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Political Skill: A Proactive Inhibitor of Workplace Aggression Exposure and an Active Buffer of the Aggression-Strain Relationship

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In the current study we examined the role of 4 dimensions of political skill (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity) in predicting subsequent workplace aggression exposure based on the proactive coping framework. Further, we investigated their buffering effects on the negative outcomes of experienced workplace aggression based on the transactional stress model. Data were collected from nurses at 3 time points: before graduation (Time 1, $n = 346$), approximately 6 months after graduation (Time 2, $n = 214$), and approximately 12 months after graduation (Time 3, $n = 161$). Results showed that Time 1 interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity predicted subsequent physical aggression exposure. Exposure to physical and/or psychological workplace aggression was related to increased anger and musculoskeletal injury, and decreased job satisfaction and career commitment. Further, all dimensions of political skill but networking ability buffered some negative effects of physical aggression, and all dimensions but social astuteness buffered some negative effects of psychological aggression.

Keywords: nursing, strains, proactive coping, political skill, workplace aggression

Workplace aggression has received an increasing amount of attention from the public and organizational researchers alike. According to a national survey by U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2006, nearly half of all large organizations (1,000 or more employees) reported having at least one incident of workplace aggression within a 12-month period. Meanwhile, Schat, Frone, and Kelloway (2006) found that about 6% of Americans were exposed to physical workplace aggression and 41% were exposed to psychological workplace aggression annually. Further, it has been well documented that exposure to workplace aggression is a risk factor for employees because of its negative impact on targets' job attitudes, health, and job performance (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Schat & Frone, 2011). Given the prevalence and consequences, researchers have been trying to identify factors that lead to the occurrence of workplace aggression, and those that may buffer aggression exposure's negative consequences on targets. Nevertheless, the prior literature is limited in at least three important ways. First, many previous studies have examined targets' individual characteristics (e.g., negative affectivity) as potential vulnerability indicators for aggression exposure (for review, see Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006). However, few of them examined individual characteristics that can help people proactively influence interpersonal interactions to avoid or prevent aggression exposure. Second, most previously examined individual characteristics are stable personality traits, and researchers rarely studied how individual characteristics that are potentially malleable could contribute to aggression prevention, which limits implications for organizations to develop effective interventions for aggression prevention and coping. Third, much of the prior work on potential moderators of the aggression exposure–consequence relations has focused on contextual factors such as perceived organizational support (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2008; Schat & Kelloway, 2003), or task interdependence between perpetrators and targets (e.g., Hershcovis, Reich, Parker, & Bozeman, 2012). There is inadequate understanding regarding the buffering effects of potentially malleable individual characteristics. In the current study we investigated whether political skill, an individual characteristic that can potentially be influenced by training and experience (Ferris et al., 2008), would predict exposure to physical and psychological workplace aggression, and whether political skill might serve as a buffer of the workplace aggression exposure–strain relationship. The current study used a longitudinal design with political skill, workplace aggression exposure, and strain reactions being measured at different time points.

Workplace Aggression and Political Skill

Schat and Kelloway (2005) defined workplace aggression as "behavior by an individual or individuals within or outside an organization that is intended to physically or psychologically harm a worker or coworkers and occurs in a work-related context" (p.

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191). This general definition of workplace aggression includes both physical and nonphysical behaviors that are enacted by individuals within organizations (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates), and individuals outside of organizations (e.g., customers, clients, patients, and patients' family members) (Barling, Dupre, & Kelloway, 2009). Workplace aggression has been studied in various forms such as workplace violence (Schat & Kelloway, 2000), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), bullying and workplace harassment (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996), workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and counterproductive work behavior (Spector & Fox, 2005). Although these forms of workplace aggression are different from each other on several dimensions including relationship of perpetrator to target, intentionality, and severity (Barling et al., 2009), consistent results have been found on negative consequences of exposure to workplace aggression, including worsened job attitudes, impaired psychological and physical health, and decreased job performance, as well as outcomes outside of organizations (for review, see Aquino & Thau, 2009).

Following recommendations in previous studies (Barling, 1996; Schat & Kelloway, 2003), we examined physical aggression and psychological aggression separately for two reasons. First, previous research has reported that psychological aggression is more prevalent than physical aggression (e.g., Greenberg & Barling, 1999). Second, researchers suggested that psychological aggression could lead to physical aggression (Glomb, 2002; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Schat & Kelloway, 2003). Taken together, we believe they can be considered as distinctive constructs. However, physical aggression and psychological aggression have showed similar patterns of relationships with shared outcomes. For example, Spector and colleagues reported that physical aggression and psychological aggression were both positively related to anger, anxiety, depression, physical symptoms and injury, and negatively related to job satisfaction (Chang, Eatough, Spector, & Kessler, 2012; Kessler, Spector, Chang, & Parr, 2008; Spector, Coulter, Stockwell, & Matz, 2007). Therefore, we believe it is reasonable to examine physical aggression and psychological aggression as different constructs in separate hypotheses, but to predict that the relationships of physical and psychological aggression with shared outcomes are in the same direction.

Because of the aforementioned negative consequences of workplace aggression exposure, identifying factors that can help prevent workplace aggression occurrence is critical for both employees and organizations (Barling et al., 2009). Further, different individuals might respond to experienced workplace aggression in different ways (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998), so understanding how individual characteristics might contribute to effective responses to workplace aggression exposure is also of theoretical and practical importance. The specific individual characteristic that we are interested in is political skill, which was defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/ or organizational objectives" (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). Political skill is suggested to lead to more control and support (Ferris et al., 2007) and was found to relate to various positive outcomes (e.g., Blickle et al., 2011; Blickle et al., 2012). In addition, political skill has been found to be a neutralizer of strain reactions to various stressors such as job tension, role conflict, and role overload (e.g., Hochwarter et al., 2007; Hochwarter et al., 2009; Perrewé et al., 2004; Perrewé et al., 2005). In the current study we predicted that political skill would not only help reduce individuals' exposure to workplace aggression, but also neutralize the negative effects of workplace aggression that does happen.

The current study contributes to the workplace aggression literature and political skill literature in several ways. First, compared with the extensive literature about why people engage in workplace aggression (e.g., Hershcovis et al., 2007) or why some people seem more vulnerable to perpetrators (Aquino & Thau, 2009), less is known about how people can proactively avoid or prevent workplace aggression. By examining the potential role of political skill in predicting people's workplace aggression exposure, we will understand whether certain individual characteristics can help employees proactively prevent being the target of workplace aggression. Second, although political skill has been found to neutralize negative effects of some work-related stressors such as role- or task-related stressors, it is not yet clear whether it will buffer targets' strain reactions to experienced workplace aggression—a form of interpersonal stressor. Thus our study contributes to the current workplace aggression literature by exploring a new and potentially malleable individual characteristic that may help targets effectively cope with workplace aggression exposure. Third, research on the main effects of political skill has been limited mostly to positive desirable outcomes like job performance (e.g., Blickle et al., 2011; Blickle et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2005; Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008) and reputation (e.g., Laird, Zboja, & Ferris, 2012; Y. Liu et al., 2007), but its potential effects on reducing undesirable outcomes like workplace aggression is understudied. Thus our study contributes to the political skill literature because it expands the nomological network of political skill by exploring its potential protective role in reducing negative work outcomes. Lastly, aggression exposure has been found to relate to employee turnover intent and actual turnover (Deery, Walsh, & Guest, 2011; Estryn-Behar et al., 2008; Jackson, Clare, & Mannix, 2002). Thus our study on political skill can potentially shed light on ways of helping employees reduce aggression exposure and to better cope with strains resulting from aggression exposure, which ultimately could help organizations retain their employees.

