

# Self-esteem and counterproductive work behaviors: a systematic review

Christopher E. Whelpley and Michael A. McDaniel  
*Department of Management, Virginia Commonwealth University,  
Richmond, Virginia, USA*

850

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Consistency theory and ego-defense theory have been used to examine the relationship between counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and self-esteem; however, these two theoretical approaches pose different directions for the expected relation. In line with this, previous research concerning the relationship between self-esteem and CWB has found inconsistent empirical results. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the relation between self-esteem and counterproductive behavior at work and draw conclusions about the merit of the competing theories. This study also examines the type of self-esteem as a potential moderator to this relationship.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors performed a psychometric meta-analysis of the relation between self-esteem and CWB using 21 correlations with a total  $n$  of 5,135.

**Findings** – The estimated population correlation was  $-0.26$ . The moderator analyses showed that global self-esteem had a stronger relation with CWB than organization-based self-esteem.

**Practical implications** – The relation between self-esteem and counterproductive behavior at work is important to organizations for two reasons. First, CWBs are very costly at all levels of the organization. Second, organizations and managers have some control over the level of their employee's self-esteem.

**Originality/value** – Previous research has used both consistency theory and ego-defense theory to make predictions concerning the self-esteem and CWB relationship. This paper provides support for examining this relation using consistency theory due to the negative correlation the authors found between CWB and self-esteem.

**Keywords** Counterproductive work behaviour, Meta-analysis, Self-esteem

**Paper type** Research paper

The study of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) has grown in importance in the organizational literature because of its relationship with job performance, the costs it can incur upon organizations, and the harm it may cause people. Both consistency theory and ego-defense theory have placed self-esteem as an antecedent to CWB; however, consistency theory and ego-defense theory pose different directions for the expected relationship. Our research seeks to estimate the empirical validity of consistency theory and ego-defense theory with respect to their alternative predicted relations between CWB and self-esteem. Based on the empirical evidence, we hope to offer guidance concerning which theoretical approach is more appropriate for management research and offer some implications for managers and organizations at large.

## CWB

CWB is defined as any intentional behavior on the part of an organizational member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests (Gruys and Sackett, 2003). CWB can affect the performance and well-being of the person engaging in CWB, the individuals interacting with the person engaging in CWB, and the organizations in which CWB is taking place. Researchers have referred to CWBs as a “pervasive and



expensive” problem (Bennett and Robinson, 2000). Estimates for the cost of CWBs to organizations are in the billions of dollars across a variety of domains and leads to lower levels of organizational effectiveness (Dunlop and Lee, 2004). Beyond organizational costs, CWBs at work can also harm the people who are victims of CWB. In the extreme, CWB can involve acts of physical aggression and violence against other people in the work environment. Between the years 1997-2008, 1,260 people were killed by work associates in the USA (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Victims of less severe forms of CWB, such as harassment, can suffer from decreased well-being (Duffy *et al.*, 2002), life satisfaction, and job satisfaction and increased occurrences of depression and anxiety (Bowling and Beehr, 2006).

Finally, engaging in counterproductive behavior hurts the individual participating in the CWB through lower levels of manager rated job performance (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). Research has shown that counterproductive behavior is one of three components of job performance. The other two aspects of job performance are task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002; Dalal, 2005). Of the three components of job performance, CWB has been noted to have the strongest effect on an individual’s performance ratings and, as such, individuals found to be engaging CWB can expect to receive significantly lower levels of rated job performance (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). In sum, CWB can affect nearly all aspects of an organization from the day-to-day interactions of the people working in them to the total cost and revenues reported in an income statement.

### Self-esteem

It is likely that self-esteem has always been important to the study of humans. Self-esteem has been viewed as an evolutionary adaptation which provides information concerning social standing within a group (Campbell and Foster, 2006). James (1890) viewed self-esteem as self-appreciation that was determined by feelings toward the self. Building upon James, we define self-esteem as the overall positive or negative evaluation of oneself (Brown, 1993).

