Collateral Damage of Workplace Bullying

by

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Second Reader     Date
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Collateral Damage of Workplace Bullying

INTRODUCTION

A form of harassment in the workplace has become a major problem for today’s organizations. It is called “workplace bullying”. The behaviors of the perpetrators are very similar to that of schoolyard bullies but, they are adults and their playground is the workplace. This counterproductive behavior (CPB) in the workplace can harm employees and organizations. These behaviors, directed at others, include: emotional abuse, revenge, retaliation, mobbing, and aggression.

Workplace bullying occurs when an individual repeatedly and aggressively targets another employee using uncivil and harassing tactics. These tactics can come in various forms and levels of severity. They can be as subtle as silent treatment, not returning telephone calls, deliberately not inviting someone to an important meeting, or public humiliation such as verbally belittling someone in front of others, negatively interfering with someone’s work tasks, and spreading gossip and mistruths about someone.

The problem has become so prevalent that it has attracted the attention of researchers, scholars, and employment law experts. Workplace bullying sometimes goes unrecognized because the behavior may not fall into the category of sexual or discriminatory harassment. Although it has many similarities to sexual harassment, this type of harassment is not illegal in the United States. But, as of May 6, 2009, sixteen states have introduced anti-bullying legislation in an attempt to give victims of severe workplace bullying a legal recourse to get compensated for their injuries (Namie 2009).

According to a 2007 survey directed by Dr. Gary Namie, founder of the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI), 54 million Americans have experienced or witnessed workplace
bullying. Dr. Namie’s survey revealed that 49 percent of adult Americans are affected by it, either through direct experience or by witnessing it. He says because such a high percentage of American Workers are affected by workplace bullying, it is considered an epidemic. However, due to its career-jeopardizing potential, it is a “silent epidemic” and an “un-discussable” topic at work.

According to author Robert Sutton, who is an organizational psychologist and professor at Stanford University, workplace bullying can negatively affect the organization’s bottom line. In a 2004 Harvard Business Review article, he mentions an IT company that calculated the expenses attributed to the behavior with one of its star salesman. Turnover, legal bills and anger-management courses totaled $160,000 (Takeuchi Cullen 2007).

A 1992 study by Emily Bassman, a human resources expert, found that abusive work environments result in fear and mistrust, resentment, hostility, feelings of humiliation, withdrawal, play-it-safe strategies, and hiding mistakes (Yamada 2007). Harassed employees who lose trust in the relationship with their employer can feel their psychological contract has been violated. They may respond by neglecting their duties, practice work slowdowns, or provide customers with poor service (Rousseau 2005). When employees’ morale is low, they are less productive and that creates a loss to the company. Employees may also feel less inclined to do a good job when dealing with customers. This could have a negative effect on customer service relationships and result in customer dissatisfaction. Another cost associated with workplace bullying is high turnover. The cost of replacing an employee can be two to three times that person’s salary.

Not only does this behavior distract targets of bullies, it also affects co-workers who are aware of the bullying events and incidents. Employees who witness the humiliation and
degradation of others can also be affected by bullying. Even though they are not the brunt of the abuse, they can begin to lose trust in the organization’s ability to operate on a professional level. They can also feel vulnerable to this type of behavior if they see the corporation fails to resolve the issue.

According to Dr. Gary Namie’s 2007 Survey, 40 percent of victims quit their jobs to escape mistreatment. Only 38 percent informally notified their employer, 4 percent of cases filed a formal complaint, and only 3 percent filed a lawsuit. How do witnesses or observers respond to these situations? Results of the survey also revealed that 45 percent of bullied targets reported the stress from this experience caused health problems. Do those who witness workplace bullying also suffer from stress and/or health problems as a result of their experience? Dr. Namie’s survey found that 56 percent of those surveyed felt that the reason bullying happened was due to the bully’s personality, 20 percent felt it was because of the target’s personality or their unacceptable job performance, and 14 percent felt how the employer ran the work environment was at fault. What was the perception of the witnesses or observers on the cause of the situation in their workplace bullying experience?

This study focused on the impact workplace bullying has on witnesses. It specifically sought to understand how this behavior affected them personally, including their work environment. The research also determined the personal characteristics and situational conditions that influenced a person’s decision to become involved in the conflict; as well as those who decided not to get involved in the conflict.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher will seek to gain an understanding of how workplace bullying effects those who are not targets but who witness this behavior aimed toward individuals in their workplace. How do they cope with this situation? Do they react differently than the targets or victims of workplace bullies? Would their course of action differ if there were corporate policies or laws protecting employees from this type of behavior? In addition, this study will also seek to gain knowledge about the harmful effects workplace bullying has on their workplace environment.

Bully Behavior Defined

Scientists have found the prevalence of bullying in the American workplace tops the rates found in Scandinavian countries and is equal with those in Great Britain (Bryner 2007). Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) and Zogby international conducted 7740 online interviews of a group that is representative of the adult population of the U.S. To date, this has been the largest scientific survey of this phenomenon in the U.S. Statistical data was gathered on racial groups; age groups; geographical regions; political party self-identification; and gender. A brief summary of the key findings is as follows:

- **Workplace bullying is an epidemic**
  37% of American workers, 54 million people, have been bullied at work. It affects half (49%) of American adults, 71.5 million workers. (Section 2, page 4)

- **Bully is same-gender/same-race harassment ignored by current laws**
  Bullying is four times more prevalent than illegal discriminatory harassment.

- **American employers can and do ignore bullying**
  In 62% of the cases, when made aware of bullying, employers worsen the problem or simply do nothing (Section 4, page 9)

- **Most bullies are bosses – the stereotype is real**
  72% of bullies are bosses. 55% of those bullied are rank-and-file workers. (Section 5, page 10)
- **Bullying most strongly affects women**
  Women are targeted by bullies more frequently (in 57% of cases), especially by other women (in 75% of cases). (Section 3, page 7)

- **Bullying is a public health hazard**
  For 45% of bullied targets, stress affects their health. 33% suffer for more than one year (Section 7, page 15)

- **Bullied individuals are not “sue-crazy,” many fail to even complain**
  Only 3% of bullied targets file lawsuits. 40% never complain. (Section 7, page 14)

- **Perpetrators suffer little despite inflicting suffering**
  Targets have to stop the vast majority of bullying (77%) by losing their jobs despite being the ones harmed. (Section 8, page 16) (Namie 2007).

Workplace Bullying is a form of harassment but it is not illegal in the U.S. A 2004 study by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), found that one in four companies surveyed acknowledged bullying behavior existed in their organizations. They defined it as “repeated intimidation, slandering, social isolation or humiliation” (Pyrillis 2007). According to experts, a surprising number of bullying cases involve health care settings, with senior hospital workers, particularly doctors and supervisors, harassing nurses and technicians. The problem is also common in academia and the legal profession (Parker-Pope 2008).

Counterproductive behavior in the workplace can harm employees and organizations. They can range from severe, systematic, abusive bullying to milder, ambiguous episodes of workplace incivility (Fox 2005). Mobbing as it pertains to this phenomenon means continually harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label mobbing to be applied to the particular activity, the interaction or process has to occur repeatedly and regularly and over a period of time. The process of mobbing escalates until the person who is confronted with the abusive behavior ends up in an inferior position and ultimately becomes the target of the aggressor (Fox 2005).
Some of the subtle tactics used by workplace bullies are eye rolls, a mean glare, as well as other verbal and non-verbal dismissive gestures to more serious behaviors such as a supervisor removing critical duties from a subordinate and then accusing them of not doing their job (Parker-Pope 2008). Workplace bullies are sometimes described as two-faced actors, narcissistic dictators and devils that make others feel like vulnerable children, slaves and even prisoners (Bryner 2006).

**Organizational culture and other causes**

All bullies may not be aware of the effects of their behavior because of lack of communication between perpetrators and victims. In some cases perpetrators may not receive realistic feedback about their behavior (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003) (page 244-245) (Fox 2005).

