Workplace Harassment: The Social Costs of Bullying

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Most research on workplace bullying uses survey results to understand working conditions, target and bully characteristics, and results of bullying situations. This study uses content analysis to determine themes emerging from a writing assignment that asks students to respond to questions about workplace bullying. The intent of the research is to enable bullying targets to better understand the situation, to help managers to learn how to mitigate possible bullying situations, and to assist witnesses to better react to workplace incidents.

INTRODUCTION TO WORKPLACE BULLYING AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

The majority of the research on workplace bullying uses survey results to understand the working condition, target and bully characteristics, and the results of the situation. Additional research has been done with focus groups and structured interviews of targets to elicit similar results using qualitative input in the research process. This study uses content analysis to determine themes emerging from a writing assignment that asked students to write a response to questions about workplace bullying. The intent of the research is to enable bullying targets to better understand their situation, managers to learn how to mitigate possible bullying situations, and witnesses to better react and assist in averting a potentially traumatic workplace incident.

Workplace bullying is an accepted terminology for many of the harassing behaviors that can exist in the workplace that undermine or mistreat individuals through acts that can be either physical, nonverbal or verbal in nature. They run the gamut from silent treatment and low intensity tactics to physically violent actions of the powerful to the powerless. Features of bullying include repetitive actions that escalate over time that have an attributed intent to threaten or stigmatize the target by a more powerful perpetrator.

Costs to the organization are high when lost productivity, turnover, distraction of witnesses and emotional and physical health costs of targets are measured. This number exponentially increases when a potential lawsuit for unjust dismissal or workers compensation and disability are added. Costs that are harder to calculate but are negatively impacted are reduced work quality, errors, absenteeism, or poor reputation and customer relationships that result from loss of work focus and commitment.

The content analysis of 67 written stories resulted in the following thematic tactics used by the bully: verbal humiliation (including email), instilling fear, public embarrassment, inappropriate use of power, work related retaliation, and physical behaviors. Content was also analyzed for impact or result to the

organization from bullying. In this paper an analysis of 67 bullying stories will also be presented using the following categories: gender of victim, gender of bully, age of victim, age of bully, employer and industry, relationship of victim to bully, culture of the workplace and results or action taken.

It is sad to report that most organizations do nothing to try and eliminate or rectify a situation of bullying. Policies are not widespread and Human Resource departments do little to resolve the dilemma. However, in a few instances the bully did apologize or the company reorganized to try and remove the victim from the workgroup or remove the bully from the reporting chain. Many victims left or are considering leaving the company. Unfortunately our analysis illustrates that professionals as a personality descriptor leave more frequently and ironically these are the individuals companies want to keep. Bullying appears to be gender, race and age neutral affecting all workers and not just the powerless and uneducated subordinates in the workplace. The variety of industries represented and workplace experience support the commonality of bullying as a leveling phenomena across varying demographics.

Resistance to bullying can take many forms but most often victims leave and workplace productivity suffers. Most organizations do not have formal policies against bullying and the behavior affects not only targets but witnesses to public humiliation of the victim. Organizations will become more ethical and humane by acknowledging the stories of workplace bullying and creating a culture that forbids this practice. Ultimately, we are about trying to create positive change in organizations and more ethical cultures and ethical decision making in our workplaces. It is our hope that research such as this serves to illuminate a dark topic that has been kept under wraps, and shed light on a disturbing and complex workplace behavior.

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RESEARCH METHOD

We chose a written media for reflection over time on the complex phenomena of workplace bullying. The methodology was combined with a group panel discussion of the bullying event in order to allow others to hear stories and thereby increase their understanding of the various roles and responsibilities in a bullying situation. These two aspects were chosen because it can be difficult for a participant to verbalize a bullying incident and talk about all of the complex factors that combine to produce this traumatic series of events. Targets blame themselves as do other victims in similar situations of abuse or neglect. It can also be difficult to speak about something that is for the most part silent in our workplaces. The fact that we had a mix of people who were bullied and who witnessed bullying of others allowed for various perspectives on the issue and provided a lens for possible bullies to identify their behavior and accurately classify possible behaviors to avoid or curtail.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

We used pseudonyms and disguised or changed identifying variables in order to protect anonymity of participants. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 56 years old with an average age of 30 and a median age of 26. There were 27 males and 40 females in the group. Out of 67 total participants, 55 were white, 6 Black 1 Asian and 4 Hispanic. Of the 67 participants, 3 were unemployed at the time of the

study, 1 was self employed and the remaining worked in various industries such as retail, events marketing, elementary education, manufacturing, banking, waste management, insurance, engineering, information technology and digital document management. Workplaces ranged from private to public, government and nongovernmental contractors, large multinational firms to small retail operations. Seven of the workplaces were international in scope with operations and /or headquarters abroad. As such, the participants offered a wide range of work experiences.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESSES

In graduate level MBA courses on organization management and undergraduate management courses students were asked to write a reflective assignment on a workplace harassment situation and respond to unstructured, open ended questions to guide their writing. The assignment was given with a 2 week window in order to allow for critical reflection and thoughtful responses. It was not overly structured to allow for the free interpretation of events. The assignment was not proscriptive to allow for individual interpretation of what constitutes bullying since this greatly varies by individual, as does other forms of workplace harassment.

We wanted to build on the power of the group effect found in focus groups or group therapy where respondents build on each others' commentary and discover a common language that can describe diverse experiences. A group setting can also validate targets and hearing them describe a situation that can often be isolating and embarrassing is educational for everyone. We felt that this public naming would possibly help all participants by increasing awareness levels and educating everyone to a largely unspoken workplace transgression. The discussion was loosely structured in order to allow the stories to build on each other with the opening question of "who would like to share their story and tell us what kind of work you do and when you noticed a problem." Ground rules were set to changes real names of organizations and people and to respect confidentiality and keep what was shared in the room.