Though self-esteem is not the strongest predictor of job performance or life happiness, it has many important outcomes associated with it. For example, self-esteem has been empirically and theoretically connected to self-efficacy, job performance (Judge and Bono, 2001), life satisfaction (Campbell, 1981), conscientiousness, extraversion, and emotional stability (Robins *et al.*, 2001). Despite these correlations, research on self-esteem has shown both functional and dysfunctional outcomes. On the positive side, high self-esteem individuals tend to be more proactive, optimistic, and have higher levels of social and civic activity as compared with their lower self-esteem counterparts (Owens and McDavitt, 2006). However, other research has shown that high self-esteem individuals may have some negative outcomes in terms of work effort and performance. For example, Weiss and Knight (1980) found that high self-esteem individuals searched for less information and had lower performance in a problem solving task when compared with their lower self-esteem counterparts. The benefits of self-esteem have been debated, but, in general, higher self-esteem people believe they are of value in the world and this belief can act as a buffer between the individual and the negative aspects of their life leading to more positive work and life outcomes (Salomon, 2006).

### Theoretical confusion

There have been two distinct lines of reasoning which have been put forth as to why there should be a significant relation between self-esteem and CWB: consistency theory

and ego-defense theory. These theories have emerged from the literature to pose different motivations for acting in a counterproductive manner depending on an individual's level of self-esteem. Not only does the literature reflect two separate theoretical arguments surrounding self-esteem and CWB, but there also exists empirical results supporting both of these theoretical frameworks (Baumeister *et al.*, 2003; Ferris *et al.*, 2009b). Because of the varying theoretical arguments and empirical results, this paper seeks to compare the two theoretical approaches and provide a meta-analytic estimate of the empirical relation between CWB and self-esteem. In so doing, we hope to lend empirical support to either consistency theory or ego-defense theory and to provide guidance to researchers examining self-esteem and CWB concerning the theoretically appropriate lens to use. In addition, we examine the type of self-esteem as a potential moderator of this relation.

This research is responsive to recent calls for an increase in research-based evaluations of competing theories (Gray and Cooper, 2010). Many researchers prefer new theoretical approaches, often times without paying much heed to existing theoretical stances (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007). This research process has encouraged theory proliferation and has ignored the need to compare theories across predictive domains (Gray and Cooper, 2010). Our research examines consistency theory and ego-defense theory, which have been empirically tested in different settings, and compare them in the organizational setting to see which, if any, has empirical validity based on previously performed research.

Beyond the theoretical and research implications, the self-esteem and CWB relation has consequences for both individuals working in organizations and organizations at large because research has generally supported the idea that organizations can influence the self-esteem level of their employees (De Cremer *et al.*, 2005).

### **Theoretical comparison and hypotheses**

The main theory that purports to show a negative relation between self-esteem and CWB relies on consistency theory (Korman, 1970). Consistency theory grew from the proposal that people strive to confirm their self-conceptions (Lecky, 1945). Lecky supposed that there was a super-ordinate motive to preserve our current structure of ideas in the form of unity striving (Stevens, 1992). Thus, the self-concept is a single and self-consistent phenomenon. By striving for unity, an individual's behavior serves to minimize the need to reorganize their self-concept which results in more pleasurable emotions.

Korman (1970) drew from Lecky's (1945) research and provided a theoretical framework for examining self-esteem as an antecedent and predictor of organizational outcomes. Within this context, individuals are motivated to believe and act in ways that run parallel with their views of self. Korman wrote that "individuals will be motivated to perform on a task or job in a manner which is consistent with (their) self-image" (p. 32). In line with this premise, individuals with high self-esteem would have increased levels of job performance and job satisfaction relative to their lower self-esteem counterparts. In other words, such individuals align their level of behavior with their self-concept (Pierce and Gardner, 2004). Consistency theory predicts lower levels of CWB among high self-esteem individuals for two reasons. First, individuals high in self-esteem are motivated to perform their job well and CWB is considered in job performance ratings (Viswesvaran *et al.*, 2005; Rotundo and Sackett, 2002); thus, people attempting to maximize their performance would be less likely to engage in CWB. Second, to the extent that people are motivated to view themselves positively, and CWB is considered a negative behavior, individuals will not want to make downward

judgments about themselves by engaging in CWB. Accordingly, consistency theory predicts that high self-esteem individuals will engage in fewer CWBs and individuals with lower self-esteem will engage in more counterproductive behaviors.