Theoretical Background

The transactional stress model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) proposes that workplace situations and events are likely to be perceived as stressful if employees believe these situations and events are threats to their well-being, and when employees perceive they do not have enough resources to cope with these situations or events. These stressful situations and events are referred to as stressors, whereas people's negative psychological and physical reactions are referred to as strains. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that individuals' responses to stressors vary depending not only on how they appraise stressors, but also on the resources they believe they have to deal with the stressors. People can engage in various coping efforts to manage strains after stressors occur, such that people having more resources tend to experience fewer strains and people having fewer resources tend to experience more strains.

In addition to actively coping with stressful events that have occurred (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Aspinwall and Taylor (1997) suggested that proactive coping, defined as efforts made to prevent potential stressful events from happening, also plays an important role in stress and coping research. They argued that proactive coping prepares people to accumulate resources, recognize potential stressors, make initial appraisals of stressors, engage in preliminary coping efforts, and elicit and use feedback. Through these five stages of proactive coping people are able to avoid or minimize some stressors. Further, this framework extends the role of individual and social resources from moderating the stressor-strain relationship in the transactional stress model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to determining whether people can proactively avoid or eliminate stressors before they occur. Individuals having more resources are more likely and more capable to engage in proactive coping and thus experience fewer workplace stressors.

Political skill, as an important internal resource (Ferris et al., 2007; Hochwarter et al., 2009), can facilitate individuals' acquisition of other resources to cope with demands and threats experienced at work (Ferris et al., 2007). We believe political skill is likely to play important roles in aggression prevention and coping. First, some workplace aggression incidents might be prevented through proactive coping that is facilitated by political skill and additional support and resources obtained through political skill. Second, when proactive coping fails to prevent workplace aggression from happening, political skill and the additional social resources gained through utilizing political skill might help targets cope with experienced workplace aggression in more effective ways so that they will experience fewer strains.

Hypotheses Development

Political Skill and Workplace Aggression Exposure

It has been suggested that individuals with certain characteristics are more likely to be targets of workplace aggression (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006), and several personality traits have been found to relate to exposure to workplace aggression. Personality traits that have been found to relate to more workplace aggression exposure include low agreeableness and high neuroticism (Milam, Spitzmueller, & Penney, 2009), high negative affectivity (Aquino, Grover, Bradfield, & Allen, 1999; Bowling, Beehr, Bennett, & Watson, 2010), low extroversion (Glasø, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007), low conscientiousness (Coyne, Seigne, & Randall, 2000), low self-esteem (Harvey & Keashly, 2003), conflict management styles (Trudel & Reio, 2011), and low core self-evaluations (Bowling et al., 2010).

Most of the aforementioned studies have considered these individual characteristics as indicators of vulnerability or provocation to workplace aggression (Aquino & Thau, 2009). For example, individuals with high negative affectivity are more likely to be perceived as irritating, hostile, and hard to get along with, and thus are more likely to be targets of workplace aggression (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Individuals with low self-esteem are likely to be perceived as safe targets for interpersonal aggression by potential perpetrators (Einarsen, 2000). This line of research has focused on the passive protecting effect of personality traits by showing that individuals with certain traits are less likely to be targets because of how they appear to potential perpetrators. What is missing in the literature is whether some individuals experience less workplace aggression because of what they proactively do to influence situations and interpersonal interactions. Few if any studies have examined individual characteristics that might have such *proactive* protecting effects. We believe that political skill might play such a protecting role based on the proactive coping framework (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997).

Political skill is an important interpersonal construct (Zellars, Perrewe, Rossi, Tepper, & Ferris, 2008) that influences people's perceptions and behaviors in interpersonal interactions. Political skill includes four dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005). Because politically skilled individuals are socially astute and are able to better observe interpersonal situations and other people, they are more likely to enact appropriate behaviors in various situations, and also use their ability to influence others to display behaviors they prefer through interpersonal influence. Further, politically skilled individuals have better networking ability that enables them to get resources and support from others. Lastly, politically skilled individuals tend to appear sincere to others in interpersonal interactions, and thus gain trust and confidence from others (Ferris et al., 2007). These abilities and behavioral strategies might help politically skilled individuals gain advantages in interpersonal interactions, and then obtain better work outcomes. Existing studies have empirically established connections of political skill with increased personal reputation (Laird et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2007), higher performance ratings (Blickle et al., 2011; Blickle et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2007), increased objective task performance (Blickle et al., 2012; Blickle, Wendel, & Ferris, 2010), and increased contextual performance (Jawahar et al., 2008).

Based on characteristics of the four political skill dimensions, as well as the fact that the four dimensions are related but distinctive constructs (Ferris et al., 2007), we believe that each of the dimension can potentially play a unique role in the process of proactive coping and thus might reduce occurrence of workplace aggression. For example, recognition of a potential stressor requires attention to details and interpretation of warning signs (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), and social astuteness might enable people to recognize warning signs of workplace aggression. Additionally, social astuteness can help people better interpret problems in interpersonal interactions, and social support obtained through networking may help people mitigate their initial emotional arousal. After initial appraisals, preliminary coping efforts are needed to prevent the potential stressors, which can be achieved through influencing potential perpetrators with adaptive behaviors. Networking ability can help people establish contact and social networks which are valuable resources facilitating proactive coping (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Apparent sincerity might help relax potential perpetrators and reduce the possibility of them becoming aggressive. Lastly, it is likely that politically skilled individuals are better at gaining and using feedback from their astute observations and established networks, and thus engage in more adaptive efforts ranging from preliminary coping (e.g., reappraisal) to preventing the occurrence of a potential stressor. In sum, we predict that the four dimensions of political skill can contribute to the reduction of workplace aggression. As explained before, we present separate hypotheses for physical aggression and psychological aggression.

Hypothesis 1: Social astuteness (a), interpersonal influence (b), networking ability (c), and apparent sincerity (d) will negatively predict physical workplace aggression exposure.

Hypothesis 2: Social astuteness (a), interpersonal influence (b), networking ability (c), and apparent sincerity (d) will negatively predict psychological workplace aggression exposure.

Strain Responses to Workplace Aggression

Based on the transactional stress model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and previous findings (for review, see Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010), in the current study we predicted that employees who are targets of physical and psychological workplace aggression would experience increased strains. We chose several specific outcomes to represent different types of strains. We chose anger because it was one of the most frequently reported emotional outcomes after experiencing workplace aggression (Needham, Abderhalden, Halfens, Fischer, & Dassen, 2005; Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010). We used job satisfaction as an example of job attitudes that have been consistently found to relate negatively to aggression exposure (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). We used career commitment as an example of participants' attitudes toward their profession because we were interested in finding whether experiencing workplace aggression is a potential reason for employees to be less committed to their profession. Lastly, musculoskeletal injury not directly attributable to physical aggression was found to be related to both physical and psychological aggression exposures in cross-sectional studies (e.g., Spector et al., 2007), but was only linked with physical workplace aggression exposure in longitudinal studies (e.g., Yang, Spector, Chang, Gallant-Roman, & Powell, 2012). Therefore, we decided to include musculoskeletal injury as an example of physical strains and to examine whether both physical and psychological aggression could predict musculoskeletal injury longitudinally. Based on previous findings (e.g., Chang et al., 2012; Kessler et al., 2008; Spector et al., 2007), we expected that exposure to physical and psychological workplace aggression both will lead to increased anger, decreased job satisfaction and career commitment, and increased musculoskeletal injury.