A panel of six students (3 female and 3 male) discussed their bullying stories and responded to the following 5 questions:

1. What distinguishes micromanaging from bullying?
2. How do you know you are a victim of bullying?
3. How do you describe a workplace bully?
4. What tactics or behaviors do bullies use? Verbal? Mental? Physical?
5. What do your companies/workplaces have in place to prevent bullying at work? Is there a policy against it? Are there procedures to follow if bullying is suspected?

These combined research methods were selected because they are pragmatic as well as ethically valid as an approach to collect data on a complex topic. It can be difficult to succinctly get stories from victims of traumatic events so the written assignment served an efficiency goal. The group discussion allowed for cascading commentary and recording of emotions and body language. It is interesting to note that when the researchers gave the assignment to the participants they reacted with unusually high amounts of enthusiasm and excitement to being asked to work on this topic. Reactions from students ranged from, " oh boy, I can't wait to write about this – I advised my sister to complain to her manager and maybe now she will" to " I've wanted to tell someone about what's been going on at work and didn't know who to talk to about it."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying has been researched by analyzing the metaphors that victims use when they describe events. Central metaphorical themes emerged when victims were asked "What does workplace bullying feel like?" with respect to the bullying process, the bully and the target. The bullying process was seen as a battle or game where bullies played dirty and made their own rules. It was seen as a nightmare, torture, or as a noxious substance like festering garbage. The bully was seen as a dictator, royalty, two-faced actor,

evil, a demon or a witch. The target was seen as a personal slave, animal, prisoner, child or broken hearted. Feelings of being numb and tuned out or feeling like a zombie going through the motions were used to zone out during an attack. (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, Alberts, 2006).

Bullying is most commonly against a subordinate by someone with power and title, yet it does not discriminate by rank. Research has shown that managers can be bullied by subordinates who have varying sources of power over their manager. (Branch et al, 2007). In many common coding schemes a list of concepts are generated in order to sort the comments made in the study. A coding scheme was developed based on a review of the literature in order to assist in the categorizing of situations presented in the reflective writing assignment. We did not restrict the number or occurrence of subthemes or additional codes. Three broad themes reflected in descriptions and supported in bullying research are: the workplace and culture, changes in the workplace and power issues in the workplace (Branch et al, 2007).

Work culture includes areas such as lack of empowerment, ineffective leadership, group conflict, and pressures and deadlines. Work changes include increased pressures and stresses due to technology, or demands from the manager to meet stretch goals. Change may be reflective of downsizing, mergers, new technology, new management or other disruptions to the status quo. Fear and uncertainty resulting from the change can lead to frustration, lack of acceptance, or other negative or retaliatory behaviors. Who has power and how they use it are politically charged aspects of work. Power can be formal or informal and its abuse is often part of a bullying situation in any direction in the workplace hierarchy. A subordinate can have critical knowledge or expertise and wield power over their boss. A manager controls rewards and reprimands and has power to hire and fire however they may not have legitimate power and may suffer from lack of respect from subordinates or from superiors. Targets describe a lack of respect that is explicitly communicated through abusive language, gossip, or a challenge to authority or implicitly communicated through looks, tone of voice, and the silent treatment of stigmatization.

Much has been written about characteristics of bullies, such as genetic or brain differences, childhood experiences, or need for control and power. Bullies do not fit a stereotype of ignorant psychopaths and are usually politically astute and good manipulators of their environment and of others (Namie and Namie, 2004). "Bullying is psychological violence, mostly covert and sometimes overt. Bullying is psychological violence both in the forms it takes and its impact. Regardless of how it is manifested – either verbal abuse or sabotage to render the target unproductive and unsuccessful – it is the aggressor's desire to control the target that motivates the action."(Namie and Namie, 2004). Namie and Namie describe bullies as opportunists and controlling competitors who consider work a zero-sum game and will do anything to advance their careers. They identify four categories of bully: the Screaming Mimi who is angry, humiliates others, and has mood swings; the Constant Critic who is hypercritical, looks for errors and incompetence in others, and resorts to belittling victims; the Two-Headed Snake who undermines others to get ahead and uses divide and conquer schemes to move up; and the Gatekeeper who is obsessed with control and blames performance problems on others (Namie and Namie, 2004).

Researchers have categorized bullying into seven broad groups of behaviors. These behaviors are: stigmatizing or placing the victim in an out group; using victims as scapegoats in such a way as to potentially jeopardize their professional status; harassing someone with less power; increasing work pressure and work load beyond what others are expected to produce; isolating victims by withholding information, career advances, or separating the victim physically or emotionally from the group; repeating reminders of failures, setting the victim up to fail, or not giving the victim credit for success; and, finally, physically harming or abusing the victim, resulting in mental or physical health problems and chronic conditions (Harvey et al., 2006, p. 2).

Tehrani (2004) studied bullying behaviors and found the most prevalent (in order of frequency of incident) to be unfair criticism, intimidation, unpleasant personal remarks, public humiliation, malicious gossip, being ignored, threats, ganging up, physical attacks, and hiding or taking personal property. Namie (2007) suggests that bullies are not psychopaths, but are ambitious Machiavellian types who will use others to advance themselves by harming others.

There is ample discussion in the literature of characteristics of targets of bullying. Frequently, victims have low self-esteem, are not well-connected, are passive and isolated in their work, can be submissive,

and lean toward negativity in outlook. These characteristics can foster and perpetuate victimization by others (Namie and Namie, 2004). Workers that are chronically bullied experience constant anxiety that undermines self-confidence and can cause stress-related symptoms, such as depression, confusion, lack of sleep, panic attacks, irritability, insecurity, and anxiety-related disorders. Some victims show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and cope with unhealthy habits that can lead to alcoholism, weight gain, social withdrawal, migraines, fatigue, ulcers, and cardiovascular disease (WBI Survey, 2007). Victims often face retaliation from the organization and from co-workers that can result in firing, demotion, poor evaluations, or transfers out of the group.

