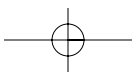
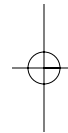
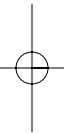

PART I

Perspectives on Workplace Violence



1

Editors'
Introduction to Part I

Work is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us.

—Studs Terkel, *Working* (1974), p. xi

In his classic book *Working*, the American journalist Studs Terkel gave a prescient analysis of work in the 20th and 21st centuries. In the last 10 to 15 years, research on workplace violence and aggression has proliferated, and as constructs and measures are developed and refined, the fundamental soundness of Terkel's analysis has become apparent. For many employees, work is fundamentally about violence. The postal shootings of the mid-1990s (see U.S. Postal Service Commission on a Safe and Secure Workplace, 2000) and the resulting popularization of the phrase *going postal* to describe an enraged state were, arguably, the defining moments that focused organizational and research attention on the notion of workplace violence and aggression. This is not to say that the postal shootings were the first incident of this kind. As Terkel's observations and those of numerous others attest (e.g., Grinker & Spiegel, 1945; Loo, 1986; Stouffer et al., 1949; Southard, 1919), the problem and consequences of workplace violence have been known for some time.

The timing of the postal shootings, however, was coincident with the APA-NIOSH initiative on occupational health psychology (Sauter & Hurrell, 1999) and the inauguration of the APA-NIOSH Work, Stress, and Health Conferences. Media attention highlighted the problem at the same time as researchers concerned with health and safety in the workplace were beginning to come together in a more organized fashion. Perhaps not surprisingly,

workplace violence emerged as an issue at the first such conference (e.g., Braverman, 1992) and became a focus at the second Work, Stress, and Health Conference leading to the publication of a seminal collection of papers on the topic (VandenBos & Bulatao, 1996).

As this volume attests, research on workplace violence and aggression has proliferated since that time. To some extent, research has followed the path originally described by Terkel. From an initial focus on physical violence (the fistfights noted by Terkel), researchers have moved on to consider a wider variety of aggressive behaviors (Terkel's shouting matches) under various rubrics (see Schat & Kelloway, 2004, for a review). Research has explored the connections between various forms of aggression and violence in the workplace (e.g., Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001). More recently, empirical attention has focused on the "violence to the spirit" and "daily humiliations" associated with workplace bullying (e.g., Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002) or emotional abuse (e.g., Keashly, 1998; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003). As our understanding of the range of behaviors constituting workplace violence and aggression grows, so does our appreciation of the enormity of the problem.

Like work, this handbook is fundamentally about violence. Our intent was to bring together the leading researchers to summarize the current state of knowledge and to begin to chart the course for future research. The chapters in this first section provide an appropriate foundation for this endeavor.

The study of aggression and violence is characterized by two fundamental theoretical orientations: the *rational choice model* and the *frustration-aggression hypothesis*. It is not clear that these are competing, as much as complementary, approaches that have something to tell us about the causes of workplace violence and aggression.

In the first chapter, Felson presents an argument in favor of a rational choice understanding of violence and aggression. Essentially he argues that the key to understanding violence and aggression is to recognize that individuals engage in such behaviors because "they can (a) force others to comply, (b) restore justice when they believe they have been wronged, (c) achieve a desired image or reputation, and (d) entertain themselves with a potentially risky activity" (Felson, this volume, p. 16). Felson's focus is on violence in general rather than on workplace violence. Thus, his analysis avoids the balkanization that is apparent in many studies of workplace violence and provides a context in which workplace violence can be understood.

Spector, Fox, and Domagalski begin with a focus on "frustration-aggression" but expand this analysis in two major ways. First, as they note, current research has moved beyond *frustration* to consider a range of negative emotional states. Their approach draws on previously developed models that posit emotions as resulting from organizational stressors and influencing responses such as violence and aggression (e.g., Spector & Fox, 2002, 2004). Like Felson, Spector et al. offer an expanded context for understanding workplace violence and aggression. Rather than go beyond the workplace, however, Spector et al. suggest that workplace violence and

aggression be understood within a broader framework of counterproductive work behaviors, again a perspective that is likely to add to our understanding of the phenomenon.

Schat, Frone, and Kelloway also offer a foundation for understanding workplace violence and aggression. Drawing on a national probability sample, the authors go beyond the media hype and the widespread use of convenience samples to generate accurate prevalence estimates for workplace violence and aggression. Schat et al. note the need for consistent operationalization and rigorous sampling methodology in generating accurate prevalence estimates. They use their data to examine the impact of demographic and occupational factors on workplace violence and aggression. The results of their analyses show that approximately 47 million U.S. employees (41.4%) are exposed to psychological aggression, and 15 million (13%) are exposed to physical aggression in the workplace.

For many employees, then, work is fundamentally about violence. Changing this situation requires an understanding of how violence occurs as well as its effects on individuals. Change also requires understanding who is affected by workplace violence and aggression and what interventions are available to organizations and individuals. Facilitating such understanding is the goal of this handbook.

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