Hypothesis 3: Exposure to physical workplace aggression will predict targets' (a) increased anger, (b) decreased job satisfaction, (c) decreased career commitment, and (d) increased musculoskeletal injury.

Hypothesis 4: Exposure to psychological workplace aggression will predict targets' (a) increased anger, (b) decreased job satisfaction, (c) decreased career commitment, and (d) increased musculoskeletal injury.

Buffering Effects of Political Skill on Strain Responses to Workplace Aggression

In addition to the large number of empirical studies that examined the direct effects of workplace aggression exposure on targets, studies have also examined factors that might buffer these negative effects (Aquino & Thau, 2009). A few different types of organizational and individual resources have been examined as potential buffers of the workplace aggression-strain relationship. For example, psychological safety climate as a resource from the organization buffered the positive relationships of workplace aggression with psychological distress and emotional exhaustion (Law, Dollard, Tuckey, & Dormann, 2011). Further, instrumental support was found to buffer negative effects of physical and psychological workplace aggression on emotional well-being, somatic health, and job-related affect, whereas informational support buffered the negative effect of physical workplace aggression on targets' emotional well-being (Schat & Kelloway, 2003). General self-efficacy as a type of personal resource was found to buffer the negative effect of workplace bullying on targets' psychological health complaints (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Taken together, these findings provide empirical evidence for the transactional stress model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that targets of workplace aggression will experience fewer strain reactions when they possess more resources (e.g., social support, self-efficacy) to deal with it.

As discussed earlier, political skill not only serves as an important internal resource, but also facilitates individuals' acquisition of other resources to cope with demands and threats experienced at work (Ferris et al., 2007). Thus, it might also be an active buffer of people's strains in response to experienced workplace stressors. Previous studies have found consistent support for this notion. For example, political skill has been found to have a neutralizing effect on individuals' strain reactions to several workplace stressors, including role conflict (Perrewé et al., 2004), role overload (Perrewé et al., 2005), felt accountability (Hochwarter et al., 2007), and job-limiting pain (Ferris, Rogers, Blass, & Hochwarter, 2009). However, most if not all of the stressors were role- and task-related, and whether political skill will also neutralize negative effects of interpersonal stressors (i.e., workplace aggression) remains less well understood.

In the context of workplace aggression, the four dimensions of political skill might contribute to effective coping with experienced workplace aggression. Social astuteness might help targets understand situations better and have higher levels of self-awareness so that the targets can know how to appropriately respond to aggression incidents and thus can experience fewer strains; interpersonal influence allows targets to change their behaviors and strategies adaptively so that they might influence subsequent behaviors of the perpetrators and other people at work, and thus gain more desirable outcomes and experience fewer strains; networking ability might help targets establish contact and rapport from whom they can get emotional and instrumental support, and in turn feel less angry with the aggression incident(s) or less dissatisfied with their job in general; lastly, apparent sincerity might help targets to gain understanding and support from others at work, so that they can use those social resources to better cope with strains after being assaulted by perpetrators. As Ferris et al. (2007) argued, politically skilled individuals tend to have more interpersonal control and self-confidence, which might help them to interpret workplace stressors as less stressful. Further, Ferris and colleagues also suggested that politically skilled individuals tend to gain more support and trust from others, which could be important resources to deal with experienced strains. Taken together, it is reasonable to posit that political skill will buffer the negative effects that exposures to physical and psychological workplace aggression have on targets.

Hypothesis 5: Social astuteness (a), interpersonal influence (b), networking ability (c), and apparent sincerity (d) will moderate (buffer) the effects of exposure to physical workplace aggression on targets' anger, job satisfaction, career commitment, and injury; specifically, the effects will be stronger for individuals at lower levels of the dimensions than for individuals at higher levels of the dimensions.

Hypothesis 6: Social astuteness (a), interpersonal influence (b), networking ability (c), and apparent sincerity (d) will moderate (buffer) the effects of exposure to psychological workplace aggression on targets' anger, job satisfaction, career commitment, and injury; specifically, the effects will be stronger for individuals at lower levels of the dimensions than for individuals at higher levels of the dimensions.

The Current Study

Based on the proactive coping framework and the transactional stress model, the current study aimed at examining whether political skill can proactively prevent people from being targets of workplace aggression, and whether political skill buffers the negative effects of exposure to workplace aggression on targets' strains. We measured political skill of graduating nurses in college (Time 1) and administered follow-up surveys for aggression exposures and strain experiences approximately six months (Time 2) and 12 months (Time 3) after they graduated. Using this longitudinal design we were able to address the limitation that the direction of effects could not be established by most previous studies due to the use of cross-sectional designs. Further, by measuring political skill before our participants were employed, we can rule out the possibility that exposure to workplace aggression at their full-time job positions might influence participants' reports of political skill, and thus examine whether political skill participants had before employment would predict future aggression exposure at work.

Method

Participants

Six cohorts of graduating BA-level nursing students ($n = 346$) were surveyed during their final month of nursing school (Time 1) at a major university in the southeastern United States. They were contacted twice (6 months = Time 2 and 12 months = Time 3) after they graduated for follow-up surveys. Two hundred fourteen of the initial participants responded in the second data collection approximately six months later (Time 2 response rate = 61.8%), and 161 of initial participants took the third survey after approximately another six months (Time 3 response rate = 46.5%). The average age of the initial participants was 25.3 ($SD = 5.9$), and most of them were female (87.3%) and white (66.3%). The average number of hours they worked was 37.9 ($SD = 6.3$) at Time 2, and 38.5 ($SD = 6.1$) at Time 3. Most of the participants worked in hospital settings (94.3%), and the rest of them worked in a variety of settings, including prison, physician's office, and nursing home.

Procedure

Demographics, control variables, and political skill were measured in a baseline survey in class during the final month prior to graduation (Time 1). Their contact information was collected in a separate sheet after the baseline survey. The participants were contacted by e-mail, phone, and mail approximately six and 12 months later to take the Time 2 and 3 surveys, respectively, which measured their workplace aggression exposure in the prior six months and their strain reactions including anger, job satisfaction, career commitment, and musculoskeletal injury. All surveys were anonymous, and were matched using the same self-generated identification codes (name of high school, city of birth, and mother's birthday) that were unique for each individual but could not be linked to the identities of the participants (Schnell, Bachteler, & Reiher, 2010).

Measures

Political skill. Political skill was assessed with all 18 items for four dimensions (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity) from the Political Skills Inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items were "I pay close attention to people's facial expressions" (social astuteness), "I am good at getting people to like me" (interpersonal influence), "I am good at building relationships with influential people at school" (networking ability), and "I try to show a genuine interest in other people" (apparent sincerity). Coefficient alphas for the current sample were .83 (social astuteness), .87 (interpersonal influence), .92 (networking ability), and .86 (apparent sincerity), respectively.

We used self-reported political skill because that is how this measure is generally used in the literature. In addition, previous studies have shown that self-reported political skill was significantly related to other-reported political skill (e.g., .25–.29; Blickle et al., 2011). Further, Meurs, Gallagher, and Perrewe (2010) demonstrated that self-reported political skill plays a more important role in buffering internal strains of stressors, which is the case for our outcome variables.