Vickers attacks the stereotype of victims as sensitive, thin-skinned, lacking assertiveness, lacking a sense of humor, and/or paranoid. She found that victims can be attractive, confident, successful and more popular than the bully. They may also have high standards and be recognized as high achievers that are competent and stand up for themselves and others. Vickers also attacks the stereotype of bullies as loud and assertive as inaccurate. She notes that bullies often operate quietly and can be jealous and lack confidence (Vickers, 2006).

Employee exposure to stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction within the political climate of the workplace can produce anger, depression, and aggression at work (Ladebo et al., 2008). This intensifies if employees perceive that management tolerates or does nothing to change the toxic culture with a policy against incivility or by punishing bullies. In essence, the organization is supporting the abusive actions by doing nothing to prevent or stop them. This can encourage aggressive behavior by employees if management does not intervene to suppress harassment (Vigoda, 2002). Researchers propose various strategies that are used by organizations to try to keep bullying under control in the absence of a law to deter acts of bullying. Some organizations recruit peer listeners who are selected and trained to provide a compassionate peer response and offer advice to co-workers who are experiencing bullying at work (Vega and Comer, 2005). Organizations without a network of peers have designated an individual to serve as an ombudsman or a confidential counselor to victims and can recommend medical or psychological help and a course of action to eradicate the problem. Many suggest an informal approach, such as peer mediation, with escalation to human resources. This can resolve an issue when the bully is unaware or oblivious to his or her actions and the simple act of putting them on notice is enough (Vega and Comer, 2005).

Yamada proposes four public policy goals that should be addressed with respect to workplace bullying: prevention; fair and prompt resolution; compensation and assistance; and deterrence (Yamada, 2007). Prevention tactics encourage employers to develop policies, educate employees, and foster a positive culture with dignified treatment for everyone. Yamada advocates internal resolution of disputes in a fair and prompt manner that protects workers and provides incentives to employers who respond effectively to bullying accusations. He states that the legal system should provide relief in the form of compensation and assistance to a victim, such as monetary damages, counseling, and reinstatement to the position if lost due to termination. Finally he advocates deterrence through the threat of punishment to employers who enable bullies (Yamada, 2007).

Organizations are recognizing and analyzing the costs associated with stress, burnout, and depression at work (Tracy et al., 2006). Vickers argues that the focus of organizations should be on the needs of individual employees and away from the well being of the organization. Organizations respond only when they have to in order to satisfy shareholders, react to media, protect from litigation, or change a damaged reputation. In her analysis of responses to bullying, Vickers discusses the harmful effects to employees and the protective measures taken by organizations that are ineffectual in combating workplace bullying. Organizational responses can protect the bully, the company, and the status quo instead of ameliorating the effects of bullying. In her study of Australian organizations, she found that the organizational response made the experience worse for the victim by ignoring, dismissing, not believing, or minimizing the situation (Vickers, 2006).

The best way for employers to hinder anti-bullying legislation would be for them to implement strong anti-bullying policies (Swanton, 2008). Some have predicted that anti-bullying policies will become standard at most companies. Not only is it important to have a policy, an employer must also respond swiftly and appropriately to complaints of improper behavior (Brutocao, 2007). In other words, they must

walk the talk. Even those in favor of strong anti-bullying protection agree that employer policies and enforcement are necessary regardless of whether legislation is passed (Pappas and Szydlowski, 2008).

THEMES RESULTING FROM WRITTEN ANALYSIS

The content analysis resulted in the following thematic tactics used by the bully: verbal humiliation (including email), instilling fear, public embarrassment, inappropriate use of power, work related retaliation, and physical behaviors. Content was also analyzed for impact or result to the organization from bullying. Quotes from the written reflections are sorted by theme and recorded below. Numbering was used to indicate a different source.

VERBAL HUMILIATION (INCLUDING EMAIL)

Participant stories spoke of verbal humiliation most frequently as a tactic of bullying. Most were verbal in nature and some were threatening and demeaning emails sent to intimidate or reinforce a verbal attack.

1. Bob was very aggressive and at meetings he would yell if anyone disagreed with him. He intimidated his reports.
2. We were constantly subjected to verbal abuse, jokes about my performance and my character, blame me for all his problems
3. Publicly humiliate and push until you quit. Question everything that she was asked to work on
4. Raising his voice and making demands
5. Ed singles someone out and continues to push them until they break
6. Verbally abuse my co-worker in staff meetings and after she was gone
7. She was under a lot of stress and she would take it out on him. She would tear into him and make him feel worthless
8. I received daily porn emails that were clearly over the edge
9. This fashion of communication with a sense of superiority is offensive. There was no respect or regard for my skills and ability. I had limited tolerance for her belittling and condescending tone
10. She was hurt and embarrassed when he chastised her in front of everyone saying how she could not even take a message correctly
11. The dean is a woman in her mid 40'2 who is very condescending and belittling to her employees
12. He demeaned me, embarrassed pother employees in front of each other and in front of customers
13. He used verbal humiliation and character assassination to reprimand my co-worker for making a tiny mistake with an ad that wasn't going to be published for a week
14. She would belittle my work, speak down to me and compare me to her 10 year old child
15. He was a sleazy older man. He got in an argument and started screaming and yelling and saying "stupid women like you are secretary's because you are not smart enough to get a better job!"
16. Rather than simply responding that he liked his approach better he became irate and insulted me in front of my peers. His face grew angry, somewhat evil looking with fire in his eyes, and he told me I shouldn't speak because I don't know what I'm talking about.
17. Dennis blew up at him stating that he should learn how to deal with his employees and told him to stop talking because he wasn't providing any value.
18. He continually reminds me of my priorities saying things like "let me repeat…here are your goals…do you know your goals?" He sent me a humiliating email with my goals and priorities. I'm a 15 year veteran and a senior at the company and I do not need someone younger reminding me of my goals. I'm a professional not a child.
19. She came into a board meeting and made a comment in front of everyone that "I hope everyone is prepared today." This was said sarcastically to imply that Tara was unprepared.

20. She also emailed Tara about an error she made on the project they were working on and copy their boss in order to make Tara look bad. This became the norm as their relationship became more and more abusive.