There are certain personality types that could be more prone to foster bullying behavior. Scientists suggest that the structure of some American workplaces could also be responsible for breeding bullies. Bullying can become a cultural norm, for example, in the armed forces where acting tough may be seen as character building (MacDonald 2006). Workplace cultures that demand high levels of competition can actually encourage bullying (Bryner 2007). For example, in work environments where competition and economic rationalism increase pressures that could promote the use of hard management style that can inadvertently lead to the use of intimidation and undue criticism of employees (McAvoy and Murtagh, 2003; McCarthy, 1996; Sheehan, 1996) (Djurkovic, McCormack 2006).

Some corporate cultures accept bullying as being a tough management style (Parker-Pope 2008). Uncivil behavior in one setting may not be considered uncivil in another; however, we can hold a common understanding of workplace incivility as behavior that disrupts mutual respect at work (Fox 2005). When nothing is done about workplace bullying, the employer
becomes the bully’s accomplice, whether deliberately or inadvertently, by allowing it to continue (Namie 2007).

**Impact on Victims**

Targets of extreme bullying can end up with permanent psychological damage, stress disorders, increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and even thoughts of suicide (Bryner 2007). Some bully victims report having nightmares, headaches, bouts of depression, and ulcers (Pyrillis 2007).

**Impact on Witnesses**

As identified in a recent online survey led by Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik of the University of New Mexico, co-workers watching from the sidelines of the bully conflict had higher levels of stress and greater dissatisfaction with their jobs than workers who were not exposed to bullying (Bryner 2007).

According to Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik witnesses describe seeing co-workers psychologically terrorized as the equivalent to watching a mugging every day and being unable to stop it. They feel deep pain for their colleagues. Some get involved and try to help and are either targeted themselves as a result or they feel deep disappointment, anger, and shock that nothing is done to stop the abuse (Bryner 2007).

**High costs to organizations**

Workplace bullying affects the health and career of targeted individuals and it paralyzes the workplace environment with fear. This problem can have a huge impact on an organization’s bottom line. However, tolerance for workplace bullying is declining due to new statistics detailing the financial costs to companies and health affects on bullied victims (Urbanski 2002).
Violations of employees’ psychological contracts promote mistrust, anger, and attrition and change the way people behave in future interactions. The effects of contract violation can be seen in declining corporate loyalty and increased litigation. The majority of people who quit jobs within the first two years of employment report they felt their employer had failed to uphold important commitments (Rousseau 2005).

Lost productivity is another area where companies are being affected. Workers who are harassed are less productive due to being distracted because they are pissed off, or nursing emotional wounds and stress-related illnesses. This could influence a company’s customer service. If both targets and co-workers take out their frustrations on clients, it could result in dissatisfied customers (Urbanski 2002).

High absenteeism resulting from time off taken by harassed employees is another area. The American Psychological Association estimate that of 1,500 workers surveyed, around 750 claim to have lost time from work due to rude workplace behavior (Urbanski 2002).

Ubanski Farrell (2002) states that when bully’s targets become affected by stress-related illnesses, an organization’s health care costs can escalate. According to Namie, 41 percent of bully targets become depressed, with 21 percent of targeted men being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (Urbanski 2002).

Comparison of bullying to other types of harassment

Recognition of workplace bullying is in the same place sexual harassment was 10 to 15 years ago. No one knew how to define it (Pyrillis 2007). While many Americans are familiar with sexual and racial harassment, they are not familiar with generalized workplace bullying (Bryner 2006). The phenomenon is just now creeping into people’s vocabulary as the research and education on the topic increases. Therefore, it sometimes goes unrecognized. Before the
term “sexual harassment” was part of the American vocabulary, people had difficulty identifying that behavior (Bryner 2007).

While sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, national origin, gender, religion, or disability is against the law, workplace bullying is not (Pyrrillis 2007). Robert I. Sutton, a management professor and co-director of the Center for Work, Technology and Organization at Stanford University says business groups feel that existing laws can adequately protect workers (Parker-Pope 2008). And, according to employment attorney Rick Samson, courts are reluctant to take on the issue in absence of laws prohibiting it. He says because one person’s bully can be seen as another person’s demanding boss, it is difficult to justify his or her behavior as illegal (Pyrillis 2007).

Currently many workplace-bullying situations fall between the cracks of existing state and federal employment law because bullying generally does not involve race, age, or sex, which have protected status in the courts. Instead, most of the time bullying occurs just because someone doesn’t like someone else (Parker-Pope 2008). Sometimes he or she chooses a victim based on his or her own needs and insecurities (Urbanski 2002).

However, workplace bullying could become more problematic for employers in the future, according to David C. Yamada, a professor at the Suffolk University Law School in Boston. Professor Yamada is the author of several anti-bullying legislations. He says that currently a real gap exists in the law where someone could be tormented and subjected to humiliation and really be suffering because of it. But, the courts are saying it’s not severe enough for us to allow the lawsuit to go forward. However, the New York State Legislature is considering an anti-bullying bill, and in several other states, including New Jersey and
Connecticut, where lawmakers have introduced such measures. So far none have been successful (Parker-Pope 2008).

**Methodology**

**Research Method Overview**

This research studied the effects workplace bullying has on co-workers who work in an environment where workplace bullying is present. A grounded theory approach, a qualitative method of research (Creswell 1998), was used to interview six ‘witnesses’ or ‘targets’. The primary question is: How does being in a work environment where workplace bullying exists affect individuals.

**Interviews**

The research consisted of a semi-structured interview process involving three witnesses and three targets who state they worked in an organization where in their opinion a co-worker was bullied or they were bullied. This experience must have lasted for at least six months.

**Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with three targets that had a personal experience and three witnesses who had first-hand knowledge of a bullying situation. Each participant was interviewed once. Initial interviews were followed-up via telephone or email to clarify or to expand discussion points. All questions were open-ended and were asked in a manner that allowed participants to express themselves in their own words. This interview process allowed for follow-up and clarifying questions in order that the researcher could better understand current practices.
The interview may have been modified as it was delivered, to fit the participant’s unique experiences.

Participants were asked general questions about the situation including why they think the workplace bullying occurred. Participants were asked about their awareness of workplace bullying and if a code of conduct, anti-harassment, or healthy workplace policy existed in their organization. They were asked questions about how they coped with their experience. They were also asked how they responded to workplace bullying. Furthermore, participants were asked questions on the effect that workplace bullying has had on them. (See Appendix A)

Participants were interviewed individually. All interviews were recorded in its entirety with the permission of the participant and later transcribed by the researcher.

Literature

In addition to the literature review included in this proposal, the researcher continued to search for relevant and increasingly focused literature in the field, both through traditional literature research methodology and through any referrals from experts.

Site

The interviews were conducted at a site that was convenient to the participants. All attempts were made to conduct the interviews outside of the participants’ workplace. All of the participants were interviewed in person. The interviews were recorded.

Access and Sample Selection

The sample consists of six individuals who were bullied or who observed another person being bullied in their workplace. The criteria for the participants includes: individuals who were bullied for at least six months or who had a close working
relationship with a co-worker who was a target or victim and witnessed the bullying for at least six months.

Participant Introduction to Project/Invitation to Participate

The following are steps that were taken to introduce and invite the participants to participate in this study:

1. Once the authorization for the study had been granted by the proper Human Participant Committee, the researcher formally invited each potential participant via email. (Refer to sample email correspondence in Appendix A.) Candidates were requested to respond via email or telephone directly to the researcher confirming their participation.

2. Once they confirmed their participation, participants were contacted by the researcher directly via phone or email to schedule an interview date, time and location. If a phone interview was to be conducted, the researcher confirmed the phone number at which they wished to be called. If an in-person interview was to be conducted, the location for the interview was determined and agreed upon. Participants were also sent via email the list of questions that were asked throughout the interview (see Appendix C). Also, a consent form (see Appendix B) was forwarded to them for their review prior to the scheduled date of the interview.

3. Participants who were interviewed by phone were asked to sign and submit the consent form via confidential fax or U.S. mail prior to the scheduled date of the interview. Those participants who were to be interviewed in person were given a copy on site and asked to sign the consent form prior to commencing the interview.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All information given by study participants is confidential and individual contributions are anonymous. All data was stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by the researcher. Each participant was identified on the tape by first name and participant code only.