Workplace aggression exposure. Following the procedure in the European 'NEXT' Study (Estryn-Behar et al., 2008) and many previous studies of aggression in a nursing context (e.g., Arnetz, Arnetz, & Petterson, 1996; Pai & Lee, 2011; Spector et al., 2007), physical and psychological workplace aggression were measured using single items, respectively. For physical (vs. psychological) aggression, participants were asked to select "Yes" or "No" to the question "Have you been physically (vs. verbally) assaulted while at work since you graduated from nursing school?" at Time 2 and the question "Have you been physically (vs. verbally) assaulted while at work in the past six months?" at Time 3. If participants selected "Yes" to any of the questions, they were asked to indicate how many times the assault had happened to them. Then participants were asked to check all sources that have committed that type of assault, and response options included "Patient," "Patient family member," "Another nurse," "Coworker/employee not a nurse," and "Other." The total numbers of physical assaults and verbal assaults were used to represent physical and psychological aggression, respectively.

Anger. Anger was measured using a three-item scale developed for occupational stress studies (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Penneau, 1980). Participants were asked to rate how often they had experienced the given feelings in the past month at

work, and response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*every day*). One sample item was "I have felt angry." Coefficient alphas for our samples were .88 at Time 2 and .91 at Time 3.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured using three items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). Participants were asked to rate from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) to what extent they agreed that the statements described themselves at work. One sample item was "In general, I don't like my job." Coefficient alphas for our samples were .93 (Time 2) and .89 (Time 3).

Career commitment. Career commitment was measured using seven items from Blau (1989) with items rephrased to refer specifically to nursing. Participants were asked to what extent they agreed that the statements described themselves at work. Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). One sample item was "I want a career in nursing." Coefficient alpha for our samples was .92 at both Time 2 and Time 3.

Musculoskeletal injury. Musculoskeletal injury was assessed with the nine-item Nordic Musculoskeletal Questionnaire (Kuorinka et al., 1987). Nine body parts (e.g., neck) were included and participants were asked whether injuries occurred (yes vs. no) for each of the body parts and whether each injury occurred at work. A total number of injuries that occurred at work were used as the indicator of injury.

Demographic and control variables. In the baseline survey we included items about age and gender, and measured negative affectivity as a control variable because negative affectivity has been found to be a constant predictor of workplace aggression (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Negative affectivity was measured using 10 items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg et al., 2006). Participants were asked to indicate from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*) the extent to which each item was characterizing them. An example item was "I worry about things." Coefficient alpha for our sample was .85.

Data Analysis

Zero-order correlations were used to test whether dimensions of political skill would predict subsequent workplace aggression exposure, and whether workplace aggression exposure would predict strain reactions. Additional regression analyses using political skill dimensions to predict subsequent aggression exposure with and without controlling for negative affectivity were conducted. To address the possibility that strain reactions at Time 2 may influence participants' strain reactions at Time 3, hierarchical regression analysis was used to further test the main effects of aggression exposure in the six months before Time 3 survey on strain reactions at Time 3 while controlling for the strain reactions at Time 2. Further, hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the moderating effect of political skill dimensions on the aggression exposure-strain relationship at Time 2 and Time 3.

We used aggression exposure and strain reactions from the same time point to examine the moderating effects of political skill dimensions for the following reasons. First, the strain reactions measured at follow-up surveys reflected participants' accumulative strain reactions to aggression exposure experienced over the course of six months before the surveys, thus the aggression exposure-strain relationship can be best captured using data collected at the same time point. Second, using Time 2 aggression exposure to predict Time 3 strain reactions may not serve our purposes in that participants' aggression exposures over the six months right before Time 3 survey were not taken into account. However, because it is likely that the strain reactions at Time 2 might carry over to Time 3, we controlled for Time 2 strains when examining the moderating effects of political skill dimensions on Time 3 aggression exposure-strain relationship. For comparison purposes, results of political skill dimensions moderating the aggression exposure-strain relationship at Time 3 without controlling for Time 2 strains will also be presented.

Results

Results showed that 7.2% (Time 2) and 16% (Time 3) of the respondents reported having experienced physical aggression, and that 28% (Time 2) and 40% (Time 3) of the respondents reported having experienced psychological aggression. Table 1 presents the prevalence rates of physical and psychological aggression by sources. It shows that among respondents who experienced physical aggression, 100% (Time 2) and 95% (Time 3) of them selected "Patient" as the source. Among respondents who experienced psychological aggression at Time 2, 85%, 24%, 15%, and 6% of them chose "Patient," "Patient family member," "Another nurse," "Coworker/employee not a nurse" as sources of psychological aggression, respectively; among respondents who experienced psychological aggression at Time 3, 85%, 40%, 21%, and 19% of them chose "Patient," "Patient family member," "Another nurse," and "Coworker/employee not a nurse" as sources of psychological aggression, respectively. Because the majority of the perpetrators were patients and we were not able to separate aggression incidents by source, all following hypotheses were tested using the overall aggression scores.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and zero-order correlations are shown in Table 2. Among the four dimensions, interpersonal influence was negatively related to participants' physical aggression exposure at Time 3 ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$), and apparent sincerity was negatively related to participants' physical aggression exposure at Time 2 ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$) and Time 3 ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$). We also used each of the four dimensions to predict aggression exposure while controlling for negative affectivity, and the results showed the same pattern as those in Table 2: after controlling for negative affectivity, interpersonal influence negatively predicted physical aggression at Time 3 ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .05$), and apparent sincerity negatively predicted physical aggression exposure Time 2 ($\beta = -.18$, $p <$

Table 1
Prevalence Rates of Physical and Psychological Aggression by Sources

Source	Physical aggression		Psychological aggression	
	Time 2	Time 3	Time 2	Time 3
Patients	100%	95%	85%	85%
Patient family member	NA	NA	24%	40%
Another nurse	NA	5%	15%	21%
Coworker/employee not a nurse	NA	NA	6%	19%

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Age	25.78	6.6																				
2. Gender	0.90	0.29	−.11																			
3. NA	2.46	0.62	−.08	.17**																		
4. Network	4.57	0.78	−.15*	.07	.03																	
5. Sincerity	5.02	0.71	−.01	.16*	−.16*	.23***																
6. Astute	3.66	1.09	.03	.05	−.07	.40***	.29***															
7. Influence	5.57	0.58	−.03	−.01	−.24***	.47***	.42***	.56***														
8. Political	4.54	0.64	−.09	.08	−.07	.86***	.48***	.75***	.76***													
9. Physical aggression[a]	0.07	0.34	.00	.07	.07	−.12	−.18**	−.01	−.11	−.13												
10. Verbal aggression[a]	0.60	1.45	.03	.02	−.05	−.11	−.03	.05	−.02	−.06	.31***											
11. Anger[a]	2.17	0.75	−.03	−.01	.30***	.00	−.08	−.04	−.09	−.06	.17*	.23***										
12. Job satisfaction[a]	4.94	1.15	−.02	.06	−.10	.04	.04	.00	−.04	.04	−.02	−.21**	−.32***									
13. Career commitment[a]	4.85	1.10	−.01	.08	−.14*	.17*	.10	−.04	.09	.13	−.04	−.22**	−.33***	.64***								
14. Injury[a]	0.03	0.09	−.11	.03	.01	−.16*	.00	.01	−.01	−.09	.28***	.32***	.23***	−.19**	−.25***							
15. Physical aggression[b]	0.29	0.88	−.02	−.02	.04	−.11	−.32***	−.01	−.21*	−.16	.42***	.15	.08	−.08	−.08	.16						
16. Verbal aggression[b]	1.05	2.40	.02	−.08	.07	.02	−.08	.00	−.10	−.03	.29**	.13	.16	−.04	−.04	.14	.36***					
17. Anger[b]	2.40	0.76	−.08	−.03	.27**	.02	−.02	.12	.03	.06	.21*	.13	.43***	−.23*	−.27**	.16	.30***	.24**				
18. Job satisfaction[b]	4.73	1.17	−.07	−.03	−.07	.10	.06	−.05	.15	.08	−.15	−.18*	−.18*	.49***	.44***	−.25**	−.28***	−.13	−.48***			
19. Career commitment[b]	4.77	1.08	.08	.02	−.13	.17	.03	−.02	.14	.13	−.15	−.34***	−.27**	.49***	.83***	−.36***	−.14	−.05	−.32***	.56***		
20. Injury[b]	0.04	0.11	−.14	−.05	−.07	.03	.02	.09	−.08	.03	.32***	.09	.14	.00	−.03	.39***	.33***	.34***	.28**	−.18*	−.18*	