INSTILL FEAR IN THE TARGET

Stories often used the word intimidation and fear to describe bully behaviors and the resulting impact on the target or the culture at work. Fear was created by verbal and physical measures designed to put the target down while elevating the position of the bully.

1. My body tensed, I felt nervous and my voice was shaky
2. There was an atmosphere of fear of the team president. He was fearful to take another job. Afraid of the team president so he turned down the job offered to him fearful that the president would bad mouth him to the rival team and then fire him for trying to get another job
3. Tense and unhealthy environment for everyone who were all fearful of making a mistake
4. She often pointed out every little mistake that her direct reports made posturing herself in an authoritative threatening position when she would yell at her employees
5. No one wanted to raise their voice because they were afraid and did not know how to manage the situation. Everything was meant to disturb, trouble and bother him (the target) while he was in the office
6. He loudly reprimanded me pointing out specifics while customers gawked in awe
7. She treated me as a child and made me feel trapped. While working for her I didn't feel as smart or good at my job
8. After many weeks of this demeaning process which seemed like an eternity, I finally discussed this humiliating experience with my parents
9. On one occasion the Dean directly told her that she did not like her and she'd better watch her back because she knows people in "high places."
10. Most team members did not ask for his advice. Sometimes issues needed to be resolved immediately but they panicked due to his aggression and emotional outbursts
11. These women were quick to blame me or our firm as opposed to their customer. When a problem arose they would assume we were at fault. They treated customers with more respect than those who helped them achieve their goals on a daily basis.
12. He talked down to people like they were stupid or wasting his time, constantly yelling at employees for no reason, and he even cursed at a cashier in front of customers. I was scared to confront him about his behavior myself for fear of retaliation
13. He would continuously make inappropriate comments to us ladies and he would always be telling inappropriate jokes regarding sex and women
14. While he is brilliant, he is the most negative, condescending person I've ever met. He treats everyone with the same negative management. In every meeting he will humiliate at least one of us, if not multiple people in one meeting
15. He didn't like being questioned so he snapped at me very angrily asking if I knew what my goals were and that if I didn't he could pull them up on his computer right then and there and go over them with me to make sure I understood what I should be focusing on. It was quite humiliating
16. Newer people were afraid of being fired so they accept his vulgarity and yelling for fear of being fired
17. He would launch into a profanity laced tangent and create an atmosphere of fear to prove he was in charge. I've never met anyone like him – it's like he was proud of what he was saying. It put everyone on eggshells.
18. Tara would try avoiding interaction with Hillary and began to have anxiety about whether Hillary was sabotaging her in the eyes of their mutual boss. The reason I feel this is so potentially dangerous is that Hillary is cleverly disguising her bullying and the abuse Tara takes goes unnoticed.

19. The two often have altercations at work, and Tara (who lives in Paris) will often phone home to me and describe these situations. She often feels very bad about the fights she has with Hillary and will look to me for some comfort. What I have realized is that the things Hillary says and does are very subtle, and seem to affect women much more than men. It was clear to me that Tara was very upset and it was negatively affecting her work.

PUBLIC EMBARRASSMENT

Victims are traumatized by intimidation and humiliation when serving as the target of a bully. Public embarrassment magnifies the impact of the abuse by suffering in a public forum in addition to enduring private reactions. Peers and customers witnessing workplace abuse adds another dimension to this toxic behavior b creating witnesses to the abuse.

1. When Amanda spoke during the meeting Ed cut her off and made comments under his breath
2. Co-workers were present so it made her feel self-conscious and embarrassed
3. The rant involved lots of inappropriate language. He questioned my co-workers work ethic and character, which made him look bad in front of the entire office, sarcastically saying things like "not everyone is as smart as…."
4. Rest of the employees feared what would happen to them if they made a mistake after the president made a public example of my co-worker
5. She began to yell at Tony and he realized there was no way to calm her down
6. He chastised her in front of everyone calling her stupid
7. He regularly publicly yells at or humiliates employees. The office is an open cubicle area where the majority of employees sit so everyone can see and hear what is going on. He marched out to the employee's desk and announced that he needed to come out and physically sit with him to watch him work to ensure he actually did what he was supposed to do. He did this for days and the employee finally exploded stating that he couldn't work under such pressure and they had a screaming match out in the open

INAPPROPRIATE USE OF POWER

Similar to sexual harassment, workplace harassment is an abuse of power usually directly by the powerful to the powerless. Even if the victim has a position of power and is a manager bullied by a subordinate, the overwhelming effects of bullying creates feeling of powerlessness and helplessness in the victim. Self esteem and self confidence are eroded and can result in feelings of ineffectiveness and inability to do a good job at work.

1. My job depended on my boss and he had the power to terminate me. As a young man I was excited about going to work, but when Bob became our supervisor I dreaded going to work and I would miss days, I would avoid my boss. I began to second guess everything I did and I was not able to do my job
2. She left the meeting feeling discouraged and embarrassed. Ed singles someone out and continues to push until they break. It made Amanda question her ability to perform her job
3. There wasn't a lot a person could do besides swallowing their pride and taking the verbal abuse he would give out
4. He could never be sure if he would be talking to Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde. Sarah freely admitted to micromanaging and even openly bragged about it on occasion. She badgered and intimidated her direct reports
5. She would speak down to me
6. He brought me to tears. I know it sounds absurd but I actually liken him to someone who brainwashed people, like in cults, so they can manipulate and control them. I have become depressed at times and completely unmotivated which is totally out of character for me. I started getting lethargic and moped around when I got home from work.

7. Hillary is very sarcastic and manipulating and relies on her strong personality and has an opinion on everything. Tara is a more timid person, she works hard and at times is more standoffish and quiet. Tara is much more sensitive and Hillary takes advantage of this as do most people who are bullies.

WORK RELATED RETALIATION AGAINST TARGET

In some instances the bully has used their power to implement changes in work practices to the detriment of the victim. The bully uses his/her authority to create negative work assignments, schedules and other workplace benefits that burden the victim and treat them unfairly in the distribution of benefits and harms. Victims suffer from more harms such as undesirable shifts and assignments.