All data and notes were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office for the duration of the research process. All tapes of interviews were destroyed upon completion of the final paper.
Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study was completely voluntary and participants were free to change their mind at any time and choose not to continue even after signing the consent form.

Informed Consent

Human participants are protected in accordance with the ethical standards taken from the APA Code of Conduct (1992). Informed consent documents emphasizing confidentiality were given to each participant and discussed in detail prior to the interview. The researcher verified that the participant understood the documents and the process. Participants were given time to read and sign the consent forms. The researcher assigned pseudonyms (participant numbers) to each participant to insure confidentiality and anonymity. All code notes and participant identifications will remain anonymous.

All participants who responded affirmatively to the invitation to participate in the study were requested to sign the informed consent form. The consent form explained the above, that participation in the study was voluntary and that participants were free to change their mind at any time, even after signing and submitting the consent form. The form confirms that the information provided during participation in the study is confidential and anonymous. (Refer to Appendix B.)

Debriefing Procedures

At the conclusion of the interview, individual participants were given the opportunity to debrief with the researcher, to ask questions or express any concerns they may have had. The researcher responded to their questions and concerns at that time. Participants, who wished to address any outstanding issues or questions regarding the interview or final report, were invited
to call or email the researcher directly to address their issues or questions. A summary of findings were made available to them upon their request.

Participants were invited to contact the JFK University Project Advisor if they had questions or requests for additional information regarding this study and the interview process:

Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H.
Organizational Psychology Research Coordinator/JFK University
Email:  SAMulgrew@aol.com       Telephone:  510-450-0378

**Researcher Bias**

The researcher conducting this study has negative bias toward workplace bullying. The researcher has personally experienced aggressive harassment in the workplace as well as been a witness to others’ bullying experiences. However, the researcher realizes the importance of maintaining neutrality when conducted this study to maintain the integrity of the findings and results. Due to the criteria of the research method, bias awareness is especially important and an awareness of that bias was maintained by the researcher.

**Limitations**

The findings of this study are tentative. The sample size and procedures for participant selection are appropriate for qualitative research. They will not, however, due to the small scope of this study, support generalization to a larger population without additional research.

**Data Analysis**

This is an exploratory study. Interviews were transcribed and field notes maintained. Data and field notes from each interview was coded and categorized. The researcher paid
particular attention to patterns that developed and applied additional codes and categories accordingly, if applicable.

**Conclusion**

It is the hope of the researcher that the information gained and analyzed through this study will bring about new insights that can be of further value to employees, organizations, and researchers involved in developing effective responses and solutions to workplace bullying in their organizations.

**Purpose of Study**

While the objective of this study was to focus on witnesses of workplace bullying, there was difficulty finding six witnesses to interview. Therefore, I interviewed three witnesses and three victims. An example of the impediment I experienced finding participants for this survey is when a potential participant, who was a victim of workplace bullying agreed to be interviewed, expressed how hard it was for her to revive unpleasant memories. Consequently, she decided not to take part in this study. As stated by Dr. Gary Namie of the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI), it is referred to as a “silent epidemic” because it has “career-jeopardizing” potential and it can be an un-discussable topic at work. It is not uncommon for people not to want to talk about their experience. People who encounter extreme bullying can be left with permanent psychological damage (Pyrillis 2007). The purpose of this study is to hear first-hand the impact workplace bullying has on victims and witnesses.
RESULTS

This study presents an opportunity to hear directly from victims and witnesses of workplace bullying to provide a clearer understanding of the harmful effects this type of behavior has on workers and their work environment. Results from this study were acquired by interviewing six workers who either experienced or witnessed workplace bullying for at least six months. This study was conducted using a grounded theory approach (Creswell, 1998). These participants gave narrative responses that were tape recorded and then transcribed. Direct quotes from participants are used in this study. Responses to interview questions provided knowledge relating to the following areas:

- The reason the victim was targeted
- The actions taken to rectify the circumstances.
- The outcomes of the situation.
- Participants’ opinions about whether or not there should be laws or company policies that prohibit workplace bullying.
- Long-term beliefs participants might possess because of this experience.

The participants are between the ages of 40 and 65. Five of the six participants are female. Three of the participants are victims and three are witnesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim or Witness</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Workplace Setting</th>
<th>Employment Sector</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1V Victim</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2W Witness</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3V Victim</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4V Victim</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Food Service</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5W Witness</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Interview Questions:

Q1 - How do you define workplace bullying, what does that term mean?

Even though many people see bullying in the workplace, they don’t know what name or term to use to describe the behavior. Both P1V & P3V said they had not heard a term for this behavior. P1V stated that “This is the first time I’ve had a label put to something that I have witnessed”.

Self-blame and shame

P4V stated that though she did not know how to describe it. But when it happened to her, she said “I thought the workplace bullying behavior was my fault because nobody would talk to me.”

Intimidation

P2W felt workplace bullying behavior was similar to that of a schoolyard bully. “You have the person that always intimidated you and this person was always characterized as the king of the school. They were usually bigger, tougher, could be male or female. But this person usually had some sort of status where he was either a large person or a big person who had big mussels. The way this person looked was intimidating”

Abuse of power and authority

Participants perceived that workplace bullies have some type of status that gives them authority and power that they use to intimidate and control others. Both P5W and P6W used the concept of intimidation to describe the perpetrator in workplace bullying: “One intimidating another (P5W); someone who uses their authority and power over someone with less power to intimate and control (P6W).
Q2 - You stated you knew a co-worker who had been bullied for at least six months, can you tell me how the bullying showed up, who was the bullier, what did they do?

Out of the six participants, all victims were female; two of bullies were male (P3V, P4V); four were female (P1V, P2W, P5W, P6W). P1V and P2W were held to higher standards than their co-workers. In five of the six cases (P1V, P2W, P3V, P4V, P6W) the witnesses observed and the victims reported that the victims were micromanaged. P3V, P4V, reported that they were made to feel incompetent, and P6W observed that happening to the victim he witnessed. P5W observed the victims being disrespected.

Double standards

P1V said “my lead clerk (a female) was the bullier. I noticed things that other people were doing and nothing was ever said to them but if I did it, I was singled out. For instance, I would come in maybe at 8:01 and my supervisor would tell me that I would have to take that time off my timecard, use vacation time, or make my lunch period a minute shorter. I would have to make up that one minute if I were late.”

P2W said “The bullier was this person’s supervisor who was also my supervisor as well. The bullying would take place in the way this person was treated. This person was actually disabled and she was deaf. She could hear a little but she was considered legally deaf”. P2W believed that people were rude to her “because, she didn’t really understand what was really going on”.

The victim required an interpreter during meetings who miss-communicated what was being said; the errors would show in her work; and P2W reported that the supervisor would “get very angry with her, unnecessarily I think.” He also noticed that the supervisor treated her
differently from other co-workers; she criticized her work, pressured her into being at work at a certain time every day.

This victim was held to different standards than her co-workers. “She wasn’t given a lot of liberties to take care of personal things she needed to do.” She had a son and family.

As P2W stated “When you have a family, sometimes you have to take off from work to take care of matters pertaining to the family. But, even these types of things, she was being scrutinized on.” Her co-workers were given consideration for their family issues but, P2W said “She had to be at work all the time.” P2W observed that “She was challenged on those things at least twice a week she would experience some sort of pressure on her from the supervisor.”

**Made to feel incompetent**

P3V was micro-managed by her supervisor. “My immediate supervisor (a male) was a bully. He tried to find things I did wrong. He looked over my shoulders constantly, every move I made.” Her supervisor also tried to intimate her “Accusing me of things where I had to prove myself.” His actions were very humiliating for P3V “I was a very honest person and always did what was right. But I had to be on my toes constantly.” And she was also denied fair treatment for allowances she had earned “I had more seniority than anyone else but, he gave me the latest shift.” This mistreatment lasted about one year and she finally had enough. “It got so bad that I retired.”