Esponsing a contrary perspective, ego-defense theory has been the primary theory put forth for the positive relationship between CWB and self-esteem. Ego-defense theory derives from early work by Dollard *et al.* (1939) which suggested that aggression is always the result of frustration with not being able to accomplish some attractive goal. Berkowitz (1989) expanded upon this to include varying sources of frustration as well as an affective component to the frustration aggression hypothesis. Berkowitz argued that events and situations which cause negative feelings are more likely to prompt aggressiveness. Thus, the blocking of a desirable goal makes aggression more likely. Baumeister *et al.* (1996) incorporated aspects of Berkowitz's (1989) work and used the frustration aggression hypothesis to explain the term ego threat, where ego refers to self-esteem. At the individual level, ego threat occurs when an environmental condition conflicts with the existing self-view. In this sense, CWB is a manifestation of the self's (ego's) rejection of esteem-threatening evaluations received from the environment (Bushman and Baumeister, 1998). Baumeister *et al.* (1996) explored the construct of aggression (a form of CWB) as being instrumentally used to reconcile internal and external views of the self when a circumstance and/or event highlights differences between one's self-view and the feedback they are receiving from their present situation. In this line of thought, "threats to self-esteem are more apt to be perceived as unjustified if one's self-concept is positive than if one's self-concept is negative and unjustified threats are more likely to prompt anger" (Kernis *et al.*, 1989, p. 1014). Consistent with this, an individual's level of self-esteem directly effects their evaluations of the ego threat and this evaluation is tied to actual behavior. Thus, the higher one's self-esteem, the more likely it will be that differences are perceived between the treatment of an individual and their self-view. Consequently, high self-esteem individuals may be more likely to engage in behaviors that bring these discrepant views back into line with one another, which could be some form of CWB. Implicit in Baumeister and colleagues work is a consensus in the literature that there is a subset of people who are aggressive and have unstable, but high, self-esteem. This line of thought predicts that self-esteem can be fragile or secure. Fragile self-esteem is conceptualized as being defensive, unstable, and discrepant with true feelings of self-worth (Kernis, 2003). The set of individuals who have unstable high self-esteem may support the Baumeister *et al.* (1996) interpretation of ego threat as accounting for a positive relationship between self-esteem and CWB (Kernis, 2003; Kernis *et al.*, 1989).

Though consistency theory predicts a negative relationship between self-esteem and CWB (Ferris *et al.*, 2009a, b), alternative viewpoints illustrate how high self-esteem could lead to more counterproductive behaviors (Baumeister *et al.*, 1996). However, having different researchers using different theoretical approaches does not mean that one theory is not without more merit. Consistency theory seems to provide a more compelling explanation of the relation between CWB and self-esteem. According to research on the construct of core self-evaluations (Judge and Bono, 2001), self-esteem is a part of larger dispositional trait that also includes self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability. Core self-evaluations and its subcomponents have been shown to relate to overall job performance (Judge and Bono, 2001). Though self-esteem has been meta-analyzed as a component of overall job performance, no systematic review has integrated this literature to estimate the magnitude and direction of the self-esteem and

CWB relationship and, in turn, there is no empirical comparison that lends support to either consistency theory or ego-defense theory. Our research seeks to estimate the relationship between CWB and self-esteem and we offer the following:

*H1.* There is a significant negative relation between self-esteem and CWB.

Self-esteem has been viewed as a multidimensional construct. Two separate dimensions in the self-esteem literature are global self-esteem and contingent self-esteem. Deci and Ryan (1995) noted that “contingent self-esteem refers to feelings about oneself that result from and indeed, are dependent on matching some standard of excellence or living up to some interpersonal or intrapsychic expectations” (p. 32). Along this thought line, contingent self-esteem occurs when self-worth is derived from success in a particular domain (Ferris *et al.*, 2009b). Individuals with contingent self-esteem may ask themselves questions about their esteem in a single arena (e.g. am I a good parent?). This differs from global self-esteem which is the overall positive or negative evaluation of oneself.