1. Looked for ways to make life miserable, sudden schedule changes, time off denials, taking credit away from sales done by the sales person and giving it to someone else, never praise for a job well done, but there was always criticism
2. She commonly took credit for my work while doing nothing herself
3. She constantly undermines her team by reviewing their work – always finding a reason to criticize the way cases are handled. She incessantly monitors by watching over their shoulders, something she refers to as " checking in." she even told one of her employees on the first day to provide a doctor's note if she has a condition that requires constant use of a bathroom
4. Because she was so financially irresponsible she would have her employees write her bills out of their own checkbooks and pay them back at a later date with cash. Rather than assigning them work she would pick and choose who could go to lunch with her instead of working
5. He began asking me to walk his dog for him. Then one day he asked me to pick up his dry cleaning. Then he made me go get the oil changed in his car. Then another day he made me go buy him cigarettes. Before I knew it I was running all his personal errands for him. He asked me to get him a file from upstairs and my jaw must have hit the floor. This publisher was publishing nude magazines
6. He approached me while I was grabbing some food and demanded to know why I wasn't working. We worked 9 hour shifts and should have gotten a half hour for lunch but never did. He expected us to work right through and I'm hypoglycemic and must have food every 4 hours. I was so infuriated that I told him he could call the ambulance if I passed out in the store

PHYSICAL BEHAVIORS TOWARD THE TARGET

At times bullies use physical manifestations to reinforce and intimidate the target. Gestures that subjugate or instill fear in the victim can be on a continuum from awkward to physically threatening or violent.

1. She told me that on three different occasions the Dean would physically bump her without acknowledgement or excusing herself. This was witnessed by several co-workers. I could understand f this was an accident but this by no means was an accident
2. As I was returning from the men's room I saw Bob banging and kicking the door. I heard him say, "Al I know you are in there, if you don't come out you will be fired."
3. He would bang his hands on the table while he yelled. Bob never apologized for his outbursts. Everyone was a victim of Bobs attacks. He had the reputation of being a loose cannon.
4. Sarah stormed over to Tony completely livid and shaking. She towered over Tony in his chair and pointed her finger at him. She was now trembling
5. Customers would watch the manager as he interrupted me, reorganizing the shelf after I had already done it, piece by piece, throwing items on the floor

RESULTS / RAMIFICATIONS IN BULLYING ORGANIZATIONS

Unfortunately, many organizations do nothing to try and eliminate or rectify a situation of bullying. Policies are not widespread and Human Resource departments do little to resolve the dilemma. However, in a few instances the bully did apologize or the company reorganized to try and remove the victim from the workgroup or remove the bully from the reporting chain. Many victims left or are considering leaving the company.

1. The boss said he was sorry in front of everyone at the Christmas party. He apologized and the secretary accepted it but still to this day it is awkward between the two
2. My parents instructed me to resign immediately. Even though I needed the income, I complied
3. I learned what I should not do as a manager. Most team members did not want to work with him again and gave reasons to not join him in the next project. The next project was postponed because he didn't have enough members to start it. Those who did were new employees because they could not avoid working on his project
4. Prior to working for this man I liked my job. After he came on board I dreaded work every day. I looked forward to the days when he did not work. He caused people to quit their jobs and caused the rest of us to hate our jobs. I took a considerable pay cut even though I just got engaged and moved in with my fiancé. I now had a wedding to plan and pay for. But the emotional stress he caused me in that job made it well worth the pay cut
5. The culture changed over time when the company hired supervisors with a college degree and the leadership style was phased out as older supervisors retired
6. I filed a report with the FBI and had an excellent conversation with their investigator. I look forward to being there the day they make the arrest
7. Daniela went directly to the unemployment office and filed a claim for working under harsh working conditions. He had to pay her unemployment
8. Currently, Ed is on management probation and has to have weekly meetings with his team that are monitored by varying levels of upper management. Amanda was offered a position in another department which I believe was management's way to free her of having to be in that situation again
9. The result of not only this bullying situation but others has caused there to be an atmosphere of fear in the office
10. Tony never mentioned this story and many others of intimidation and humiliation until he left the company. During his exit interview he did not want to burn any bridges so he kept quiet on the matter. Tony realized that he needed to find another position in the company or leave. He promptly left the company
11. The situation was resolved by taking this sales person out of that office and transferred him to a healthier environment where his talents can be used. He became the best performing sales person in the region and shortly afterwards the sales manager (bully) retired
12. Multiple times I tried to resolving the situation by speaking to other managers and trying to get a truer assessment of the job I was doing. After some time this manager quit but I had already begun a job search. I found a new job and have never looked back
13. I am a strong willed, qualified and ethical person. In spite of feeling unappreciated and frustrated I did not let her attitude affect my goals and ambitions too much
14. Unfortunately no action was ever taken against Jeanne mainly because most of her employees end up leaving the company out of frustration. The few who did complain were transferred to another department. It is well known that Jeanne is considered to be a hard worker and is highly favored by management
15. She told the HR manager that she will not allow this to happen anymore and if need be she will take it into her own hands by possibly hiring a lawyer. Starr stated that it must have been handled with the Dean discreetly because the Dean has not bumped her ever since she met with the HR manager. It has been 2 years since the Dean first bumped Starr and it has not happened since then