P4V was also intimated by her boss. She said “My boss (a male) started criticizing my work.” The supervisor also tried to make her feel incompetent. “He told me he wanted me to learn Microsoft Word and I told him that I (already) knew Word.” The pressure got to her “For a couple of months he made me feel like I couldn’t do my desk. I just did my work. I had no love for that man.” It’s very difficult to work under constant harassment and not be affected.
P6W identified the co-worker’s boss (a male) as the bullier but she found that other people in the office also participated in the mistreatment of this woman. P6W stated that “No matter how good she did her work, it was never good enough. Her boss constantly complained.” There were also comments made about her personally, such as about her being overweight.

Disrespected

P5W identified the bullier as a co-worker who was the sales/customer service manager. She bullied the staff of six people with “malice laced teasing”. P5W reported that on one occasion, this manager took everyone’s coffee cup from the break room and hid them. “She was mean spirited and enjoyed causing other people pain.”

Q3 - What was your relationship to your co-worker?

Victims

Out of six participants, three (P1V, P3V, P4V) were victims who were the direct target of a workplace bully.

Witnesses

Three of the six participants (P2W, P5W, P6W) witnessed one or more co-workers who experienced workplace bulling. P1V says “I was the victim.” P5W said, “I was her (the bully’s) peer and would stand up to her.”

Q4 - How did you know about the person’s experience?

Victims

Three participants (P1V, P3V, P4V) have knowledge of workplace bullying because they experienced it personally.
Witnesses

The other three participants (P2W, P5W, P6W) witnessed co-workers being bullied. P2W, a witness, reported that the harassment was open for everyone to see. “I saw a good amount of harassment from the supervisor …it was pretty open.” P5W, another witness, “saw it happen to people in the office.” Multiple people were being harassed by a supervisor who was P5W’s peer. But, there was one co-worker who was “a major target” of the bully “She shared her story with me.” This coworker’s harassment was more severe than the others. P6W witnessed a co-worker being bullied by more than one person. P6W confirmed she worked in an adjoining office and stated “I saw and heard what was happening” to the target.

Q5 - What did he or she do about their experience as far as you know?

Although the victims sought help, every place they turned the victims got very little help or no help at all. P1V, P3V, P4V turned to their unions for help but, the unions did not help their situations. P1V also went to human resources but, all they did was make the conditions worse by victimizing her further and dismissing her complaint as invalid. Others, P2W, and P5W sought help from co-workers. The victim P6W witnessed being bullied did not feel she needed any help. Although P6W felt the victim was being mistreated, she (the victim) said she was okay.

Neither Human Resources nor the unions helped

P1V reported that she “defended myself against false allegations and lies, but nothing was ever removed from my evaluation. Eventually, I went to the union for help. I also filed a complaint with human resources. On page 57 of the employee handbook it states ‘If you feel you are being singled out, the company will not tolerate it. You may request an investigation and something will be done.’ She sent a certified letter to management and requested human resources investigate the manager who was singling her out. She was invited to a meeting about
an investigation but found out at the last minute that it was not about management but, instead was about her. “I was fired.” “My union rep sat right next to me at that meeting; he did not defend me.” She was two months short of being vested in the retirement plan when she was fired. She reported that later she got a letter on official letterhead that said “I would not be getting an investigation.” P3V and P4V both went to the union for help. P3V reported that the “Union talked to him but, he kept on.”

**Sought advice from co-workers**

P2W observed that the victim he observed would talk to her peers about what was going on and expressed dissatisfaction to people whom she felt she could trust and confide in. “She would ask us what she should do because she really didn’t know because of her disability.” She was at a real disadvantage. “She didn’t have access to things and she couldn’t hear well so she would ask questions and this kind of touched me.” She knew she wasn’t being treated fairly but she “She just didn’t know what to do to be honest with you.”

P5W’s co-worker fought back against the bully’s tactics. She (victim) responded to write-ups and complained to management. P5W said “but I am not sure what she did beyond that.”

**Victim denial**

P6W watched her co-worker (victim) just weather the storm. She offered to help but the victim didn’t want it. “I tried to talk to her but, she said she was alright.”

**Q6 - Why do you think this person was a target?**

Personality traits and an individual’s image are two of the major reasons participants believe the person became a target. Some of the victims had images of being weak and
vulnerable, which made them appear to be easy targets. Others had images of being strong and willing to challenge the actions of their bullier. One participant felt her low status in the organization was partly the reason and another felt her race was a factor.

**Personality traits**

P4V had a personality that challenged the status quo. She states “I was an advocate for Title IX. I had filed a sexual harassment complaint in 1997 due to problems in the past.” P5W saw her co-worker defend herself. She had a personality trait that challenged the bullier. P5W said “she (co-worker) pushed back and wasn’t docile.” P5W believes this is why she became the main target. P1V and P3V both projected the image of a person who was competent a knowledgeable. P1V stated “I made suggestions for improving how to do the work; people thought that I felt I was better than they were.” P3V said “I was the manager before him, he felt threatened.”

**Target’s image is weak & vulnerable**

P6W believes her co-worker’s well-known religious beliefs portrayed an image of a person who was weak and vulnerable. P6W said “I believe she (her co-worker) was singled out because of her religious beliefs and because she was passive.” P2W believes his co-worker was targeted because she had a physical disability. She was deaf and had an image of a person who was weak and vulnerable. P2W, who observed the bullying, said “I believe it was because of her disability. I believe it was the only reason she was targeted.”

**Racial difference**

P3V also felt race played a part in her being victimized because she “wasn’t Mexican. The supervisor who was the bully was Mexican and most of the co-workers were Mexican, because he only hired Mexicans.”
Low status

P4V also believes that her low status in the organization was a reason, because she was a secretary and not faculty. She was treated as if her input about Title IX wasn’t important. The mostly male faculty dismissed her ideas and disregarded her suggestions. Despite their discouraging behavior, she (victim) stood up to them and insisted things be done right.

Q7 - What was the outcome of their situation?

All of the victims in these cases separated from their employment. All of them were forced out due to the bully’s behavior. Two were fired (P1V, P5W), three resigned (P2W, P3V, P4V), two went out on medical leave before resigning (P4V, P6W), and one went out of medical leave before she died in a tragic car accident.

Some targets were fired

P1V was terminated. As reported earlier, she was “two months short of being vested in the retirement plan when I was fired.” P5W reported that her co-worker was also fired. P5W stated “The manager who was the perpetrator, built case against her (the victim) and presented it to upper management. She was then fired.” P5W felt this action was unjustified.

Some targets resigned or retired

P2W’s co-worker resigned from her job. P3V and P4V both retired. P3V said that after the union talked to him and he didn’t change. P3V said that “It got so bad that I retired.” P4V said “I went out on stress and eventually retired.”

Some targets went out on medical leave

P4V and P6W’s co-worker both went out on medical leave prior to separating from their employers. P6W observed that her co-worker went out of medical leave. She eventually came back and the treatment continued. She reported that while her co-worker was on her way home
from work, she had a heart attack that resulted in a car accident and she died. P6W was appalled that the victim was being disrespected even after she died. “Even after she died the perpetrators continued to slander her name with rumors.”

**Q8 - Was the individual the only person who was harassed by this other person?**

According to responses from some of the participants, there are environments in some organizations that tolerate workplace bullying. In those cases there were either multiple people who were bullied or there was serial bullying, i.e., other incidents before or after their experiences.

**Environments with other incidents of workplace bullying**

P1V, P3V, P5W, P6W all reported other incidents of workplace bullying where they worked. P1V said “After I left, they started picking on Sheila. Shelia is my friend and she shared her experience with me.”

P3V, who had previously stated that she believed her race, was partly the reason stated “After I left, he harassed Stephanie, who was a good worker. Stephanie and I have remained friends. I think he harassed her because she was black.” P3V is white and stated in her interview that her boss was Mexican and he only hired Mexicans. P3V “I felt there was favoritism for Mexicans.”

