just unsettling. So that's hard sometimes in that—I don't feel completely accepted where I work. I work at a predominantly white institution, but sometimes it's hard when every day you have to show up and put on a face to get through the day. So, it's just hard and it continues to happen in different facets of my workday.

Tonya expressed that she finds it hard to identify with an organization wherein she feels unaccepted and where there was a (white, male) President who she perceived as unsupportive of the social justice issues that she is passionate about. At the time of her research interview, Tonya was trying to find ways to maintain her connection to her organization so that she could remain employed there in a meaningful way. Specifically, Tonya was attempting to make connections with other organizational members to mitigate her negative experiences. Tonya stated in her own words, "Certain people that are just in place too. So, you cannot really…I cannot say 'Well, [this organization] just sucks.' And there is [sic] certain people that are in place that maybe should not be in place." Instead, she recognizes the fact that there are certain individuals that she does not identify with and that she can use her connections with others at the university to maintain her organizational identification. These findings illustrate that participants in this study were able to separate the organization and other organizational members from the perpetrator of destructive workplace behaviors to remain identified with the organization. In doing so, participants connected with their colleagues, their work, and with the organization.

However, not all participants experienced organizational disidentification as some maintained a sense of connection with their organization. In these cases, participants indicated that they found other factors to be more salient (Pratt, 1998) which allowed them to reposition their identification with the organization (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). Participants like Tonya and Becca discursively connected with others and with the organization to preserve their positive social identity (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). In these cases, participants' stories focused on the relational outcomes of experiencing destructive workplace behaviors and how their organizational identification was relationally and communicatively constituted. This is in keeping with viewing organizational identification as a fluid process that can shift as participants align themselves with others to make sense of their lived reality (Larson and Pepper, 2003).

Applying relational identification tactics then served to moderate participants' (negative) experiences and their organizational identification. Relational organizational identification tactics employed included communicatively blaming specific individuals (e.g., management/leaders) and connecting with other parts of the

organization (e.g., their team; LGBTG affinity groups), trusted peers, and/or with the work itself. For example, participants like Sam employed tactics to separate the organization from the individual perpetrator(s) to maintain a sense of organizational identification. Gavin is another example of a participant who focused on other salient areas for his organizational identification (e.g., working with students and the organization's mission).

4.2.2.2 Participants create a circle of trusted individuals

Participants discussed utilizing social support or leaning on trusted individuals to moderate any potential organizational disidentification that they may have experienced. For example, Helen, the staff member in higher education, was comfortable expressing herself to others in the workplace but only if they were part of a small, select group of trusted individuals. In her words, "And that's usually just expressed to the people that I trust, though." Sarah, the creative director of a marketing team, connected with her team of direct reports, building trust with them around the collaborative nature of their work.

Tonya, the staff member in higher education, described the relational aspects of building trust with others to maintain her organizational identification. She expressed that she was free to express herself to others when they were part of a "Circle of Trust". Tonya described this circle of trusted individuals as layers of the levels of trust she has in others. In her words, the most "Inner Circle" includes her most trusted colleagues, friends, and family members. As she stated, these were "her peeps" and this circle was the smallest represented, which is a visual representation of the limited number of people within this ring. Moving outward, the next layer was her "Test Zone" for immediate colleagues and any new people in her life. Tonya explained that if you are in the "Test Zone" she would trust you with small things that would not hurt her too terribly if you betrayed her trust and told others. If things went well for some time, then she might move you closer to, and eventually into, her inner circle. The very "Outer Circle" was where Tonya said her colleagues who were not at all trusted would remain. This was what she called the "you might as well be a stranger" layer. Tonya further explained that, between these circles of trust, she would "code switch" or speak differently depending on who she was interacting with. For example, the "Inner Circle" often heard talk that includes slang or vulgarities. They joked openly with one another without fear of judgement and would often share private information. Those in the "Test Zone" might hear some of this talk, but the discourse was mostly professional in nature with only small things being shared here and there, such as a "YOU knoooow, girl!" Finally, those in the "Outer Circle" never heard this type of dialogue unless they happened to accidentally overhear it. In this way, Tonya was able to avoid freely expressing her true self to anyone outside of her "Circle of Trust".

Participants indicated that they utilized social support from trusted individuals to moderate potential organizational disidentification. For example, though Chad experienced workplace incivility from work colleagues who ignored his pronoun and name preferences, he still connected with others and as a result he felt highly identified with his organization. Similarly, Tonya described the types (layers) of relationships that were important in mediating experiences with destructive workplace behaviors and the communicative and relational aspects of these behavior outcomes (e.g., "circle of trust"). This suggests that the support of work colleagues, friends, and family

members (i.e., social support – see Maguire and Sahlstein, 2009) is critical to forming and maintaining organizational identification. This is in keeping with previous research that found that social support is a strategy that targets of destructive workplace behavior often employ as a coping mechanism (Linvill and Connaughton, 2018).