16. The next project was postponed because he did not have enough members to start it
17. I spoke with my manager and explained the situation. He suggested we sit down and meet about the problem. It resulted in a new allocation of duties. This was a quick fix until someone was hired, which took close to a year
18. Supposedly he was spoken to about his behavior and it improved for a couple weeks, and when things got a bit stressful or didn't go as planned, he reverted to his former behavior
19. Unfortunately the reorganization to remove him lasted only a year. The CEO didn't want to deal with the daily details. He explained that Dennis is Dennis. He knows his style is rough, but Dennis isn't going anywhere and we just need to learn to adjust to his style
20. I would cringe every time he would call my name in fear that I would need to go into his office again and reap the same yelling that occurred. He might have gotten a little out of hand yelling but it did make me focus more on assignments and even though the situation was taken to another level he did get his point across. It resulted in me improving my follow-up skills
21. She told me I should stay until she could find me another job. I honestly did not want to be alone with him in the same room. About 2 weeks later I got a new job so I left and vowed I would never work in a job environment like that again. I think he saw me as a stupid college student that he could take advantage of and make me do what he wanted. I regret doing all that menial work and not standing up for myself. But now that I'm older I know better
22. No action was taken because of fear of retaliation from the news director. Nothing changed and it probably never will
23. I went to HR but nothing was done. I use every excuse I can find to not go to work. If there's a snowflake I'll not go to work and do anything to get out of it. I went back to school to try and regain some self-esteem. It's hard to imagine why a huge company like this did nothing
24. My sister is very shy and timid and a type B but her work peer is the opposite. She's a type A and a real barracuda who knows exactly what buttons to push to get to my sister. They work for the same guy so my sister is afraid of looking bad while Hannah makes herself look good
25. The company was driven by numbers and he produced what they wanted so it'll never change as long as he's there
26. I question myself constantly. I dread going to work because I never know what I'm going to have to deal with and it's just wearing me down. I got to a point where I thought the only way to deal with it was not to deal with it. Just ignore him. Don't let him get to me. Control my emotions and don't take it personally. I realized it isn't the right approach. I need to name it. I need to let him know that I'm not going to put up with it. I've started searching for another job at the worst time possible, but I remain hopeful something will come along. I feel like I have renewed strength to deal with it and I refuse to let him get the best of me.
I know I'm not alone. I've talked with several other employees who feel the same-both my peers and subordinates. I've had some of my employees quit because of it. They praised my management, but said that there was no way to isolate them from him. One employee, a man, filed a harassment claim to HR against him. HR had the two of them sit down. Dennis basically told the employee he is who he is and he isn't changing. HR didn't really do anything. The CEO thought the claims were ludicrous basically because it was a 'man' complaining and it wasn't 'sexual' so he should toughen up and be a 'man'. They boiled it down to the employee being inferior. It isn't healthy for the company or the employees. Morale has declined even further.

RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF GROUP PANEL DISCUSSION OF BULLYING STORIES

Analyzing face to face interaction enabled the researchers to look beyond what was written by participants and further understand bullying from observation of the body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and level of animation generated by the topic. It can thereby augment survey and written data and provide a rich contextual format for exploration of this complex phenomena. Observing how language is used to describe bullying sheds light on how it is conceptualized and articulated by targets

and observers. It is interesting to note that similar to targets withdrawn and silent reaction to bullying, members of the group discussion were also quiet and reserved, or hesitant to publicly voice their story. The written word may have afforded more comfort and anonymity than a group forum where voice is assigned and accountable.

A practical benefit to hearing each other's stories is the ability to better understand and categorize behavior and get validation that individuals are not unique. It broadens the scope of the definition of bullying and enlightens all participants to the breadth, depth and frequency of workplace bullying. There was a wide range of participants yet a common set of body language relating to each other's stories with verbalization of things like "That's exactly what I felt" or " I had no idea that someone else like him existed."

The researchers witnessed lots of head nodding and signs of alignment. Stories tended to build on one another as ideas from one participants triggered another comment. The discussion shared many emotions that bonded targets to a common emotional experience. This is important since bullying situations are often isolated and unspoken due to embarrassment, lack of voice or shame of being a target. Panel members used animated and demonstrative body language to reinforce the physical tactics of the bullies who pounded on tables and pointed fingers at targets. They mirrored the sighing and rolling of eyes that were indications of exasperation used by the bully to intimidate or humiliate the target. A female panel member mimicked the bully using clenched hands and waved paper to mimic what her boss does to confront her.

PANEL RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

The researchers recorded responses given to the following 5 questions from the six panel members. The additional fifteen observers at times offered a response as well. Exact quotes of words and phrases were recorded. There was no company policy or procedure in any of the firms represented by the 21 participants.

QUESTION: WHAT DISTINGUISHES MICROMANAGING FROM BULLYING?

"Delivery of the message and the tone used. If the delivery is overbearing, using finger pointing and yelling it is bullying. If the attack is personal and not performance related it can be bullying and not just micromanaging. Look at the emotional reaction you get back. You may be frustrated and annoyed with micromanaging but there is not a negative impact. The bully demands "is the report done yet?" where the micromanager says "what can I do to help?"

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE A VICTIM OF BULLYING?

"Most people know when they have crossed the line and mistreated someone. You gauge people to determine how much they can take. If they are sensitive you back off. Bullies need to embarrass others and can sense who they go after. Victims have a loss of self worth, they are nervous, stressed, anxious and don't want to go to work. They lose sleep. Victim may be asked to do repetitive tasks and they may not get answers to questions as a subtle way of sending a signal. You may not know you are a victim at the time it's occurring. You think it's isolated and just a bad day but it becomes a pattern. It starts to make you angry and you obsess about it all day. Victims feel bad about themselves and they get depressed and cry. They feel powerless and trapped. They feel humiliated and judged. They may become a joke at work or get a nickname. They withdraw and feel timid and weak. Victims change their regular patterns as a signal that they are being victimized, such as sleep patterns, or work routines in order to avoid the bully."

QUESTION: HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE A WORKPLACE BULLY?

"A bully gets enjoyment from controlling others and has misplaced aggression. They are pushy and unprofessional. They are cowards but disguise it by acting cool and collected. They are aggressive toward people and things. They break things. They are arrogant and constantly pick on people. They are relentless perfectionists. They have low self esteem and are insecure so they take it out on others. They lack a filter and are inappropriate in language and deeds because they don't have the capacity to sift thoughts and feelings. They are scary and threatening. They are fearful of their bosses and take it out on people below them."

QUESTION: WHAT TACTICS OR BEHAVIORS DO BULLIES USE?