P5W, who worked for the organization before the victim came and also after the victim left, reported that there, was a group of people who worked for the supervisor who was the bully. All experienced harassment. However, the victim she observed, her co-worker was victimized more than the others. She was the main target and shared her story with me. This could be because she fought back against the bully’s efforts.
P6W said that at the time her coworker worked there, she was the only target. But, prior to her coming to that office there were others who were targeted by some of the same employees. After she left, there was a new target. Even though some of the employees who were perpetrators left, the environment that tolerates this behavior continues. It is obvious that this behavior is part of the organizational culture. It has become the norm.

Q9 - Do you think gender or race contributed to the mistreatment received by the victim?
If yes, how did it contribute?

Sometimes gender or race contributed to how the victims were treated but there were also other reasons believed to be the cause.

Gender and race were factors in some cases, but not in all

P1V, P2W, P5W, P6W responded they did not believe gender or race contributed to the mistreatment.

Image

P1V, P5W felt other reasons may have been the cause. P1V stated “I don’t think gender or race had anything to do with it, but I do think my age did.” She also confirmed that she was the oldest person in her department. She thought it may be her image. “I believe that because I made suggestions for improving how to do the work, people thought that I felt I was better than they were.” P5W felt her co-worker became the main target because she wasn’t docile and pushed back when confronted by the bully.
Disability

P2W said “I think it was disability to be honest with you.” This victim was legally deaf. Due to miscommunications from her interpreter mistakes sometimes showed in her work. “I think the supervisor would get very angry with her, unnecessarily.”

Racial difference

P3V stated in her interview that her boss was Mexican and he only hired Mexicans. P3V responded” Yes, I believe my race and gender was a contributing factor in how I was treated. I felt there was favoritism for Mexicans. I also believe that he felt I was a threat because I was the supervisor before he was hired.”

Gender difference

P4V believes gender contributed to the mistreatment. P4V said “Yes, gender and also my low status in the organization.” Title IX enforced gender equity in the sports program. P4V was the advocate for Title IX. However she found that the male athletic faculty didn’t want to bring in women’s sports, they didn’t want to do anything. The administration wanted her to do things to help them comply with the law, but they didn’t back her up. They wanted her to help the guys and show them how to do things right. “And I did, I fought them tooth and nail because they weren’t going to do anything I told them to do. I would tell them that that they couldn’t do certain things. But, they would do it anyway and the CFO would write it as an exception to the procedure.”

Low rank and status in organization

Participant felt her male athletic faculty coworkers and the division dean looked down on her because her status was lower than theirs. P4V said “because I was classified and not faculty.”
Q10 - What feelings did you have due to this situation?

All participants expressed having emotional feelings due to their experience.

Fear

P1V, P2W, P4V had feelings of fear because of their situation. P1V said “I felt like crap everyday that I went home and feared going back the next day. I felt I was walking on eggs.” P2W feared helping the target would cause him problems. P2W stated “I think I would have been concerned about what the repercussion would be if I took a stand for someone.” Because of his fear, he limited his involvement to moral support. “Am I going to lose my job?” P4V says “I never want to be a secretary to one person again; because if you don’t get along with that person, you are screwed. I will look for work in a different field.” This experience has changed P4V’s career outlook.

Long lasting negative feelings

P3V, P5W had feelings of anger because workplace bullying. P3V “I worked (there) for 20 years and I will never say anything good about them. I will never set foot there again as long as I live.” P5W found that the “feelings still exist 15 years later.”

Powerless

P6W felt a different type of emotion. He stated that he felt powerless because the victim he observed “said she was okay. I knew she was being treated very badly.”

Q11 - What, if anything, did you do about it?

P1V, P3V, P4V sought help in the logical places; human resources and their labor unions. P4V even filed a lawsuit.
Sought help from human resources and union

P1V tried to get help from her employer. P1V said “I followed the instructions in the employee handbook, and requested an investigation. I also complained to my union.” P3V stated “I went to the union on more than one occasion; they didn’t help my situation at all. They did nothing.” P4V “I went to the union, but they didn’t help.” The unions did not stand up for them. Then I filed a lawsuit, which I lost.” Everywhere they turned for help did not provide them the help they needed.

Co-workers tried to help

P2W gave moral support to his co-worker. “I talked to the person (victim) and offered an ear.” P5W stood up to the bully on behalf of her co-workers. “I confronted her and made her take her comments back. I also went to the boss.” P6W would have done more to help. “I offered to help but, she said she was okay and could handle what was happening to her.”

Q12 - If you didn’t do anything about it, what prevented you?

Victim – Filed complaint with human resources

P1V stated “on page 57 of the employee handbook states ‘If you feel you are being singled out, the company will not tolerate it. You may request an investigation and something will be done.’ I sent a certified letter to management and requested Human Resources investigate management who was singling me out.”

Sought help from union

Workers have a right to work in an environment free from harassment but, the unions didn’t see it that way. P3V said she went to the union for help but the behavior continued after a
short period of time passed. She stated “union talked to him but, he kept on.” P4V “I went to
the union, but they didn’t help.”

**Witnesses – Made attempt to rectify situation**

P5W got involved. “I stood up to her against what she was doing to others. I eventually
got involved. I eventually went to management and complained about her behavior.”

**Some witnesses had reasons not to act**

P2W, P6W had reasons for not doing anything about the workplace bullying.
P2W feared for his job. “I was concerned about my job. I was afraid that if I got involved,
maybe the tables would turn against me. Maybe if I would have stood up for her, I would have
been a target as well. That’s what made me not want to get involved.”

P6W stated that on more than one occasion she spoke to the victim in private but, the
victim didn’t want her help. “She (the victim) didn’t think there was a problem and therefore
didn’t feel she needed my help.”

Q13 - *When you hear about workplace bullying experiences, do you tend to side more with
the target or with the perpetrator?*

When asked this question all participants responded that they sided more with the victim
of workplace bullying.

Q14 - *What is your opinion about whether or not a company should attempt to prevent
workplace bullying?*

All participants felt employers should prevent workplace bullying. P1V said “Yes, they
should prevent this in the workplace.” Some were unsure how employers should deal with the
problem. She said “But, when it is a supervisor, they have to stick together. So, how do you
break that?” P2W “I think they should always attempt to prevent it. Others had ideas how
employers can prevent workplace bullying “It should be written into their protocol for their
employees. Workplace bullying should not be tolerated and it should be dealt with a heavy
hand.”

P3V stated “It shouldn’t be like that in any workplace. Should never be favoritism.”
P4V felt preventing workplace bullying could be difficult to do. She said “They should try but I
believe it is hard to prove. I feel management will back a manager even if they are wrong.”
P5W and P6W both feel employers should protect their employees. P5W declared “Employers
have an obligation to provide a safe work environment.” P6W feels that “Employers should
protect their employees from being victimized on the job.”

Q15 - Let’s say your company had a policy in place to resolve workplace bullying, how
comfortable would you be to file a formal complaint on behalf of your co-worker?

Victims and witnesses would file a complaint on behalf of someone else

Five out of six respondents (P1V, P2W, P3V, P4V, P5W, P6W) would feel comfortable
filing a formal complaint on behalf of someone else.

Victims would file a complaint on behalf of their self

P1V and P3V said they would be comfortable filing a formal complaint for their self.
P1V “I would probably do a quicker job of reporting it for myself (than for someone else).”

Victim would not file a complaint on behalf of their self

P4V said “Probably for a co-worker but I don’t think I’d ever do it again for myself.”
This victim felt betrayed by her co-workers because some of the ones she thought she had a good
relationship with testified against her after she filed a lawsuit.
Victims would file a complaint on behalf of someone else

All three participants who were victims (P1V, P3V, P4V) stated they would file a formal complaint on behalf of a co-worker.

Witnesses would file a complaint on behalf of someone else

Two out of three witnesses (P5W & P6W) would file on behalf of a co-worker.

Witness would not file a complaint on behalf of someone else

Because of the risk of retaliation, P2W decided not to get involved in someone else’s situation. P2W said “I would let this person know about it. But, I’d be a little reluctant to file a complaint on behalf of someone else.”

Q16 - What is your opinion about whether or not laws should be enacted to prohibit workplace bullying?

All six participants felt laws should be in place to prevent workplace bullying. P1V felt even with laws, it could be an uphill battle with very little support. She said “Yes, but the person needs good documentation because they probably won’t get help from witnesses. P6W felt that “It should definitely be illegal to bully people at work.”