Note. For gender: 1 = Female and 0 = Male. NA = Negative affectivity; Astuteness = Social astuteness; Influence = Interpersonal influence; Network = Networking ability; Sincerity = Apparent sincerity.
[a] = Time 2, and [b] = Time 3.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

.05) and Time 3 ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$). None of the other predictions was significant. Thus Hypotheses 1b and 1d were supported, but Hypotheses 1a, 1c, and Hypotheses 2a through 2d were not supported in that neither social astuteness nor networking ability predicted physical aggression exposure and none of the four political skill dimensions correlated with subsequent psychological aggression exposure.

As shown in Table 2, exposure to physical aggression within the first six months at work was positively related to participants' anger ($r = .17$, $p < .05$), and injury ($r = .28$, $p < .001$), reported at Time 2; exposure to physical aggression within the second six months of work was positively related to participants' anger ($r = .30$, $p < .001$), and injury ($r = .33$, $p < .001$), and negatively related to job satisfaction ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$), reported at Time 3. Exposure to physical aggression was not related to career commitment at Time 2 or at Time 3.

At Time 2 exposure to psychological aggression was positively related to participants' anger ($r = .23$, $p < .001$), and injury ($r = .32$, $p < .001$), and was negatively related to participants' job satisfaction ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$), and career commitment ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$). At Time 3 exposure to psychological aggression was positively related to anger ($r = .24$, $p < .01$) and injury ($r = .34$, $p < .001$), but unrelated to job satisfaction or career commitment.

Table 3 shows standardized regression coefficients of Time 3 aggression exposure predicting Time 3 strains while controlling for Time 2 strains. After controlling for Time 2 strains, exposure to physical aggression within the second six months significantly predicted anger ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .01$), job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.24$, $p < .01$), and injury ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .01$) at Time 3, whereas exposure to psychological aggression predicted anger ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$) and injury ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$) at Time 3. The patterns were consistent with zero-order correlations at Time 3. In sum, Hypotheses 3a and 3d were fully supported, 3b was partially supported, and 3c was not support; Hypotheses 4a and 4d were fully supported, whereas 4b and 4c were partially supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that dimensions of political skill would buffer the negative effects of physical aggression exposure. Results of moderated regression analyses are shown in Table 4 for Time 2 aggression exposure and Time 2 strains. Among the four dimensions, social astuteness only moderated the relationship of physical aggression with injury; interpersonal influence moderated the relationships of physical aggression with career commitment and injury; networking ability did not moderate any of the relationships of physical aggression with strains; and apparent sincerity moderated the relationships of physical aggression with job satisfaction, career commitment, and injury.

Table 5 shows results of four dimensions of political skill moderating relationships of Time 3 aggression exposure with Time 3 strains after controlling for Time 2 strains. Social astuteness and networking ability did not moderate any of the relationships of physical aggression with strains. Interpersonal influence moderated the relationships of physical aggression exposure with career commitment and injury, and apparent sincerity moderated the relationships of physical aggression exposure with anger, career commitment, and injury. Taken together, Hypotheses 5a, 5b, and 5d were supported for moderating at least one out of four relationships, whereas Hypothesis 5c was not supported.

Table 3
Results of Regression Analyses With Time 3 Workplace Aggression Exposure Predicting Time 3 Strains Controlling for Time 2 Strains

Predictors	Anger	Job satisfaction	Career commitment	Injury
Physical aggression	0.26**	−0.24**	−0.08	0.27**
Time 2 strain	0.41***	0.47***	0.83***	0.35***
R^2	0.25***	0.30***	0.70***	0.23***
Psychological aggression	0.17*	−0.11	−0.02	0.29***
Time 2 strain	0.40***	0.49***	0.83***	0.36***
R^2	0.21***	0.25***	0.69***	0.24***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that dimensions of political skill would buffer the negative effects of psychological aggression exposure. Results of moderated regression shown in Table 4 for Time 2 aggression exposure and Time 2 strains indicated that none of four dimensions moderated the relationships of psychological aggression with strains. Table 5 shows results of four dimensions of political skill moderating relationships of Time 3 psychological aggression exposures with Time 3 strains after controlling Time 2 strains. Social astuteness did not moderate any of the relationships between psychological aggression and all four strains. Interpersonal influence moderated the relationships between psychological aggression exposure and all four strains. Networking ability moderated the relationships of psychological aggression with anger, job satisfaction, and career commitment. Lastly, apparent sincerity moderated the relationships between psychological aggression exposure and all four strains. In summary, Hypotheses 6b, 6c, and 6d were supported, whereas Hypothesis 6a was not supported.

Table 6 shows results of four dimensions of political skill moderating relationships of Time 3 physical and psychological

Table 4
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses at Time 2

Predictors	Anger	Job satisfaction	Career commitment	Injury
Physical aggression	−0.35	0.74	−8.33	3.94
Astuteness	−0.03	0.00	−0.09	−0.01
Physical aggression × Astuteness	0.07	−0.04	0.32	−0.14*
R^2	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.09***
Physical aggression	1.87	−7.12	−21.11*	4.15
Influence	−0.05	0.03	0.18	0.01
Physical aggression × Influence	−0.05	0.39	1.16*	−0.20**
R^2	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.12***
Physical aggression	2.45*	−1.44	−4.95	1.34**
Network	0.01	0.01	0.18*	−0.01
Physical aggression × Network	−0.05	0.07	0.26	−0.04
R^2	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.10***
Physical aggression	2.72	−6.98*	−17.33*	3.32**
Sincerity	−0.04	0.00	0.21	0.05
Physical aggression × Sincerity	−0.11	0.48*	0.12*	−0.18**
R^2	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.12***
Psychological Aggression	0.67	−1.13	−1.88	0.12
Astuteness	−0.02	0.00	−0.08	0.00
Psychological aggression × Astuteness	−0.01	0.03	0.04	0.00
R^2	0.06**	0.04*	0.04*	0.10***
Psychological aggression	0.29	1.08	−1.07	−0.12
Influence	−0.06	0.09	0.23	−0.01
Psychological aggression × Influence	0.00	−0.08	0.00	0.02
R^2	0.06**	0.05*	0.05*	0.11***
Psychological aggression	0.28	−0.31	−1.76	0.32
Network	0.01	0.01	0.14	−0.01
Psychological aggression × Network	0.00	−0.01	0.05	−0.01
R^2	0.06*	0.04*	0.07*	0.12***
Psychological aggression	0.48	0.54	−0.86	0.45
Sincerity	−0.08	0.12	0.39	0.02
Psychological aggression × Sincerity	−0.01	−0.06	−0.01	−0.02
R^2	0.06**	0.04*	0.05*	0.10***