"They use an in your face tone and are impatient and uptight with a short fuse. They use intimidation tactics like getting in your space and towering over you. My boss puts his hand on my arm to prevent me from leaving his side when he rants and raves. They take credit for others work and don't accept responsibility for their actions. They make demeaning and sarcastic comments like a smart know it all and blame everyone but themselves. Some use gestures and body language like sighs and eye rolling or interrupting you when you're speaking to put you down and make you feel incompetent."

QUESTION: WHAT DO YOUR COMPANIES HAVE IN PLACE TO PREVENT BULLYING AT WORK? IS THERE A POLICY AGAINST IT? PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW IF BULLYING IS SUSPECTED?

"We have business conduct guidelines for ethics and treatment of customers that we sign off on and take an online training module to prove we've read them. There is a hot line and a grievance procedure to report an employee relations problem but nothing specific that addresses bullying. We have an open door policy in HR but they do not use discretion and confidentiality is breeched and nothing gets done. We work really hard at our jobs sometime until one or two in the morning and weekends and we expect some loyalty and appreciation for our efforts. It's really disheartening when the company values the bully over a hard worker and does nothing to correct the situation. The company is focused on product only. The managers were all life time military people lacking in interpersonal skills. The style changed after hiring younger managers with college degrees."

RESULTS

The participants provided information on age, gender, ethnicity, employment and characteristics of the bullying. In addition information on whether a complaint was lodged with human resources and whether the victim left the company. This information was supplemented with an analysis of the victim's relationship to the bully, the victim's coping ability, and the victim's personality characteristics as determined by the authors based on reading the written description of the bullying incident.

Analysis of this data is detailed below. We analyze by age, gender, ethnicity, victim personality characteristics and relationship with bully, and bullying behavior.

The sample consisted of 67 victims of bullying; 27 males and 40 females. Below is displayed our analysis on age, gender, ethnicity, personality traits and the victim/bully relationship. The victims worked in a very wide range of industries including manufacturing, financial services, food service, marketing; staffing, retail, construction, sports, automotive and real estate. While some industries may exhibit higher levels of bullying, our sample size consisted of victims from a wide range of employer industries and the sample size insufficient to reveal any industry characteristics associated with bullying. We were able to analyze bullying based upon age, gender, ethnic, personality and victim/bully relationship variables.

Tables C summarizes our gender analysis.

Age and gender analysis of our sample results reveals:

- The victim average and median ages are lower than the bully age. Victims complaining to human resources tend to be older while age does not seem to impact the decision to leave.
  - o Victim average age is 30 and median age is 26.
  - o Bully average age is 37 and median age is 35.
  - o While the victims who complain to human resources are likely to be older, 36 versus the average victim age of 30; those who leave the firm are not older than the average victim.
- Bullies are more likely to be male than female.
  - o Almost 60% of victims in our sample were female
  - o Bullies were about 60% male.
- Complaints to human resources are relatively more frequently lodged by females.
  - o While our sample included almost 60% female victims, over 80 of those who complained to human resources were female.
- Gender does not appear to impact the decision to leave the firm.

TABLE C
GENDER ANALYSIS

Victim: Analysis by gender	
Total # victims	67
# male	27
% male	40.3%
# female	40
% female	59.7%

Bully: Analysis by gender	
Total # victims	67
# male	40
% male	59.7%
# female	27
% female	40.3%

Analysis - Victim Complains to Human Resources	
Total number of victims	67
# that complain to HR	11
% complain to HR	16.4%
# male	2
% male	18.2%
# female	9
% female	81.8%
Avg age of victim who complained to HR	
	36
Avg age of males who complained to HR	
	39
Avg age of females who complained to HR	
	35

Analysis - Victim Leaves Company	
Total number of victims	67
Total that leave company	28
% that leave company	41.8%
# male	12
% male	42.9%
# female	16
% female	57.1%
Complained to HR	1
% complained to HR	3.6%
Avg age of victim who left	
	31
Avg age of males who left	
	28
Avg age of females who left	
	34

Analysis by ethnicity results reveals:

- Black victims were relatively more likely to complain to human resources and to leave than White, Hispanic or Asian victims.

TABLE D
ETHNIC ANALYSIS

Victim Analysis by ethnicity		
White	55	83.3%
Black	6	9.1%
Hispanic	4	6.1%
Asian	1	1.5%
Total	66	100.0%

Complaint to HR by Ethnicity	Total number	Percent
White	8	72.7%
Black	3	27.3%
Hispanic	0	0.0%
Asian	0	0.0%
Total	11	100.0%

Victim left by Ethnicity	Total number	Percent
White	22	78.6%
Black	4	14.3%
Hispanic	2	7.1%
Asian	0	0.0%
Total	28	100.0%

Next we analyze personality characteristics of the victim and the relationship between the victim and bully.

Analysis of victim personality characteristics reveals:
- o "Assertive" are relatively more likely to report a complaint to HR than to leave.
- o "Professionals" are less likely to report a complaint but more likely to leave the firm.
- o Gender does not seem to have an impact.

TABLE E
PERSONALITY ANALYSIS

Victim Analysis by personality			% Male	% Female	% White	% Black	% who reported to HR	% who left
Tough cookie	10	14.9%	30.0%	70.0%	90.0%	10.0%	30.0%	40.0%
Assertive	11	16.4%	36.4%	63.6%	63.6%	18.2%	36.4%	18.2%
Professional	20	29.9%	45.0%	55.0%	90.0%	5.0%	15.0%	55.0%
Easily intimidated	21	31.3%	38.1%	61.9%	81.0%	4.8%	0.0%	42.9%
Spineless	3	4.5%	33.3%	66.7%	66.7%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
Paranoid	2	3.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%
Total	67	100.0%						

Analysis of the relationship between the victim and the bully reveals:

- o Victims are most likely to be subordinates but nay be co-workers or even bosses.
- o When the boss is a victim of bullying, he/she is about 50% likely to leave.
- o Bullying by co-workers is relatively less likely to lead to complaining to HR or leaving than other
- o Gender and ethnicity do not seem to have an impact.

