Addressing Unacknowledged Conditions: The Language Of Workplace Bullying

Laura Dzurec, PhD, PMHCNS-BC

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WHAT BULLYING ISN’T

He just didn’t seem to understand the banter?

Bullying or simply establishing social cohesion?

—Alexander, MacLaren, O’Gorman, & Taheri, 2012

Bullying is not banter.
Bullying is not maintaining high standards and holding clear, reasonable expectations, including:

- Being “hard but fair”
- Using objective evaluation standards
- Implementing performance based, not personality based assessments

WHAT BULLYING IS

At Issue

“Bullies who are shouters and screamers are reasonably easy to identify, but what about the subtle bully who sets up (failure) by withholding or manipulating information, springing meetings... physically isolating...(others) from the tools to do their job, or engaging in micromanagement?” (Rayner & Cooper, 1997, p. 211)
“Bullying at work is claimed to be a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress put together” -- Adams & Bray, 1992, p. 16

OBJECTIVES:
• Discuss workplace bullying’s context.
• Recognize bullying’s nature as a chain of causal, largely-unacknowledged events.
• Identify communication patterns typical in workplace bullying.
• Describe at least 5 ways to acknowledge and respond to workplace bullying.

Bullying in the workplace typically is subtle and interpersonal. It includes behaviors like:
- eye rolling
- tongue clucking
- emotional dismissal
- marginalization
  “Your thinking is all wrong” -- Gaffney et al., 2012, p. 9
  “...All her friends ganged up against me when I reported it” -- Gaffney et al., 2012, p. 5
A chain of subtle (unrecognized) causal events and conditions, both subjective and objective -- ZAPF, 1999

The activities of workplace bullying aren’t innocuous—they silence victims “by powerful barriers to communication” – Allan, Cowie & Smith, 2009, p. 902; Duréc et al., 2013

“Unacknowledged conditions make the actors’ understanding possible but are not included in their accounts” -- Allen, 1995, p. 177.

Bullying’s threat is entangled in unacknowledged conditions
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ORGANIZATIONAL

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CORPORATE ORGANIZATIONS

Corporate Attitude of Denial
• A Culture of Violence; Workplace Dehumanization
• Lack of Worker Empowerment
• Lack of Incentives, Disincentives
• Lack of Awareness
• Lack of Information, Access to Available Information
• Lack of Communication, Training
• Lack of Resources; Lack of Reporting
• Lack of Effective Follow-Up to Reported Events
• Lack of Written Policy, Definitions, and Consequences
• Lack of Teamwork/Partnerships

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ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS

• long-term employee interrelationships
• entitlements
• ambiguous evaluation procedures; and
• the notion of ‘academic freedom’

—Keashly & Neuman, 2008)
ACROSS ORGANIZATIONAL TYPES

Our data suggest that administrators turn a blind eye to reports of bullying

--Dzurec, 2013

Qualitative analysis of 102 narrative reports:
variability and unevenness of administrative responses
a collective sense of administrative abandonment (status limbo)

--Dzurec, 2013

PERSONAL
where unacknowledged conditions do their work
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POWER THEORY:

- Aggressor
- Victim
- Savior
- Martyr
- Expert

(From and Ross)

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UNACKNOWLEDGED BULLY CHARACTERISTICS

- needs power
- feels insecure
- seeks sense of self from others
- establishes inappropriate expectations
- readily violates boundaries
- meets personal needs within organizational structure

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UNACKNOWLEDGED VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

- history of abandonment
- challenged sense of self-worth —Black, 1999
- committed to understanding the bully’s needs
- hard-pressed to capture “what happened”
- generally committed, hardworking, honest

(THESE ARE IDEAS UNDER DEVELOPMENT)
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**UNACKNOWLEDGED RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

Victims often don't notice bullying until it's gone on for some time.

--MacIntosh, Wuest, Gray, & Aldous, 2010; Duric & Bromley, 2012; Duric, Kennison, & Al-Bataineh, in press

And they tend to engage fully with their bully counterparts.

--Dzurec & Bromley, 2012; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011

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**UNACKNOWLEDGED CONFLICTING RULES ABOUT WHEN AND HOW TO ACT**

Victim depends on relationship and follows objective rules to serve self and organization

Bully depends on relationship and follows subjective rules to serve self WITHIN the organization

--Dzurec, Fitzgerald, Karpinski, Bromley, Meyers, Phillips, 2013

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**AN OLD JOKE—**

**TWO SETS OF RULES WITH ILLUSTRATION**

“Say those three little words that will make me walk on air.”

**VICTIM EXPECTATION:**

“I love you.”