Note. Astuteness = Social astuteness; Influence = Interpersonal influence; Network = Networking ability; Sincerity = Apparent sincerity. Numbers with an absolute value smaller than 0.01 were replaced with 0.00.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses at Time 3 Controlling for Time 2 Strains

Predictors	Anger	Job satisfaction	Career commitment	Injury
Time 2 strain	0.41***	0.49***	0.87***	0.35***
Physical aggression	1.00	−0.78	1.31	0.96
Astuteness	0.07	−0.06	−0.02	0.03
Physical aggression × Astuteness	−0.01	−0.01	−0.09	−0.03
R^2	0.26***	0.31***	0.71***	0.30***
Time 2 strain	0.41***	0.48***	0.85***	0.33***
Physical aggression	2.53	−1.81	−7.88*	1.56*
Influence	0.11	0.11	0.03	0.02
Physical aggression × Influence	−0.10	0.05	0.42*	−0.07*
R^2	0.27***	0.31***	0.72***	0.30***
Time 2 strain	0.42***	0.49***	0.85***	0.10***
Physical aggression	1.26	−2.08	−2.10	0.48
Network	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.03*
Physical aggression × Network	−0.03	0.06	0.08	−0.01
R^2	0.25***	0.31***	0.71***	0.31***
Time 2 strain	0.41***	0.47***	0.87***	0.32***
Physical aggression	3.13**	−2.61	−5.70*	1.36**
Sincerity	0.27*	−0.15	−0.41	0.11**
Physical aggression × Sincerity	−0.17*	0.12	0.36*	−0.08**
R^2	0.29***	0.31***	0.72***	0.33***
Time 2 strain	0.42***	0.51***	0.87***	0.37***
Psychological aggression	1.32	−2.15*	−2.15	0.34
Astuteness	0.11	−0.14	−0.13	0.03
Psychological aggression × Astuteness	−0.05	0.09	0.09	−0.01
R^2	0.23***	0.28***	0.71***	0.26***
Time 2 strain	0.40***	0.48***	0.85***	0.32***
Psychological aggression	1.31*	−2.51**	−3.76**	0.59*
Influence	0.14	0.01	−0.11	0.03
Psychological aggression × Influence	−0.06*	0.12**	0.19**	−0.02*
R^2	0.23***	0.32***	0.73***	0.27***
Time 2 strain	0.41***	0.49***	0.84***	0.38***
Psychological aggression	1.10**	−1.66**	−2.49***	0.32*
Network	0.05	−0.02	−0.04	0.03*
Psychological aggression × Network	−0.04**	0.06**	0.11***	0.01
R^2	0.25***	0.31***	0.74***	0.28***
Time 2 strain	0.41***	0.48***	0.85***	0.32***
Psychological aggression	1.73**	−3.06**	−3.83**	0.81***
Sincerity	0.19	−0.19	−0.40	0.09*
Psychological aggression × Sincerity	−0.10**	0.18**	0.24**	−0.04**
R^2	0.25***	0.32***	0.73***	0.30***

Note. Astuteness = Social astuteness; Influence = Interpersonal influence; Network = Networking ability; Sincerity = Apparent sincerity. Numbers with an absolute value smaller than 0.01 were replaced with 0.00.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

aggression exposure with Time 3 strains without controlling for Time 2 strains. Comparison between Table 5 and Table 6 shows that all the results had the same pattern with only four of them changing significance. Specifically, when Time 2 strains were not controlled, networking ability moderated the relationship between physical aggression and career commitment, apparent sincerity moderated the relationship between physical aggression and job satisfaction but failed to moderate the relationship between physical aggression and career commitment, and networking ability moderated the relationship between psychological aggression and injury.

Examples of the significant moderating effects are shown in Figures 1 through 4. Following suggestions by D. Liu, Zhang, and Wang (2012), the observed minimum and maximum values of the moderators were used in the plotting procedure. The patterns shown in the examples are all consistent with predictions, with the negative effects of aggression exposure being stronger at lower levels of political skill dimensions and the effects being weaker at higher levels of political skill dimensions. The remaining significant moderations not shown in the examples have the same patterns.

Discussion

Drawing from the proactive coping framework (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997) and transactional stress model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we examined the potential role of political skill in reducing workplace aggression and buffering its negative effects when it does occur. We proposed that politically skilled individuals could better avoid or reduce the occurrence of workplace aggression, and will cope with experienced workplace aggression more effectively and thus experience fewer strains. We found that interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity predicted less subsequent physical aggression exposure, and that each of the four dimensions of

Table 6
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses at Time 3 not Controlling for Time 2 Strains

Predictors	Anger	Job satisfaction	Career commitment	Injury
Physical aggression	1.15	−0.56	−2.49	1.34
Astuteness	0.08	−0.04	−0.05	0.04
Physical aggression × Astuteness	−0.02	−0.02	0.06	−0.04
R^2	0.10**	0.08*	0.02	0.15***
Physical aggression	3.77	−4.41	−13.81*	2.25**
Influence	0.11	0.10	0.22	0.01
Physical aggression × Influence	−0.17	0.19	0.74*	−0.11**
R^2	0.11**	0.10**	0.07*	0.17***
Physical aggression	1.10	−2.21	−7.23*	0.66
Network	0.02	0.03	0.12	0.01
Physical aggression × Network	−0.02	0.06	0.31*	−0.02
R^2	0.09*	0.09*	0.08*	0.12**
Physical aggression	3.68**	−4.73*	7.45	1.78
Sincerity	0.23	−0.24	−0.34	0.14
Physical aggression × Sincerity	−0.21*	0.26*	0.45	−0.10**
R^2	0.14***	0.11**	0.04	0.20***
Psychological aggression	1.30	1.99	4.83	0.56
Astuteness	0.11	−0.11	−0.22	0.04
Psychological aggression × Astuteness	−0.05	0.08	0.20	−0.02
R^2	0.07*	0.04	0.03	0.10**
Psychological aggression	1.69**	−2.91**	−6.41**	0.92***
Influence	0.14	0.01	−0.02	0.04
Psychological aggression × Influence	−0.07*	0.13**	0.31**	−0.04***
R^2	0.09*	0.10**	0.09**	0.16***
Psychological aggression	1.20**	−1.89**	−4.29**	0.50***
Network	0.05	−0.03	0.00	0.02
Psychological aggression × Network	−0.04**	0.07**	0.18**	−0.02**
R^2	0.10**	0.09*	0.11**	0.13***
Psychological aggression	2.00**	−3.62***	−7.26**	1.10***
Sincerity	0.15	−0.21	−0.50	0.01*
Psychological aggression × Sincerity	−0.11**	0.21**	0.44**	−0.06***
R^2	0.10**	0.10**	0.08*	0.19***

Note. Astuteness = Social astuteness; Influence = Interpersonal influence; Network = Networking ability; Sincerity = Apparent sincerity. Numbers with an absolute value smaller than 0.01 were replaced with 0.00.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

political skill moderated some observed aggression-strain relationships. The current study makes theoretical and practical contributions in the workplace aggression and political skill literatures.