Research concerning the prediction of organizational outcomes has suggested that matching work-related predictor constructs to specific work outcomes may make them more valid (Shaffer and Postlethwaite, 2012). In line with this idea, one specific type of self-esteem is organization-based self-esteem (OBSE). OBSE is defined as the degree to which an individual believes they are a capable, significant, and worthy organizational member (Pierce and Gardner, 2004). In some respects, OBSE measures whether or not someone feels that they matter to their organization and contribute to it. From an expectancy framework (Vroom, 1964), engaging in CWB offers less risk to an individual with low OBSE because they do not rely on work for their feelings of self-worth and thus anticipate less relative cost associated with endangering their job performance by engaging in CWB. Alternatively, high OBSE people derive specific psychological benefits from their relationship with the organization and would anticipate greater cost associated with engaging in CWB at work and potentially losing their job or lowering their job performance:

*H2.* The strength of the relationship between self-esteem and CWB is greater for OBSE than for global self-esteem.

## Method

### *Literature search*

Several strategies were used to locate relevant studies. Searches were performed in Web of Science (ISI), ABI/Inform, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and JStor using relevant search terms (e.g. deviance, CWB). Searches were also performed using well known scales from the literature (Rosenberg, 1965; Bennett and Robinson, 2000) by performing a forward citation analysis whereby all articles that could be located that had cited a particular scale were checked to see if they contained the constructs of interest. Additionally, the bibliographies of previously identified papers were searched to find other relevant studies. Further, review or meta-analysis papers that dealt with either self-esteem or deviance were similarly searched to identify studies for inclusion. Finally, using the OB-Listserv and HR-Listserv of the Academy of Management, we solicited unpublished manuscripts that relate to self-esteem and organizational deviance or CWB.

### *Decision rules*

To be included in the meta-analysis, studies needed to include measures of self-esteem and CWB at the individual level. Self-esteem is most commonly measured using the

scale developed by Rosenberg (1965); however, three studies included other global measures of self-esteem and were included in the meta-analysis. Four additional studies used OBSE, they were also included. The study of CWB has a large variety of behaviors subsumed within it. Many researchers used Bennett and Robinson's (2000) 19-item deviance scale which measures deviant and counterproductive behaviors at work; however, some researchers looked at a specific type of deviant or counterproductive behavior such as absenteeism, group undermining, or intended retaliation. Using disparate deviant behaviors as representative of CWB does not pose a problem because of the empirically derived higher order factor which causes a positive relation between counterproductive behaviors (Gruys and Sackett, 2003; Bennett and Robinson, 2000).

Further inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the identified studies. The studies were required to deal with counterproductive behaviors at work, which means the studies needed to focus on behaviors that occur in a work-type environment. Thus, measures such as group undermining, which were studied with undergraduate students, were included in the analysis; however, studies that looked at adolescent aggression were not included. There were no time restrictions on the studies included.

All studies found were of a survey design, but had different collection and respondent recruitment methods. The population of studies included undergraduates, graduates, blue-collar workers, professionals, university alumni, and attempts at cross-sections of the working population. The recruitment methods included in-class extra credit, newspaper ads, online recruitment, and workplace sampling. All recruitment methods were included in the analysis.

Finally, several articles included multiple measures of either CWB or self-esteem. A single article included multiple counterproductive behaviors in their two studies (Burton *et al.*, 2005). In this case, the more severe CWB was included in the meta-analysis. In Study 1, overt aggression was used over obstructionism and expressions of hostility. In Study 2, the overt aggression measure was not taken, but instead both direct and indirect measures of expressions of hostility and obstructionism were measured. This study chose direct expressions of hostility, which is the most severe of the counterproductive behaviors measured. Duffy *et al.* (2006) examined individual and group undermining as their measures of deviance. The group undermining measure was an aggregated measure of observed undermining on the part of group members. The individual-level undermining measure included self-reported undermining behavior (i.e. whether the individual engaged in undermining members of their group), thus the individual-level undermining measure was included in the meta-analysis. Scheuer (2010) included both explicit and implicit expressions of aggression; this study included explicit expressions of aggression. Lastly, Ferris *et al.* (2012) included "trait" and "daily" OBSE measures. Daily measures of self-esteem were obtained by asking self-esteem-related questions that were specific to daily events, whereas trait self-esteem measured more general and enduring opinions about oneself. This analysis used the trait self-esteem to avoid daily fluctuations in self-esteem.

With the combined search methods, the analyses were based on 21 samples that encompassed 5,135 individuals.