**BULLY’S VEILED REPLY:**

“Go hang yourself.”
Outcome of Unacknowledged Conditions:
bullying becomes tacitly permitted

As bullies communicate over time, they use prosody across subtle, linked communications, or boldly and openly in public venues, to establish a context-embedded, one-way communication process of ‘doublespeak’ (Herman, 1992; Orwell, 1949). The process serves to recontextualize (Hamilton-Wieler, 1988) victims’ situations and, through mechanisms largely unacknowledged by the victims, to subtly demean their personhood, and to shame them and render them voiceless. --Dzurec, Kennison, & Albataineh, in press

DOUBLESPEAK (Herman, 1992; Orwell, 1949), intended to let the bully have a primarily-illegitimate, personally-affronting say without the risk of being found out

--Dzurec, Kennison, & Albataineh, in press; Lutz, 1989
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You know you’re being bullied if you recognize the following in the bully:

**PUBLICLY (JEKYLL)**
- Practically perfect in every way
- Makes up stories on the fly
- Charming and plausible
- Mounts a good argument
- Self-assured
- Controlling
- Critical
- Seeks sympathy or concern for others
- Unlikely when asked to help others

**PRIVATELY (HYDE)**
- Immature, impulsive, deceitful
- Denies wrongdoing and counterattacks with fabricated criticisms
- Feigns victimhood
- Doesn’t listen
- Can’t sustain mature conversation
- Grateful
- Disciplinarian
- Defined
- Rigid and inflexible
- Insincere
- Drawn to power

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You’ll know you’re being bullied if you recognize the following in yourself:

- Frequent illness, joint and muscle pain
- G.I. symptoms, skin problems
- Headaches and migraines
- Constant fatigue and sleep disturbances
- Headaches and replay
- Obsessiveness
- Catastrophization
- Poor concentration and forgetfulness
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Headaches
- Uncharacteristic irritability and angry outbursts
- Hypervigilance
- Distressed depression
- Shattered self-confidence
- Relationship disruption

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**VULNERABLE VICTIMS CATASTROPHIZE**

Our research shows that self-identified victims tend to respond emotionally (not cognitively) to bullying:

> —Bromley & Dziurz, 2010; Dziurz & Bromley, 2012; Karpiński et al., 2012

Catastrophization involves rumination, magnification and helplessness

> —Bullens, Bishop, & Firth, 1995

In bullying, it is an emotional response to relational pain

> —Karpiński, et al., 2013; Bromley & Dziurz, 2010; Dziurz & Bromley, 2012
Victim thinking is challenged by the confusing messages of the bully—Ariely, 2011; Dzurec & Bromley, 2012; Lyon, 2006

Bullies recontextualize via one-way doublespeak.
Victim sense of self and future are challenged.
Victims feel shame and lose their voices—Dzurec, Kennison, & Albataineh, in press

Mathematically, bullying acts at a highly theoretical level in a predictable way as a deterministic, non-random, dynamical system

\[ a^2 + b^2 = c^2 \]
A deterministic dynamical system suggests a dynamical rule that specifies the immediate future of all state variables, given only the present values of those same state variables.


Ultimately, EVERYONE gets into the act as the behavior becomes necessary to survive in a bullying environment.

Theory proposed by Ariely and colleagues help to explain bully, victim, and administrator behaviors and serves to clarify what perpetuates bullying in the workplace:

Individuals’ behaviors are strongly influenced by their personal emotions and by characteristics of their environments; moreover, complexity makes it hard to know what to do—so individuals tend to do whatever takes the least effort—to default.

Unchecked, subtle workplace bullying facilitates growth of toxic employee-abusive organizations (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008).

OUTCOME: an enduring configuration of personal and organizational discomfort that will lead to dysfunction in the workplace, if it is not actively curtailed.

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Bully: establish and maintain personal power through one-way communication behaviors that are sanctioned—

--Dzurec, Kennison, & Al-Battashneh, in press

Victim: ruminate and magnify the bully’s threats, while remaining helpless to change sanctioned behaviors (i.e., they catastrophize) in response to shame—

--Bromley & Dzurec, 2010; Dzurec & Bromley, 2012; Karpinski et al., 2013

Administrator: ignore the invisible behaviors of bullies and the “ridiculous” claims of the victims—

--Dzurec, 2013

Defaults (in terms of behavioral economics):

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A wide range of physical and emotional symptoms for individuals—

--Baillien et al., 2009; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Ferris et al., 2007; MacIntosh, O’Donnell, Wuest, & Merritt-Gray, 2011

Significant dysfunction for organizations—

--Brannan, 2007; Crawford, 1999; Deluca & Twale, 2010

Untoward outcomes for organization customers and end-users—


Outcomes of subtle bullying:

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ORGANIZATIONAL ATTENTION AND ACTION ARE REQUIRED TO ADDRESS BULLYING

“…there is evidence that organizations that effectively manage workplace bullying outperform those that do not by thirty to forty percent (VonBergen et al., 2006). Some very effective organizations like Google, Southwest Airlines, and JetBlue Airlines “disdain, punish, and drive out ordinary jerks” (Sutton, 2007, p. 56).”

--From Sanders et al., 2012, p. 30
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WHY HAVEN'T WE STOPPED IT?