Q17 - If there were laws prohibiting this type of behavior in the workplace, how comfortable would you be to file a formal complaint on behalf of your co-worker?

All participants responded they would feel comfortable filing a formal complaint on behalf of a co-worker. P1V said “If legitimate – I would stick up for co-worker.” P2W felt the risk of retaliation was lessened if laws were in place. He said “I would feel a little more comfortable because that would be a right from a state or federal standpoint to not be bullied.” P4V would stand up for someone else but felt all the trouble she incurred after she filed a lawsuit
wasn’t worth it. She said that she “Probably (would file a complaint) for a co-worker but I don’t think I’d ever do it again for myself.” P6W “I would not hesitate to file a formal complaint.”

Q18 - Has this experience influenced your opinion about workplace bullying, if yes, how?

All participants reported having a new awareness of workplace bullying. They all agreed that workplace bullying is a serious problem. However, P1V felt she would “keep my mouth shut. They can always win.” P2W might do things differently if faced with this type of situation in the future. P2W said “yes, most definitely, and if I experienced it again, I would act in a more proactive way in how I saw what was going on and would possibly do something about it, especially if it were someone who was disabled. P2W became more aware because of this experience. “It made me feel really cautious because I’m an African American male. It opened my eyes to the types of things that can go on in the workplace. I learned and became a little bit more aware of this type of thing.”

P3V feels “This behavior causes a lot of stress, tension, and a lot of enemies.” P4V said “It happens to men and women. It’s real.” P5W thinks more attention to this problem is needed. She said “Yes, it’s serious. I think this issue should be addressed in new hire orientations. There should be a zero tolerance policy by human resources unanimously.” P6W reported “I have seen this happen over and over again in this department. I am convinced that they must always have someone to pick on.” She also thinks the problem of workplace bullying could be a larger issue than what she witnessed. “I wonder how widespread this is within the organization. There could be pockets where it exists.” She declared that management should focus on this problem and resolve it. “I believe the management needs to step in and put an end to this environment throughout the organization.”
DISCUSSION

Overview

The results of this study of victims and witnesses of workplace bullying revealed some very interesting facts. One of the most significant being that poor work performance was not the driving force behind becoming the prey of a workplace bully. It turns out that some personality characteristics appeared to be the main reason participants felt the person in their case was targeted by the perpetrator. Certain personality types are more prone to foster bullying behavior (MacDonald 2006). There was something about the victim’s personality that the bully did not like.

Also present in the results are some confirmations of data contained in the key findings of the 2007 survey conducted by Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) and Zogby International (Namie 2007):

1) All of the victims in this study are women
2) Forty percent of the victims in this study failed to complain to the employer
3) All of the employers in this study ignored the bullying behavior
4) The perpetrators were not punished for their abusive behavior
5) Most of the perpetrators were bosses or had some level of authority
6) Reasons employees were targeted by bullies included: standing up to authority; being competent and knowledgeable; appearing to be weak; being racially different, and having a lower status in the organization.

Standing up to authority

In P4V’s case, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) got involved with her employer for violating Title IX in their athletics programs. She became concerned about some of the actions
and attitudes the male faculty had regarding bringing in women’s sports. They did not want to
do it and she openly disagreed with them. She challenged the status quo and was humiliated by
her boss who suggested she didn’t know how to do her job. After months of harassment by her
boss and the faculty, she went out on a stress-related leave and eventually retired.

The same personality trait was present in P5W’s case where one individual out of a group
of employees who were being targeted, fought back against the bully’s tactics. Because she
defended herself against her attacker, she became the primary target. The bully ultimately built a
case against her and persuaded upper management to fire her. P5W described the bully as s a
mean-spirited person who seemed to enjoy giving and causing pain to others. She felt that the
incident where the bully hid everyone’s coffee mug was an insult, a lack of integrity of work as
well as a lack of professionalism. She said that it was in character with other controlling
behaviors the bully had demonstrated. Workplace bullies sometimes demonstrate behavior that
is described as two-faced. They are also described as devils, or narcissistic dictators who make
others feel like prisoners, slaves or vulnerable children (Bryner 2006).

P5W said that the harassment got so bad that people began to quit and complain to
management about the bully. Although management did not act right away, she did eventually
get fired. It appears that the stated main reason she got fired was her work performance; this
may be the only grounds if a company does not have a policy. However, it was only after her
numbers fell in the amount of products she sold that she was terminated. So, her being a bully
may or may not have had anything to do with her separation. One thing that is evident is that the
company endured costs related to employee turnover that resulted from having a bully on their
payroll (Takeuchi Cullen 2007).

**Being competent & knowledgeable**
Being knowledgeable was the personality trait that caused others to become targets, such as P1V, who made suggestions on improving work processes. She quickly realized her suggestions were unwelcome. She found herself feeling disliked by her mostly female co-workers because they saw her as someone who thought she was better than the rest of the group. She was singled out by management who encouraged her co-workers to make up stories about her. Their behavior turned into excessive harassing and socially excluding the target. Fox, 2005, describes this process as a ‘mobbing’ process.

On one occasion, she found a co-worker who admitted to her that she was innocent of the accusations, but that person was scared to get involved. P1V said “They couldn’t complain about my work because I was doing such a good job.” Since she did not have any work performance problems, she stated that they resorted to personal attacks, rumors, exaggerations, and falsehoods to concoct a sequence of disciplinary actions claiming misconduct by her that concluded with her being terminated two months shy of being vested in the retirement plan.

P3V, who had held the manager’s position prior to her boss being hired, was seen as a threat because of her knowledge of the duties of the manager’s job. It became clear to her that the new boss did not want her around when he started a campaign against her. Her boss intimidated her by trying to prove she was incompetent and dishonest by constantly accusing her of making mistakes and of stealing money. This is another example of mobbing the target. P2V said, “I finally retired because I couldn’t handle having to prove myself. I had to be on my toes all the time.” Harassing and offending are all part of the mobbing process (Fox 2005).

Image of weakness

Having an image of being weak was a contributing factor in two of the victims in the study. P2W had a co-worker who was legally deaf and because of her difficulty communicating,
was continually harassed by their supervisor. He describes the harassment as “pretty open”. Her deafness was exacerbated by an interpreter who made mistakes in translating what was going on. Rather than the supervisor seeking to resolve what was clearly a communication problem, the supervisor showed no tolerance or consideration for this woman’s physical disability; instead she used it as a reason to mistreat her in front of her co-workers. The supervisor spoke to her in a rude manner, criticized her work, and denied her any flexibility in her work schedule like that awarded to her co-workers. This employee did not know how to respond to these assaults. Feeling dejected, she finally quit. The type of social isolation and humiliation this victim experienced are two of the defining characteristics of bullying behavior (Pyrillis 2007).

P6W attempted to help a woman who she witnessed enduring constant criticism of her work as well as insulting comments in the form of jokes and rumors about her, including comments about her weight. She was a very religious person who told the witness that she was okay and that she did not feel a need to address the mistreatment she was receiving from her boss and co-workers. Unfortunately, her lack of response made her vulnerable to a group of bullies who always had a designated target to pick on. Not long after she returned from a medical leave, she died in a car accident from a massive heart attack while driving home from work. Even after her death, the bullies continued making slanderous rumors and lies about her. Harassing behavior such as this demonstrates an extreme case of workplace bullying where the organization has inadvertently become an accomplice because they allowed this behavior to continue (Pyrillis 2007) (Namie 2007).

**Racially different/Lower status**

One participant (P3V) felt her being of a different race was part of the reason she was targeted. She was white and her boss and most of her co-workers were Mexican. The
participant also stated that every opportunity the manager had to hire a new employee, he consistently hired Mexicans. P4V felt her lower status in the organization as a secretary and not a member of faculty was part of the reason she was targeted.

**Lack of resolution**

Another very interesting fact this study disclosed is that none of the victims in these cases were able to get their situations resolved. They all eventually left their jobs due to the stress and pressure put on them by the bully. According to Gary Namie’s 2007 Survey, 40 percent of victims quit their jobs to escape mistreatment. It is not uncommon for some bully victims to have nightmares, headaches, bouts of depression, and ulcers (Pyrillis 2007).