5 Discussion

This project contributes to and extends existing communication research by providing a nuanced understanding of destructive workplace behaviors as they relate to a target's perceived organizational identification by answering the following research question: How do targets' experiences with destructive workplace behaviors relate to their perceived organizational identification? Theoretical and practical implications are discussed further below.

Data from this study provide empirical evidence that experiencing destructive workplace behaviors matters because it informs how targets identify (i.e., connect) with their organization. This is important because destructive workplace behaviors may constitute a threat to organizational identification that needs to be resolved. Additionally, findings from this study uncovered the tensions participants experienced between identification and disidentification to the organization in the context of destructive workplace behaviors and examined the ways that participants communicatively negotiated these tensions. The following themes emerged regarding participants' organizational identification after experiencing destructive workplace behavior. First, participants have varying descriptions of destructive workplace behaviors. Second, the relationship between destructive workplace behaviors and organizational identification varied among participants. Some participants experienced organizational disidentification while others remained identified with the organization by applying relational organizational identification tactics.

In summary, this study collected stories of individuals' experiences as targets of destructive workplace behaviors to more fully understand how targets' experiences relate to their organizational identification. The research findings provide empirical evidence that targets' experiences with destructive workplace behaviors relate to their organizational identification in varying yet important ways that participants then negotiated. For many participants, experiences with destructive workplace behaviors led to organizational disidentification. For others, reframing their experiences both relationally and discursively allowed them to maintain identification with the organization. In the following sections, the theoretical and practical contributions of this study are discussed.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study provides empirical evidence that destructive workplace behaviors are important as they relate to how individuals feel a sense of identification or disidentification with their organization. Importantly, despite being targets of destructive workplace behaviors, individuals' organizational identification can be a fluid process that shifts as individuals align themselves with others through discursive processes that help them make sense of their lived experiences (Larson and Pepper, 2003) and facilitate coping skills (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2015).

Specifically, individuals who perceive that they have been targets of destructive workplace behavior often feel disconnected from their organization. This finding is important for organizations and individuals to note because lowered organizational identification has been associated with an increased intent to leave an organization (Tett and Meyer, 1993). In turn, intent to leave an organization has been identified as a predecessor to voluntary turnover, withdrawal, or actual exit from the organization (see Jablin, 2001). However, some participants indicated that, when they were unable to connect with the organization due to their experiences as targets of destructive workplace behavior, they engaged in a relational process of communicating with other organizational members in intentional and meaningful ways. By employing relational strategies to connect with others, these individuals were able to maintain a sense of identification with the organization. In this way, applying relational identification tactics served to moderate the relationship between their (negative) experiences and participants' organizational identification.

5.2 Practical contributions

Findings from this study are of practical use to organizations. First, findings should serve to encourage organizations to consider how an individual's organizational identification is affected by destructive workplace behaviors and how experiencing these behaviors may lead employees or other members to disconnect from the organization, possibly leading to organizational exit. Organizations would be wise to create multi-faceted policies that govern acts of destructive behaviors in the workplace. While many organizations have programs or specific departments that focus on issues such as bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, or workplace violence, most organizations lack *internal* policies that address all forms of destructive workplace behaviors and accompanying procedures to address these behaviors when they do occur. Many organizations altogether ignore the occurrence of destructive workplace behaviors.

This study also found that social support from a highly trusted individual or group serves to moderate individuals' perceived experiences with destructive workplace behaviors that would otherwise cause an individual to become disidentified from their organization. Given this, organizations should encourage strong work relationships, even interpersonal work friendships, between employees. Trusted relationships take time to build, in contrast to disidentifying from an organization which can happen relatively quickly. Support from the organization that enables and facilitates individuals in quickly forming trusted relationships early in an employee's socialization to the organization would be effective in preventing and/or mitigating destructive workplace behaviors.

This study also provides implications for how changes can be instituted in organizations. This research sheds light on the fact that, while experiencing destructive workplace behaviors, all individuals are unique in their experiences. Considering this, organizations would be wise to engage different solutions depending on the unique members in the organization. Organizations should therefore address specific situations and provide prevention measures that focus on meeting the intensity and intentionality of destructive workplace behaviors and how participants' perceive their own unique experiences. Though, as a cautionary note, organizations should not solely focus on the micro-level interactions that perpetuate destructive

workplace behaviors as this would limit further brainstorming regarding the support that individuals need throughout their experiences and how organizations can further prevent these types of behaviors.