When possible, the correction for unreliability was performed locally (i.e. at the level of the individual sample). In cases where reliability was not reported the correction was made using the mean of the distribution generated from the primary sample. The imputed reliability for Rosenberg's (1965) scale was 0.91. The weighted average

reliability of the CWB measure was 0.89. Finally, Kessler *et al.* (2009) reported two reliabilities, of 0.95 (self-report) and 0.98 (supervisor-report), for a single measure of CWB. Consequently, an average of these was taken and an  $\alpha$  of 0.965.

**Results**

The studies contributing data to the meta-analysis are listed in Table I and the results from the meta-analysis are in Table II. This study used psychometric meta-analysis (Hunter and Schmidt, 2004) in which correlations were individually corrected for

Authors	Year	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>	$\alpha_{SE}$	$\alpha_{Dev}$	Self-esteem measure <sup>a</sup>	Sample
Keller	1983	-0.22	174	0.82	0.89	GSE	Employed
Raelin	1994	-0.16	84	0.82	0.89	GSE	Employed
Avey <i>et al.</i>	2011	-0.39	191	0.70	0.81	GSE	Employed
Chang and Smithikrai	2010	-0.39	1,662	0.80	0.93	GSE	Employed
Cohen-Charash and Mueller	2007	-0.15	72	0.86	0.90	GSE	Employed
Burton <i>et al.</i> – Study 1	2005	-0.11	152	0.85	0.78	GSE	Undergraduates
Burton <i>et al.</i> – Study 2	2005	0.08	185	0.85	0.81	GSE	Undergraduates
Duffy <i>et al.</i> – Study 1	2006	-0.04	333	0.81	0.81	GSE	Graduate and undergraduate
Ferris <i>et al.</i>	2009b	-0.34	123	0.89	0.92	GSE	Employed
Harvey and Keashly	2003	-0.17	115	0.86	0.89	GSE	Undergraduate
Inness <i>et al.</i>	2005	0.20	105	0.86	0.89	GSE	Employed
Kessler <i>et al.</i>	2009	-0.26	96	0.85	0.97	GSE	Undergraduate
Renn and Prien	1995	0.05	57	0.80	0.89	GSE	Employed
Scheuer	2010	-0.31	271	0.87	0.84	GSE	Undergraduate
Barney	2013	-0.30	135	0.91	0.86	GSE	Graduate
Ferris <i>et al.</i>	2009a	-0.16	230	0.91	0.68	OBSE	Employed
Ferris <i>et al.</i>	2012	-0.20	100	0.88	0.89	OBSE	Employed
Hui and Lee	2000	-0.11	378	0.88	0.89	OBSE	Employed
Gardner and Pierce	2011	-0.06	236	0.93	0.84	OBSE	Employed
Duffy <i>et al.</i> – Study 2	2006	0.07	291	0.76	0.95	SE	Undergraduate
Marcus and Schuler	2004	-0.31	145	0.80	0.88	PS	Employed

**Table I.** Studies included, correlations, sample size, and reliabilities

**Notes:** *r*, observed correlation; *n*, number of participants;  $\alpha_{SE}$ , self-esteem coefficient  $\alpha$ ;  $\alpha_{Dev}$ , deviance coefficient  $\alpha$ . Where studies reported ranges in the number of participants, the lower number was used. <sup>a</sup>GSE, global self-esteem; OBSE, organization based self-esteem; SE, other self-esteem measure; PS, positive self-concept

	Observed distribution				Psychometric results		
	<i>n</i>	No. rs	Mean <i>r</i>	$\sigma_r$	$\rho$	$\sigma_\rho$	95% CI
All studies	5,135	21	-0.22	0.16	-0.26	0.19	-0.34 to -0.17
Leave one out <sup>a</sup>	3,473	20	-0.14	0.13	-0.16	0.16	-0.24 to -0.09
<i>Self-esteem type</i>							
GSE	3,564	14	-0.26	0.16	-0.30	0.18	-0.40 to -0.20
GSE <sup>a</sup>	1,902	13	-0.14	0.13	-0.16	0.15	-0.25 to -0.07
OBSE	944	4	-0.12	0.00	-0.14	0.00	-0.20 to -0.08