Most of the victims in this study attempted to be rescued from the abusive conditions they found themselves involved in. P1V indicated when she followed the instructions in the employee handbook for filing a complaint, her complaint was not taken seriously. Instead of Human Resources staff conducting an investigation based on her allegations, they took sides with the bully. According to the 2007 survey conducted by Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) and Zogby International in 62% of the cases, when made aware of bullying, employers worsen the problem or simply do nothing (Namie 2007).

Others, P1V, P3V, and P4V went to their labor unions for help. Even when the union attempted to resolve the problem, their efforts were unsuccessful; such as when P3V’s union talked to her boss. He stopped harassing her for a short time but then started again. P1V also sought help from her union, only to be disappointed by the union’s inability to protect her from the abuse.

Even when the Human Resources Departments were made aware of the presence of abusive conduct in their organization, they failed to stop it. Additionally, the labor unions that
benefited from the dues paid by these employees for representation regarding workplace issues, that include safety, also did not stop it.

Some of these victims sought help from co-workers who could only offer moral support. These employees had no remedy to solve their workplace issues.

**Emotional scars**

The impact of workplace bullying goes even deeper. All of these participants described long-lasting emotional scars due to this painful traumatic experience for which they believed they were not at fault. P5W said “The feelings still exist 15 years later.” Three victims (P3V, P4V, and P6W) went on stress or other medical-related leaves. Extreme bullying can cause permanent psychological damage (Bryner 2007). The employer’s failure to protect their employees is seen by them as a violation of their psychological contract with their workplace.

A psychological contract is the link between the employee and the organization. It occurs when employees form a mental agreement based on their expectations and perceptions that are shaped by past history and events at their workplace, such as promises. When an employee feels their psychological contract is violated, they lose trust in the organization and their loyalty declines (Pyrillis 2007).

**Negative view of organization**

Victims and witnesses reported being left with a negative image of the organization. Some victims experience feelings of helplessness, hurt, and anger because the organization failed to protect them from the emotional abuse. P3V said “I worked (there) for 20 years and I will never say anything good about them. I will never set foot there again as long as I live.”

They all expressed feelings of distrust not only in the organization where the workplace bullying took place but any workplace that they might go to. Fox (2005) agrees that uncivil
behavior disrupts mutual respect at work. P1V said “I will keep my mouth shut. They can always win.”

**Concerns of being targeted if they took the side of a victim**

Witnesses expressed fear they could one day become a victim them self. P2W stated “I was concerned about my job. I was afraid that if I got involved, maybe the tables would turn against me. Maybe if I would have stood up for her, I would have been a target as well. That’s what made me not want to get involved.” Some witnesses feel deep pain for their colleagues. However, if they get involved and try to help, they are sometimes targeted themselves (Bryner 2007).

**Affects on the Organization**

Workplace bullying is a behavior that is allowed to be part of the organization’s culture. Therefore, management is ultimately at fault for the outcome of these situations (Fox 2005). Witnesses feel deep disappointment, anger, and shock that nothing is done to stop the abuse (Bryner 2007).

In P5W’s case there was a group of employees who were victimized simultaneously by one perpetrator. In the case of P6W there were multiple people who where victims at different times by a group of perpetrators whose members changed but the behavior remained consistent. These employers granted the authority that was used to harass these individuals. The work environment was made uncomfortable and hostile for everyone who worked in these organizations whether or not they knew what was going on or why it was happening. Fox believes that employees were affected by this counterproductive behavior. This can cause an employer to lose a productive workforce, which is vital to organizational success. Employees
who are harassed are less productive due to being distracted because they are angry, or they are nursing emotional wounds and stress-related illnesses.

Harassed employees also have a high absenteeism rate. According to the American Psychological Association from 1,500 workers surveyed, around 750 claim to have lost time from work due to rude workplace behavior (Urbanski 2002).

Additionally, there are costs associated with turnover as a result of employees who left because they were forced out by a bully. Healthcare premiums may increase due to increased usage of healthcare providers. Organizations can also suffer damage to their reputation which can interfere with a company’s ability to compete. All of these losses can have a detrimental result on an organization’s bottom-line.

While the premise for the study was to focus on workplace bullying there is another very obvious concurrent problem that was exposed and that is the lack of diversity awareness and sensitivity by these managers. Race, religion, physical disability, ideas, personality type, and job status were all the reasons given for why the victims were targeted. But these reasons also reflect how these employees were different from the dominant group. These characteristics also define the term “diversity”. There is also evidence of illegal employment discrimination in the cases. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was violated in the case where the employer had a physical disability (P2W). The harassment of the employee who made her religious beliefs known was a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, the truly visible common problem inherent in all of these organizations is the lack of commitment to manage diversity and to provide a healthy work environment for employees.

The data in this study supports my theory that these victims are collateral damage of defective organizational systems. While the cases presented in this research study are only a
sample of what is occurring in these organizations; there is concrete evidence that suggests more of these cases exist. When employees feel their psychological contracts are violated feelings of mistrust, anger, and attrition change the way people behave in future interactions (Rousseau 2005).

**Best practices**

In order to repair the recognizable problems that are influencing the environment in these organizations, I recommend a change intervention that focuses on improving the organizational culture.

A commitment from top management is essential for organizations to effectively change their culture from one that allows bullying and harassment to one that supports diversity. They need to develop strategies to encourage, motivate, rejuvenate and remind the workforce of the corporate vision of working effectively and building relationships. Therefore, leadership competency is a key contributor to a successful outcome. These leaders will need to use the following five components of emotional intelligence: (Goleman, D.)

A psychological contract is the link between the employee and the organization. It occurs when employees form a mental agreement based on their expectations and perceptions that are shaped by past history and events at that happen at work, such as promises.

It is also vital for the intervention to include four of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy (1943) of human beings’ successive needs. These specific areas are as follows:

- **Security Needs** – provide a healthy civilized work environment that ensures safety of employment.
- **Social Needs** - satisfy the need of belonging and friendship by fostering inclusiveness.
- **Esteem Needs** - promote acceptance and involvement by recognizing employee achievements which will bolster self-esteem and feelings of confidence. Encourage all employees to respect others.

- **Self-actualization** – send a message that the workplace is fair and equitable by incorporating a philosophy of zero tolerance of prejudice. Accept facts by establishing a complaint system and investigating claims of discrimination and unfair treatment. Solicit employees from all levels of the organization to share in problem solving activities and support creativity.

**Concept of ‘Dignity for All’**

Another concept that could help organizations and communities evolve into a more humanitarian conscious society is “Dignity for All”. Dr. Robert Fuller (2009) presents a hypothesis that suggests that our culture is plagued by the perception of “rankism” where those with dominating behaviors abuse their rank to take advantage of those with less power or lower status. Dr. Fuller describes the concept of “somebodies” of the world using the power of their rank to take advantage over those they see as “nobodies”. He describes “Rankism” as the root causes of: school bullying, corporate corruption, sexual harassment, domestic violence, elder abuse, the invisible poor, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and ableism. I also see a valid connection between this concept and workplace bullying in that they both relate to the powerful taking advantage of the powerless.

According to Dr. Fuller, treating people with dignity, no matter where they fall on the food chain is the key to repairing the “rankism” problem in our society. If more people practiced treating each other with dignity and respect we would not have bullying issues in the workplace.
Incorporating this philosophy into an organizational change intervention would be very beneficial.

**Policies that prohibit workplace bullying**

In my search for an example of an organization that attempted to implement a policy prohibiting workplace bullying, I found an article about an interview with Goodwill Southern California’s (GSC) President and CEO, Douglas Barr. According to the interview conducted by Rhonda Smith, of the Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., Goodwill Southern California (GSC) implemented an “interpersonal misconduct” policy in 2004.