Finally, this study offers important considerations for organizations in the light of ongoing major shifts in the landscape of U.S. workplaces. Countless individuals have shifted from in-person work to varying alternative forms of work arrangements (i.e., in-person, remote, hybrid) in a relatively short period of time. The findings from this study indicate that, despite these shifts in work contexts, individuals are still targets of destructive workplace behaviors and that their experiences continue to vary with regards to decreased or continued organizational identification. As the U.S. economy continues to move through a period termed the "Great Resignation," wherein employees are demanding better working environments and are quitting their jobs when their needs are not met, we continue to see worker shortages across all sectors. Given this, it is critical that organizations actively engage in fostering happy, healthy workplaces that are free of individuals who engage in destructive behaviors. The simple truth is that the targets of these behaviors are no longer willing to be treated poorly and they are now making related choices about where they are willing to work. Fostering connections between organizational members and offering work that is satisfying for individuals to engage in is a critical component in creating strong employee organizational identification and in retaining workers.

In summary, this research outlines the relevant dangers in ignoring destructive workplace behaviors and constructing narratives that normalize these types of behaviors. Only in redefining what is "normal" in our workspaces (i.e., breaking down communicative systems of destructive workplace behaviors) will we find solutions that are needed to create change.

5.3 Future directions for research

Findings from this study uncovered the tensions participants experienced between identification and disidentification with the organization and examined the ways that participants negotiated these tensions. Because findings revealed that the nature of the destructive workplace behaviors–(dis)identification relationship is varied, it is important for future research to consider a variety of other potential factors related to the destructive workplace behaviors–organizational (dis)identification relationship. Specifically, future research should consider how changing work contexts, both situational and relational, relate to organizational identification.

First, future research should consider situational contexts of the destructive workplace behaviors–organizational (dis)identification relationship. For example, how might an individual's organizational identification be diminished during and immediately after experiencing destructive forms of workplace communication. Situational contexts include perceived frequency, intensity, and intentionality of participants' experiences with destructive workplace behaviors. Other situational aspects include how overall organizational culture and values affect an individual's organizational (dis)-identification.

Second, future research should examine various relational factors, including how organizational identification may lead people to accept or "normalize" destructive behaviors because of their relational

attachments. Examples of various relational factors related to the destructive workplace behaviors–organizational (dis)identification relationship include targets' perceived social support, issues of power and control (e.g., power disparities within relationships), and the type(s) of perpetrator and their role in organizational disidentification process.

Third, future research should consider individuals' multiple varying identifications. For example, how do destructive workplace behaviors affect identification with a work team or within one's profession or occupation? Future research should also seek to understand the experiences of those who are marginalized in the workplace. By understanding how individuals experience microaggressions and other forms of indirect or subtle discrimination against members of marginalized groups, including those in racial or ethnic minorities, we can gain a better understanding of the nuances of the destructive workplace behaviors–organizational (dis)identification relationship.

Finally, future research should consider other ways organizational identification may recover in general or over time. Participants in this study focused on their experiences at one particular point in time. Future research should engage temporal views of the relationship between destructive workplace behaviors and organizational (dis)identification through a longitudinal exploration of participants' experiences over time.

5.4 Limitations

Three limitations must be acknowledged in the context of this study. First, the sampling methods were limited because they did not represent one single organization, which would have allowed for the examination of variables such as organizational culture by collecting data from multiple members from one organization. This limited the ability of this study to explore additional contexts surrounding destructive workplace behaviors to further understand the various ways destructive behaviors might take hold and be cultivated within an organization. Second, as noted above, this study was limited to a certain point in time and is unable to speak to any variables that may be affected longitudinally. A longitudinal approach would allow future research to reveal patterns or relationships that are not apparent within this current study. Third, this study may have resulted in a sample of individuals who, due to their negative experiences with destructive workplace behaviors, may wish to convey a certain point of view. The researcher acknowledges that by focusing on targets' negative perceptions, this study may have considered a somewhat limited perspective. Exploring additional perspectives, such as those of witnesses and perpetrators, is thus important for future research.

6 Conclusion

Destructive workplace behaviors are important and impactful as they communicate messages to individuals that may in turn shape their sense of organizational identification. It was the intent of this research to shed light on the ways individuals experience destructive workplace behaviors in all of their many forms and how individuals subsequently experience their sense of connection with their organization. This study's findings represent a step toward the researcher's long-term goal of helping organizations foster ways to eradicate these destructive behaviors and promote healthy behaviors and civility in workplaces.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Purdue University IRB (West Lafayette, IN). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

Funding

Acknowledgments

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

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