**Table II.** Analysis results for the correlation between self-esteem and deviant behavior

**Notes:** No. rs, number of correlations;  $\sigma_r$ , stimated standard deviation of *r*; 95 percent CI, the 95 percent confidence interval. <sup>a</sup>Represents that the meta-analytic analysis left the largest effect size out or what is referred to as “leave one out”

measurement error. We offer results based on the observed correlations and the individually corrected correlations (i.e. estimates of the population correlation from each study). Table II also addresses *H1* (CWB and self-esteem) and *H2* (self-esteem and OBSE). In Table II, column 1 identifies the group or subgroup being meta-analyzed. Columns 2 through 5, respectively, contain the total sample across studies, the total number of correlation coefficients, the average correlation of the observed distribution, and the standard deviation of the observed distribution. Columns 6 through 8 provide the psychometric results. Column 6 and 7 include the population mean correlation and standard deviations, respectively. Column 8 includes the 95 percent confidence interval. Note that this study did not correct for range restriction which likely has the effect of underestimating the magnitude of the population effect size in our results.

Confirming *H1*, the estimated population correlation was  $-0.26$  with a 95 percent confidence interval of  $-0.34$  to  $-0.17$ . A sensitivity analysis was performed by removing the Chang and Smithikrai (2010) effect size and performing the meta-analysis with the balance of the effect sizes. The Chang and Smithikrai study had a high negative correlation ( $r = -0.39$ ) between self-esteem and CWB and included 1,662 individuals. Though the effect size was not an outlier, the sample size was larger than the other samples included in the meta-analysis. Removing the correlation resulted in an estimated population correlation of  $-0.16$  and the 95 percent confidence interval was  $-0.24$  to  $-0.09$ . Using a funnel plot, we attempted to identify any potential publication bias (Sterne *et al.*, 2005; Kepes *et al.*, 2012). No compelling evidence of publication bias (McDaniel *et al.*, 2006) was found. However, given the lack of robustness of some publication bias methods to heterogeneous data (data sets in which all variance cannot be entirely attributed to sampling error), publication bias analyses should be re-conducted in moderator subgroups after sufficient future data become available.

*H2* examined the type of self-esteem as a moderator to the relation between self-esteem and CWB. Included in the analysis were the scales that measured global self-esteem and OBSE. Global self-esteem included only those studies that used Rosenberg's scale for self-esteem. Results show that global self-esteem had a population correlation of  $-0.30$  with CWB and OBSE had a population correlation with CWB of  $-0.14$ . These findings indicate that we failed to find support for *H2*.

## Discussion

Our research points to a negative relationship between self-esteem and CWB such that individuals with higher self-esteem would be expected to engage in fewer CWBs. Though the nature of our study does not allow us to make any causal assertions surrounding the observed empirical relation, we feel that our results have significant implications for theory, society, organizations, and the individuals working in them.

### *Implications for theory*

We sought to examine the relation between self-esteem and CWB as a means to compare consistency theory and ego-defense theory. In line with this, we hoped to establish which theory offered more compelling empirical support, which may suggest the need for more research into its use in the organizational setting (Gray and Cooper, 2010). As noted, researchers have used varying theoretical stances in hypothesizing the direction the relation between CWB and self-esteem (Baumeister *et al.*, 1996; Korman, 1970). Confirming our hypothesis, the relation between CWB and self-esteem supports Korman's view of self-esteem as an antecedent of organizational outcomes whereby



individuals act in a manner consistent with their view of self. Specifically, higher levels of self-esteem relate to lower levels of CWB. As such, we feel that consistency theory should be used by researchers examining self-esteem and CWB. Further, research in organizations may benefit by using consistency theory to view self-esteem as a precursor to organizational outcomes.

Contrary to our second hypothesis, the magnitude of the relation with CWB is greater for global self-esteem than for OBSE. The observed relationship is interesting because we expected that organizationally contingent self-esteem would be a stronger predictor of CWB than global self-esteem because of the greater costs associated with CWB for high OBSE individuals relative to individuals low in OBSE. Further, previous research concerning the five factor model of personality showed that work-specific measures of personality were better predictors of job performance than general measures of personality (Shaffer and Postlethwaite, 2012). We note that we cumulate the current research to date, but this relationship should be further examined as additional research becomes available. Further, previous theoretical stances that have been used to examine sub-traits of personality may not be applicable to self-esteem, as evidenced by our empirical results.