After reading this article, I called to get more information about this organization and its policy. I was privileged to have a phone interview with Susan Gutierrez, who is the Training Manager. Gutierrez said the policy which has been in place for five years, is definitely helping to achieve the goal of creating a healthy work environment. She confirmed that incidents of workplace bullying had occurred in the organization but were now steadily on the decline as more employees became aware of the policy.

The policy was put into effect as a means to make meaningful the organization’s four values that were adopted as part of its strategic plan. Those values are “respect, integrity, service, and excellence. The acronym “RISE” is used to describe them. Barr felt a need to inject those values through a policy rather than just preach the values (Smith 2007).

Gutierrez worked with Dr. Gary Namie of the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) to establish an anti-bullying policy. She stressed that enforcement is the key to success. “The policy works only if it is enforced at every level of the organization, from the administration to the front line. It must be enforced consistently across the board.”
Gutierrez said “This message was made clear to employees when people with high visibility were let go for violating the policy.” Barr said that during the first year the policy was in effect, the organization fired employees who violated it at the senior level in retail, in the business office, and at the store manager level (Smith 2007). Gutierrez said that because GSC’s mission is “transforming lives”, GSC will pay the cost of counseling for an employee who expresses a desire to change. Barr also stated that a single act would not violate the policy unless it was especially severe and that in situations where bullying was clearly the intent they did not feel they had the luxury of counseling (Smith 2007).

Barr said “We believe people should perform the duties of their job, but that can be done in a respectful manner, without bullying” (Smith 2007). The policy defines “Interpersonal misconduct as an individual’s behavior that bullies, demeans, intimates, ridicules, insults, frightens, persecutes, exploits, and/or threatens a targeted individual and would be perceived as such by a reasonable person” (Smith 2007).

Goodwill Southern California (GSC) implements this policy in a number of ways.

- Four times a year, information is included in employee’s pay stubs. It includes hotlines available for reporting issues related to being bullied or harassed at work. The hotlines are answered by counselors who are not Goodwill staff members.
- New employees undergo a two-day orientation on personnel procedures. On the second day, the workplace bullying policy is discussed.
- Goodwill Southern California (GSC) offers awards to employees who show positive aspects of the company’s RISE values.
- RISE values are also talked about when interviewing candidates (Smith 2007).
Gutierrez said that in the new hire orientations, employees are informed how to recognize the difference between illegal harassment and bullying. They are also taught empowerment and to protect themselves against bullying behavior by using three tools:

1. Recognize the behavior
2. Confront the bully, and if it still continues,
3. Report the bully

In the interview, Gutierrez pointed out that lack of diversity awareness and sensitivity is also part of the problem. She said that the GSC believes that diversity management strengthens the organization and so they provide values and diversity training to their managers. She said they know that people come to them with their beliefs already formed. GSC believes behavior is formed by what we believe and how we interpret that. So, they work to form the behavior they want by communicating their expectations and what is required to meet them.

To increase an awareness that matches these values, GSC coaches managers on emotional intelligence and provides them with values-based training that reaches across cultural barriers. Gutierrez said “It’s not enough to only teach diversity awareness you must stress the importance of embracing diversity.” To strongly communicate their ethical standards and code of conduct they re-visit these subjects on a regular basis. They have also incorporated their corporate values into their performance evaluation.

Barr said the organization is starting to hire people who are more sensitive, better listeners, and more process-oriented. He states “It’s a slow process, but I’m convinced we are a much more respectful workplace than we were some years ago” (Smith 2007).
Conclusion

I presented the Los Angeles-based Goodwill Southern California (GSC), which has 1600 employees, as a model organization because it has a policy in place and a perspective that demonstrates the criteria essential to eradicate workplace bullying and also to manage diversity. It also represents the type of corporate responsibility that is needed to address the faults detected in the organizations in this study. It is beneficial for organizations to maximize worker productivity because it is vital to organizational success. When organizations truly view diversity as a vital asset they will enjoy a workforce that is more creative, more innovative, and better able to work collaboratively to solve problems. If these organizations operate under the same corporate philosophy, the types of incidents documented in this study will not occur.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A (Invitation)

Sample e-mail invitation to identified participants:

SUBJ: Invitation to Participate in Study: Assessing the effects workplace bullying has on co-workers who work in an environment where workplace bullying is present.

I am a graduate student in Organizational Psychology at John F. Kennedy University. As part of the requirements for the completion of my Master’s degree, I am conducting a research study on the effects that workplace bullying has on people who witness or observe another person being aggressively harassed by a co-worker. Since you work or worked in an environment where workplace bullying was or is currently present, I am requesting your consideration to participate in this study.

The proposed study will focus on how witnesses or observers responded to workplace bullying. The study will be conducted through a series of interviews with practitioners; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minute duration and will be tape-recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their own experiences in situations where they witnessed workplace-bullying behavior aimed at another co-worker. Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of the impact workplace bullying has on individuals who work in a work environment where bullying behavior is present.

Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to change your mind at any time and choose not to continue. Should you choose to participate, all information you give during the interview process will be confidential and your individual contributions will be anonymous. All data collected during the interview process will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me and a third-party transcriber. Each participant will be identified on the tape by first name and participant code only. I will also make a copy of the completed project report available to you at your request.

Thank you for your consideration. I sincerely hope that you will choose to participate! If you have any questions or would like to talk with me further prior to making a decision to participate, please feel free to call me at 925-812-1744.

Sincerely,

Robbie White
Informed Consent Form

My name is Robbie White. I am currently a graduate student in the Masters of Organizational Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California. The research project is a requirement toward the completion of my Master’s degree. This research project is being conducted under the advisement of Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H. – Organizational Psychology Project Advisor. She can be reached at SAMulgrew@aol.com or 510-450-0378.

Project Summary: The proposed study will focus on the effects of workplace bullying on witnesses or observers. The study will be conducted through a series of interviews with practitioners; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minute duration and will be tape-recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their own experiences with regard to how they responded to witnessing the mistreatment of a co-worker. You may also be contacted by phone at a later date for clarification or follow-up necessary to insure accuracy of the data. Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of the effects of workplace bullying on individuals who are not the targets or victims.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is completely voluntary and participants are free to change their mind at any time and choose not to continue even after signing this consent form.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All information given by study participants is confidential and individual contributions are anonymous. All data will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me and a third-party transcriber. Each participant will be identified on the tape by first name and participant code only.

Availability of Results: A Summary of the results of this study will be available to participants upon request after completion of the study.

Consent: I hereby consent to participate in the above research project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may change my mind or refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. I may refuse to answer any questions or I may stop the interview. I understand that some of the things I say may be directly quoted in the text of the final report, and subsequent publications, but that my name will not be associated with this study.

Participant Signature: _________________________________ Date: _____________

Name: (Please Print) _________________________________

Witness Signature: _________________________________ Date: ______________

Name: (Please Print) _________________________________
APPENDIX C (Questions for the interview)

The interview process will begin by the researcher asking study participants general questions about their experience with workplace bullying.

Please tell me in detail about your experience with workplace bullying.

1. How do you define workplace bullying?

2. You stated you knew a co-worker who had been bullied for at least six months, can you tell me how the bullying showed up, who was the bullier, what did they do?

3. What was your relationship to your co-worker?

4. How did you know about the person’s experience?

5. What did he or she do about their experience as far as you know?

6. Why do you think this person was a target?

7. What was the outcome of their situation?

8. Was the individual the only person who was harassed by this other person?

9. Do you think gender or race contributed to the mistreatment received by the victim? If yes, how did it contribute?

10. What feelings did you have due to this situation?

11. What, if anything, did you do about it?

12. If you didn’t do anything about it, what prevented you?

13. When you hear about workplace bullying experiences, do you tend to side more with the target or with the perpetrator?

14. What is your opinion about whether or not a company should attempt to prevent workplace bullying?

15. Let’s say your company had a policy in place to resolve workplace bullying, how comfortable would you be to file a formal complaint on behalf of your co-worker?

16. What is your opinion about whether or not laws should be enacted to prohibit workplace bullying?
17. If there were laws prohibiting this type of behavior in the workplace, how comfortable would you be to file a formal complaint on behalf of your co-worker?

18. Has this experience influenced your opinion about workplace bullying, if yes, how?