Based on the proactive coping framework (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), we predicted that the four dimensions of political skill as a type of individual resource and a facilitator of additional resources accruement, would contribute to the proactive coping process, and thus reduce the likelihood of experiencing workplace aggression. Interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity were found to predict less exposure to physical aggression, indicating that nurses who are able to use their influence to elicit desired behaviors of others might be less likely to experience physical assaults, and that nurses who appear more authentic and sincere might be less likely

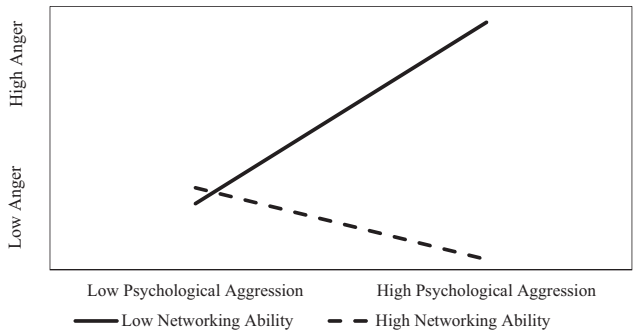

Figure 1. Moderating effect of networking ability on the relationship between Time 3 psychological workplace aggression exposure and Time 3 anger.

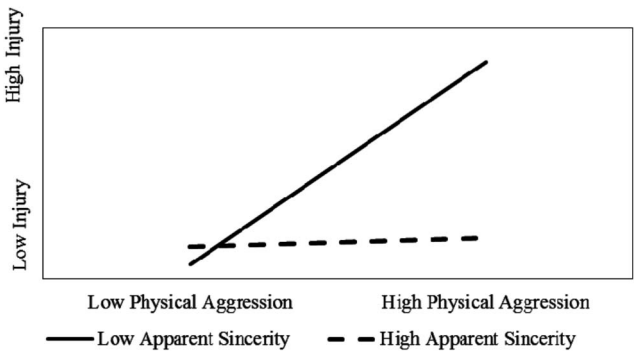

Figure 2. Moderating effect of apparent sincerity on the relationship between Time 2 physical workplace aggression exposure and Time 2 injury.

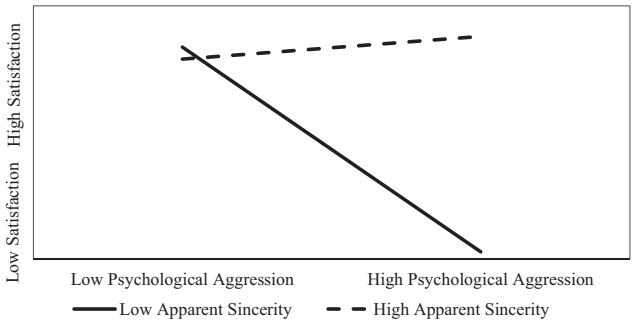

Figure 3. Moderating effect of apparent sincerity on the relationship between Time 3 psychological workplace aggression exposure and Time 3 job satisfaction.

to be physically assaulted. These two dimensions are more directly related to interpersonal interactions nurses have at work. For example, using interpersonal influence to affect others' behaviors can directly reduce undesirable outcomes such as physical aggression, while being sincere to others can from the beginning establish friendly interpersonal situations. On the other hand, social astuteness and networking ability did not predict subsequent physical aggression exposure, possibly because these two dimensions are more distally related to one-on-one interpersonal interactions with patients and their families who are most likely to engage in physical aggression (Spector, Zhou, & Che, 2014). Social astuteness enables people to observe others and situations better, but it might not help when some of the physical assaults from patients have few warning signs. Although it is possible that networking ability helps people to get along with others at work over time, this might not be true when nurses deal with patients and patients' family members with whom they only have limited time to interact.

In contrast with our predictions, none of the four dimensions predicted subsequent psychological aggression. There are several potential reasons for this finding. First, the proactive coping framework suggests that it takes five stages for people to cope with potential stressors, thus it might not be applicable to psychological aggression because people can easily say something hurtful without showing any warning signs. In contrast, physical aggression tends to escalate from minor aggressive behaviors such as psychological aggression (Glomb, 2002; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Schat & Kelloway, 2003). Thus, even if they have strong political skill, targets may not be able to anticipate and prevent psychological aggression. Second, in the current study only direct forms of psychological aggression were examined, while indirect forms of psychological aggression (e.g., gossiping, spreading rumors, and social exclusion) were not. These indirect forms of psychological aggression are more likely to be from coworkers, and might occur more often and develop with a longer process with more warning signs than direct forms of psychological aggression. Thus, political skill might predict these indirect forms of psychological aggression. Third, the majority of physical aggression was from patients, although a fair number of psychological aggression incidents were from other nurses and coworkers. It is possible that political skill dimensions might differentially predict psychological aggression from patients and colleagues. We were unable to differentiate and compare assaults based on the sources because participants were instructed to simultaneously check all possible sources that either physically or psychologically assaulted them. Thus, as proposed by Neall and Tuckey (2014), future research should compare different sources of both physical and psychological aggression to further understand how to prevent workplace aggression, and examine the important role that political skill might play in predicting indirect forms of psychological aggression.

Nevertheless, our results showed that two dimensions of political skill predicted subsequent physical aggression. The focus on dimensions contributes to the literature of political skill because most studies have used an overall score. Because the four dimensions are correlated but distinct constructs (Ferris et al., 2007), it is possible that they have differential relationships with other variables. We encourage future researchers to not only examine political skill as an overall construct, but also investigate its four dimensions separately.

Consistent with previous research findings (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006), we found that exposure to physical and psychological workplace aggression was related to various strains. Within the first six months of work, nurses who experienced more physical and/or psychological aggression also reported increased anger and injury, and decreased job satisfaction and career commitment; similar patterns continued in their second six months of work. Even though just starting their careers, nurses who experienced more aggression at work were suffering from more strains, further indicating the importance of developing effective prevention and intervention programs.

Consistent with previous findings on the neutralizing effects of political skill and supporting the buffering effect of resources on the stressor-strain relationship (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we found that each of the political skill dimensions buffered some of the negative effects of exposure to physical and psychological workplace aggression. For example, all but networking ability buffered some negative effects of physical aggression, and all but social astuteness buffered some negative effects of psychological aggression. Although to varying extents, each of the dimensions might contribute to effective coping with experienced physical and psychological aggression. This suggests that politically skilled individuals tend to experience lower levels of anger and injury, and

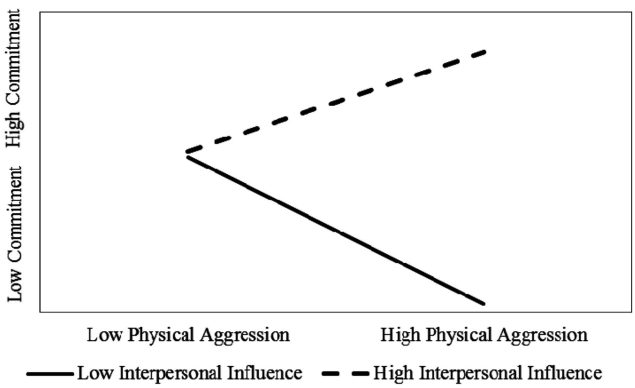

Figure 4. Moderating effect of interpersonal influence on the relationship between Time 3 physical workplace aggression exposure and Time 3 career commitment.

higher levels of job satisfaction and career commitment after experiencing aggression at work. It is worth mentioning that political skill dimensions, measured before our participants started working, moderated many of the aggression-strain relationships at Time 3 while controlling for Time 2 strains. Thus, we could rule out the possibility that Time 2 strains might carry over to Time 3, so that we could better capture the effects of physical and psychological aggression exposure over the course of six months right before the Time 3 survey, as well as the potential buffering effects of political skill dimensions.