#### *Implications for organizations*

The negative relation between CWB and self-esteem suggest that finding ways to increase employee self-esteem may serve economic and social purposes. Organizations with high levels of CWB have increased theft, higher prevalence of workplace violence and bullying, and lower levels of individual performance. In fact, it is not unfair to say that, *ceteris paribus*, an organization that contains higher self-esteem employees would outperform rivals who did not simply through the increase in performance associated with fewer counterproductive behaviors.

Given the potential importance of reducing CWBs in organizations, this study suggests that organizations should take measures to increase the self-esteem of its employees. Previous research has linked self-esteem to procedural justice and fairness, perceived autonomy, task significance, respect shown for employees, and quality of leader-member exchange (De Cremer *et al.*, 2005; Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Naus *et al.*, 2007; Grant, 2008; Sekiguchi *et al.*, 2008). These relationships offer clear courses of action for organizations and managers to increase employee self-esteem. For example, managers can place a greater emphasis on employee relationships by showing respect toward employees, illustrating the fairness of the decision-making process with regards to the employees, and emphasizing the function of tasks within the larger organization.

#### *Implications for society*

In the context of society at large, using Korman's consistency theory allows researchers to examine self-esteem in a manner such that positive self-esteem generally has positive outcomes associated with it. This study highlights the negative empirical relationship between high levels of self-esteem and CWB, but as research develops consistency theory may allow other relations to be explored. Also, the negative empirical relation observed between self-esteem and CWB points to the importance of self-esteem. As noted, there are external influences on individual levels of self-esteem and, to the extent that external influences increase self-esteem, our research would suggest more positive outcomes, in general, for individuals. Some previous research would support our assertion as self-esteem has already been empirically connected to life satisfaction, self-efficacy, and emotional stability.

### *Limitations and future research*

This review included 21 samples and 5,135 individuals. We would hope that as more research becomes available, this meta-analysis will be performed again and additional moderator analyses can be performed. One class of moderators that should be examined is the narrower facets of CWB and self-esteem and how these may have different relations with one another. The CWB construct is multidimensional and the behaviors subsumed within it can take many forms (Sackett and DeVore, 2001). Like CWB, the construct self-esteem includes multiple dimensions, such as: global (Rosenberg, 1965), organization based (Pierce *et al.*, 1989), and contingent/non-contingent (Crocker *et al.*, 2003).

The multidimensionality of these constructs could be accounting for the variance in results that have been found relating self-esteem to CWBs. Consequently, research should assess the dimensionality of each construct with their potentially unique relation to the dimensions of the other variable. Beyond the self-esteem literature, there has been research suggesting that personality characteristics may be more predictive of job performance if measured as specific to the work environment (Shaffer and Postlethwaite, 2012). Our research does not support this suggestion and we feel that further research needs to continue to focus on OBSE to better understand its predictive validity in the work environment particularly in comparison with Rosenberg's scale of global self-esteem.

Future research should more clearly articulate the scale differences and relation between self-esteem and narcissism. Some research suggests the previously observed relation between self-esteem and CWB may be explained by the positive correlation between self-esteem and narcissism. Along these lines, narcissism may be the antecedent of CWB rather than self-esteem. However, it has been found that the relationship between self-esteem and narcissism is actually moderate. Further, the observed relationship may be due to measurement contamination in the narcissistic personality disorder scale which incorporates items that are similar to those used in the measurement of self-esteem (Rosenthal and Hooley, 2010; Rosenthal *et al.*, 2011). Thus, the actual relationship between narcissism and self-esteem is still not understood and further research on this issue is warranted.

In brief, this meta-analysis draws three key conclusions. First, the negative relationship between self-esteem and CWB demonstrates that consistency theory is an appropriate and empirically justified explanation for the negative relation between self-esteem and CWB. Second, to maximize the outcomes of organizations and the individuals in them, organizations should take steps to increase the self-esteem of their employees. Finally, the variance in previous empirical results concerning self-esteem and CWB highlights the need for further research that is designed to examine the relationship between the two constructs with respect to their measurement definitions and sub-dimensions.

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### Corresponding author

Christopher E. Whelpley can be contacted at: [cewhelpley@gmail.com](mailto:cewhelpley@gmail.com)

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