TABLE F
ANALYSIS OF VICTIM/BULLY RELATIONSHIP

Victim relationship to Bully			% who reported to HR	% who left	Victim female	Victim male	Victim white	Victim black
Boss	11	16.4%	18.2%	54.5%	63.6%	36.4%	63.6%	18.2%
Co-worker	16	23.9%	6.3%	31.3%	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%	0.0%
Subordinate	40	59.7%	20.0%	42.5%	60.0%	40.0%	80.0%	10.0%
Total	67	100.0%						

Finally we analyze the type of bullying behavior.
Analysis of bullying behavior reveals:
- o Public humiliation is reported more frequently than instilling fear or micromanaging. Actual or threatened abuse is least common with 3 victims in our sample reporting actual repeated physical abuse and 15 reporting threatened abuse.
- o Gender and ethnicity do not seem to have an impact.
- o Almost 48% of those who felt micromanaged left the firm.

TABLE G
ANALYSIS OF BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Type of Bullying Behavior		% reported to HR	% who left	Victim female	Victim male	Victim white	Victim black
Extreme level of micromanaging	62.7%	16.7%	47.6%	57.1%	42.9%	76.2%	14.3%
Exterme level of Instilling Fear	71.6%	12.5%	43.8%	50.0%	50.0%	79.2%	10.4%
Physical Abuse (3 repeated; 15 threatened)	26.9%	22.2%	44.4%	27.8%	72.2%	83.3%	16.7%
Public Humiliation	83.6%	16.1%	44.6%	57.1%	42.9%	83.9%	8.9%

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

It is both theoretically and practically important to review the results of this study and apply them to organizational behavior. On a theoretical level the results add to the survey research and enrich the accumulated knowledge with qualitative discussion of a complex issue. Analyzing written and verbal stories allows for the discovery of categories created by the writers to frame the experience. The results differ from the earlier research in this field that looked at definitions, legal recourse for victims or compared bullying to other types of harassment. Since bullying does not easily have a named presence in the workplace due to the lack of legal protection, it becomes more important to name this faceless and potentially costly workplace problem. As reported by Tracy et al, "An inductive approach is especially worthwhile for making sense of messy interactive processes such as bullying, that have no definite face. Such as analysis serves to name and make tangible a process that can be invisible." (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, Alberts, 2006)

On a practical level the writing down of stories can have a positive effect on targets as well as witnesses to a negative event. In the case of an ephemeral phenomena like bullying it can help to make

the situation real and thereby empower the victim to seek remedy or redress. This may help to provide a source of control for an otherwise uncontrollable situation of powerlessness and victimization. In a group setting where others hear stories like their own it can help create a call to action and perhaps motivate positive change or movement toward resolution of the dilemma. This can also make bullying more credible and reduce the blame placed on victims for allowing it to perpetuate. Individuals may also recognize possible precursors to bullying behaviors in themselves that they may be unaware of and can prevent a problematic situation from developing. This can help to turn bullying interventions from a reactive to a proactive mode and potentially lessen the occurrence of undesirable workplace trauma.

Another practical application of the research is the awareness among Human Resource and Employee Relations professionals that organizational policy should address workplace values and state a zero tolerance for abusive behavior of all types in a professional environment. In lieu of legal protection for victims a well communicated and crafted policy is the safeguard to limit disruptive and nonproductive workplace acts. A strong policy and culture that explicitly and implicitly prohibits workplace harassment should limit the risk of more aggressive types of damaging behavior such as sabotaging work or violence at work (Neuman and Baron, 2003). Further, while we did not attempt to document the financial cost of bullying, many types of bullying behavior led to victims leaving the firm. This practice is then quite costly in a financial sense as well. Interestingly just over 16% of victims complained to human resources while 42% reported leaving the firm.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

One aspect of data gathering was a group discussion of bullying situations and as such limited the floor time for any one individual to give in depth and lengthy descriptions of the episode. Size of the group and the number of willing participants may have limited the ability to get additional detail. Researchers using focus group methodology noted the shortcomings of this approach, but also noted that a group setting may mimic exactly what individuals face in the workplace where there are competing demands for their voice among many others. " In both focus group and organizational venues, employees have voice only among a cacophony of other voices, competing demands, and within short windows of time…the focus group structure provides a unique view into the difficulty employees have in articulating their story to organizational superiors, coworkers, or HR personnel."(Tracy et al, 2006)

Limitations include the participant sample in size and scope including their unique status as MBA and undergraduate students in a USA based university. One might expect a highly educated and professional participant group to have experienced or been a witness to less bullying, however it is interesting to note that bullying appears to be gender, race and age neutral affecting all workers and not just the powerless and uneducated subordinates in the workplace. The variety of industries represented and workplace experience support the commonality of bullying as a leveling phenomena across varying demographics. Bullying as a common experience was seen through physical body language as well as verbal assertions of similar experiences with coworkers and bosses.

Another limitation of the study is that it does not account for personality styles and differences among participants, nor does it allow for in depth analysis of various organizational factors that may exist in the culture of the organizations that allow or contribute to bullying. The study did not control for fabrication or the fact that participants may have exaggerated or lied. Participants may also slant or distort the situation to protect their position in the group or falsify details in order to present an enhanced or positive picture.

A major limitation of the study is an obvious one in that we only heard one perspective on the situation and did not interview other parties involved (usually the bully or manager). This can distort the perspective to not account for other work conditions and variables unknown to the researchers. The voice of the bully is often neglected in the research of this topic since it is easier to get targets to relay their story and thereby get redress and satisfaction.

Resistance to bullying can take many forms but most often victims leave and workplace productivity suffers. Most organizations do not have formal policies against bullying and the behavior affects not only

targets but witnesses to public humiliation of the victim. Organizations will become more ethical and humane by acknowledging the stories of workplace bullying and creating a culture that forbids this practice. Ultimately, we are about trying to create positive change in organizations and more ethical cultures and ethical decision making in our workplaces. It is our hope that research such as this serves to illuminate a dark topic that has been kept under wraps, and shed light on a disturbing and complex workplace behavior.

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