Although the moderating effects of political skill dimensions on physical aggression–strain relationship showed similar patterns between Time 2 and Time 3, there were considerable differences between Time 2 and Time 3 on the moderating effects of political skill dimensions on psychological aggression-strain relationships. On the one hand, none of the political dimensions buffered effects of psychological aggression on nurses' strain reactions at Time 2. On the other hand, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity all buffered some of the effects of psychological aggression on nurses' anger, job satisfaction, career commitment, and injury at Time 3. One potential explanation is that the buffering effects of these political skill dimensions on psychological aggression exposure can only occur with accumulation of resources. It should be kept in mind that many of these nurses were employed for a relatively short time at the six month follow-up (Time 2), so they would not have had a long time to develop interpersonal resources to cope with experienced psychological aggression. By the end of their first year at work, sufficient resources and support might have been accumulated through interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity, such that the negative effects of psychological aggression could be mitigated.

In contrast, new nurses may be able to use their political skill to accrue resources needed to cope with physical aggression exposure when they just began working (fresh out of nursing school), and maintained such resources throughout their first year at work. For example, many socialization and training programs available for new employees in health care include some component of preventing physical aggression from patients and visitors (Farrell & Cubit, 2005), which could explain why new nurses with higher political skill could better use available resources to cope with physical aggression exposure, even during their first six months of work.

Practical Implications

The current study has implications for management efforts to prevent and cope with aggression in the workplace. Our findings imply that having politically skilled employees or improving current employees' political skill might help reduce perceived workplace aggression, and to buffer the negative effects of workplace aggression. This suggests two areas of managerial intervention. First, in employee selection for jobs with a high risk of physical aggression, organizations can select people with the potential to have high interpersonal influence and high apparent sincerity. For example, Ferris et al. (2007) suggested that political skill has dispositional and personality antecedents. Specifically, personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, and positive affectivity were suggested to predict interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity. In addition, locus of control and self-efficacy, as well as proactive personality and action-state orientation were suggested to predict interpersonal influence. Ferris et al. (2008) provided initial empirical support for these connections, which suggests that organizations could also select employees with these characteristics because they are more likely to have high political skill.

Second, Ferris and colleagues (Ferris et al., 2008; Ferris et al., 2007) also suggested that political skill could be developed through experiences such as role modeling and mentoring. Thus organizations can identify those existing employees who tend to be less capable to influence others in interpersonal interactions and who tend to appear less sincere, and provide opportunities for their improvement. Indeed, Ferris and colleagues (2008) found that mentoring was positively related to interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity. Therefore, organizations could invite experts to demonstrate how to use effective methods to change situations or influence others' behaviors, and how to show apparent sincerity when interacting with others. In addition, pairing employees with low political skill with politically skilled mentors might help them to improve all aspects of their political skill in actual working environments. These practices might also extend to nursing school training so that nurses would have higher political skill before entering their full-time jobs. Because of the lack of sufficient empirical evidence, we encourage future researchers to further explore how political skill can be improved. It needs to be pointed out that political skill might also have side effects. For example, Treadway, Shaughnessy, Breland, Yang, and Reeves (2013) found that politically skilled bullies are more likely to get higher performance ratings. Thus, organizations should be cognizant about focusing attention on appropriate groups of employees who need improvement on their political skill the most.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current study has several limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, our study used a single-source self-report design, which might raise concerns for common method variance. However, we used a three-wave study design in which we collected political skill before our participants started working, and collected their workplace aggression exposure and strains six months and 12 months later, respectively. This design has enabled us to control potential transitory biases, such as mood at the time of the survey. Further, researchers (e.g., Evans, 1985; Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010) demonstrated that interactive effects are less likely to be influenced by common method variance, and we did find significant interactions in the current study. Another concern with the self-report design is whether individuals can accurately report their political skill. For example, it is likely that less politically skilled participants might inflate their report of political skill, which could distort the observed relationships such that observed correlations between political skills dimensions and aggression exposures might be weaker than they actually were. Whereas most of the previous studies of political skill have mainly relied on self-report of political skill, it was suggested that using a different source of assessment of political skill might be more informative (Blickle et al., 2012). Although past findings suggested that self-reports and other assessments of political skill are significantly related (e.g., Blickle et al., 2011), future studies should examine the protecting and buffering effects of political skill using multiple sources of assessment of political skill. Lastly,

because of the self-report nature of workplace aggression, participants might differ in categorizing certain behaviors as aggression. Thus, a clear definition of acts of physical and psychological aggression in future surveys can help participants report their experiences more accurately.

A second limitation is that the low rates of physical and psychological workplace aggression incidence might attenuate the observed relationships. For example, 7.2% and 16% of responding participants experienced physical aggression at Time 2 and Time 3, respectively. The rates for psychological aggression were 28% (Time 2) and 40% (Time 3), respectively. Because most of our participants were not working in high risk units like emergency rooms, geriatric facilities and psychiatric departments (Spector et al., 2014), the rates were rather low, especially for physical aggression. The low rates likely attenuated the relationships of aggression with other variables.

Third, although we found that political skill dimensions have potential protective and buffering effects, the underlying mechanism is still unclear. How apparent sincerity and interpersonal influence contribute to proactive coping process, and how the four dimensions of political skill buffer the negative effects of workplace aggression exposure need to be further explored. Future studies may use qualitative and experimental methods to study the processes so that effective prevention and intervention programs can be developed accordingly.

Fourth, our measures of physical and psychological aggression did not separate aggression by sources, and only captured the direct forms of workplace aggression while indirect forms of workplace aggression, especially those from coworkers, were excluded. Future research should explore the potential preventing and buffering effects of political skill on aggression from different sources, as well as indirect forms of workplace aggression.

Fifth, we only controlled for negative affectivity when using political skill dimensions to predict subsequent workplace aggression, while other personality traits that could predict people's exposure to workplace aggression (e.g., self-esteem, extraversion, and conscientiousness) were not controlled. We encourage future research to extend our findings by examining the incremental prediction of political skill over and above other individual characteristics.

Finally, because we only measured political skill once (at Time 1, right before graduation), it is possible that participants' political skill had changed over the course of the study or had been influenced by aggression experiences in nursing school. Thus, we encourage future researchers to measure political skill across different time points (e.g., measure it at the beginning of nursing school and after employment), so as to further examine the possibility of change and to explore potential factors that contribute to the change.

Conclusion

Workplace aggression is an important stressor that has negative effects on targets. The current study contributes to the field of workplace aggression studies by exploring whether politically skilled individuals can proactively reduce perceived exposure to workplace aggression and effectively cope with experienced workplace aggression. Our findings suggest that two political skill dimensions (apparent sincerity and interpersonal influence) may contribute to reducing workplace aggression exposure, and that each of the four dimensions of political skill buffered some negative effects of perceived workplace aggression. These findings suggest that political skill is an important internal resource that might be developed to reduce perceived workplace aggression and its effects on employees.

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