Our research suggests, FIRST, it's because we haven't named its primary and largely unacknowledged characteristics.

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HUMAN ERROR AT-RISK BEHAVIOR UNREASONABLE RISK

LEADER'S ROLE:
- Process reassessment
- Procedural changes
- Training and Environment redesign
- Increase situational awareness

LEADER'S ROLE:
- Remove negative incentives
- Introduce positive incentives
- Take positive action

Table from Marx, 2007

LIKELIHOOD of DYSFUNCTIONAL CULTURE and BULLYING INCREASES LEFT to RIGHT

CONSOLE COACH PUNISH

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JUST CULTURES INCORPORATE:
- Expectations of mutual employee support
- Value for time away from work
- Recognition of individual need and uniqueness
- Work patterns that promote 'breathing space'

--Combe, 2013
A 'JUST' CULTURE REQUIRES A CONSCIOUS ORGANIZATION AND ITS STRENGTH IS AFFECTED BY:

- Individuals' needs for affect
  -- Schlett & Ziegler, 2014
- Social support structures
  -- AbuAlRub, 2004
- Shared interpretations of workplace events
  -- Brooks, 1993; Lau, 2013

SECOND, we haven't built just, appropriate policies to halt 'inattentional blindness' – Chabris & Simons, 2010

Reviewed Healthy Workplace Bill Website: http://healthyworkplacebill.org/

WPB Statistics: (as of March 6, 2014)
- 26 states have introduced the HWB
- there is NO legislation
- 10 states have no WPB-related activity
A sample bullying policy statement characterizes all the policies in the United States


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**Company X**

Considers workplace bullying unacceptable and will not tolerate it under any circumstances.

Workplace bullying is behavior that harms, intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates an employee or a stakeholder in the University, possibly in front of other employees, clients, or customers. Workplace bullying may cause the loss of trained and talented employees and students, reduce productivity and morale, and create legal risks.

Company X believes all employees and students should be able to work in an environment free of bullying. Managers and supervisors must ensure no one is bullied.

Company X has grievance and investigation procedures to deal with workplace bullying. Any reports of workplace bullying will be treated seriously and investigated promptly, confidentially and impartially.

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**Company X**

Encourages all employees and students to report workplace bullying. Managers and supervisors will ensure employees who make complaints, or witnesses, are not victimized.

Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who bullies an employee, a student, or a stakeholder in the University. Disciplinary action may involve a warning, transfer, counseling, demotion or dismissal, depending on the circumstances.

The contact person for bullying at this workplace is:

Name: ________________________

Contact Information: ________________________
Findings of our recent study demonstrated the inadequacy of policy and seriously spotty progress in establishing useful legislation. Let’s focus on the unacknowledged conditions of workplace bullying.

Carbo, 2009; Dzurec et al., 2013

Third, personally, we tend to do it wrong. …

“The more one can be emotionally neutral about the relationship process between others, the more efficient will be a detriangulating maneuver”—Kerr, 1988, p. 57.

We’re not generally emotionally neutral in response to bully counterparts.

Keys to Success:
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RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF LANGUAGE NUANCES:


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Bullying typically incorporates what the bully DOESN'T SAY

--Dzurec, Kennison & Albataineh, in press

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Bring Strong Skills And Wisdom To Encounters

Refuse to meet with the bully without a witness
Keep records of interactions
Report bullying behaviors clearly
Reject “unexamined acceptance” (Roberts, 2000)
Enhance quality of workplace interactions
Get and stay clear through ongoing debate
Say Confrontation is not hit and run
Fix the problem, not the blame
Approach with full disclosure
Identify the problem—only problems we know exist can be addressed
Lies—Silencing others may postpone conflict, but it will not resolve it
Emotions—Feelings are legitimate and should be acknowledged and addressed
--R. Hall, Kent State University
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RECOGNIZE THE PARADOXES INHERENT IN BULLYING DYNAMICS

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• Think proactively not reactively about workplace bullying
• Think about your own history of loss
• Put labels on what you are seeing—recognize your shame
  The long-term, predictable character of workplace bullying
  The vague responses to its components
  The ways bullies get their way
  The emotional, catastrophizing response of ‘victims’
  The bully’s ability to back you into a corner you can’t get out of
What the bully DIDN’T say to you but left you feeling—process what just happened.
Recognize Inherent Challenges

- Bullying is compelling, as the brain is challenged by the confusing, one-way, doublespeak messages of bullying.
- External pressures, such as unions, reinforce bully-victim dynamic.
- Administrators must intervene to stop bullying, but there is not language to explain its seriousness.
- It's hard to think on your feet when you're under this kind of pressure.
- Current policies are not useful.

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Trust in yourself, build a better future

- Take a stand based on what is proper, honest.
- Keep records.
- Report what is happening using objective, rational language.
- Study and improve policies.

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Recognize your responsibility for the 'Burden of Proof'  

-- Sanders, et al., 2012
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.