

**A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO WORKPLACE BULLYING
IN THE K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL SETTING**

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study investigates and describes the lived experience of and meaning applied to the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting using system theory as the framework. Descriptors of the participants: **bully, target and witness**, are operationalized as well as the mental, emotional, physical, social and financial impact and the impact on teacher performance. **Twelve self-identified targets or witnesses** were chosen from a pool of 57 respondents who completed an online survey delineating the characteristics and impact of workplace bullying. Scenarios of the participants' experiences offer insight into the emotional experience of the participant while participant interviews reveal the reality of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting as well as the characteristics of targets, bullying behaviors, reality of the personal and professional impact on the individuals and the educational system. **Five major theme clusters emerged in relationship to this phenomenological study:** the **Significance of Professionalism** which considers the professional role of the bully and

the target; **Isolation** which describes the experience of segregation that is imposed on or chosen by the target; **Longing for Responsiveness** describing the intense hope to be heard and helped, **Clutching for Closure/Will It Ever End** through which the target searches for meaning in the experience and for any aspect of the experience that had been within his/her control and **System Survival and/or Sustenance**, the manner in which the system maintains its identity despite trauma to individual members.

Keywords: workplace bullying; schools; bully; target; system theory

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of workplace bullying in society is evident in its depiction in all forms of mass media: movies, television, radio, online, and literature. *Horrible Bosses* (2011), chronicles the experiences of three individuals who have been bullied at the workplace and the popular series *The Good Wife*, featured an episode titled “Wrongful Termination” depicting workplace bullying that resulted in a worker committing suicide (Humphrey & Abrahams, 2011). A search of Amazon.com using the keywords “workplace bullying” resulted in a list of 935 titles. A Google search using the terms “workplace bullying” resulted in 1,310,000 matches. Consideration of the possibility of numerous duplicates does not diminish the significant online interest that is being generated about workplace bullying.

In addition to providing a basis for these cultural depictions, workplace bullying has also provided the basis for research. The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) conducted an online survey of 2,092 adults that supported the reality of workplace bullying (Namie, 2007). Participants responded to the question: “At work, what is your experience with any or all of the following types of repeated mistreatment: sabotage by others that prevented work from getting done, verbal abuse, threatening conduct, intimidation or humiliation?” The first survey commissioned by WBI in 2007 indicated that over a third of the population experiences workplace bullying (Namie, 2007). The results of the WBI 2010 online survey indicate that workplace bullying affects more than half of the population: 67.1% of all respondents have experienced workplace bullying at some point in their lives as either the target or a witness;

51.6% report being bullied at some point in their lives; 25.9% of the respondents report having experienced workplace bullying as a target within the past year; 15.5% report witnessing bullying without being a target and 0.3% of the respondents indicate that they have been the bully (perpetrator) (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2010).

The statistics from The WBI Workplace Bullying Survey (2010) do not offer comparisons of various work environments. While workplaces share common characteristics, there are unique characteristics as well. In general, factories, hospitals, corporations, and schools all assume that workers will follow procedures, work for the good of the institution, demonstrate respect for each other and the consumer, and work cooperatively. Because of the endless variety of individuals and their related circumstances, the assumptions of each individual often do not correlate exactly with those of the others. Typically, procedures to address conflicts based on interpretations are outlined in company handbooks, contracts, or through other resources provided by the Human resources department. The institutions which create these guidelines also assume that individuals will follow the guidelines as outlined to achieve the desired outcome of a reduction in workplace tension that has developed as a result of differing attitudes, perceptions, values, and behaviors.

In *Managing Personality Disorders: The Ones Who Make You Mad and Drive You Crazy*, Dr. Gregory Lester (2007), a clinical psychologist, describes the normal position of human beings in relationship as that of problem-solving. From a problem-solving stance, the problem is identified and the roles of individuals are assumed: victim, the individual requiring assistance, and the rescuer, the person providing assistance either through ability or community approval. When the problem is resolved by individuals filling their appropriate roles, relief and satisfaction are experienced. Typically, a positive lesson is learned or a positive relationship is

formed. Lester extends the description of human interactions to include persons with personality disorders.

Classified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) under Axis II, personality disorders are a pervasive and enduring set of characteristics that while appropriate in some circumstances are significantly inappropriate in many others. That is, the individual does not possess a complete set of traits that allows varied reactions based on circumstances, environment, expectations, and others involved. The ability to engage in reflective functioning, or the observing ego, to determine one's personal impact on others is lacking. Also deficient is the ability to consistently self-regulate, or demonstrate personal control. In addition, the individual who demonstrates the set of characteristics comprising a personality disorder is deficient in the necessary traits to respond appropriately in some circumstances (Lester, 2007). The prevalence of personality disorders in the general population is between 15% and 19% (Lester, 2007). The high number of individuals who meet the criteria for personality disorders indicates that these individuals exist in all areas of life. The fact that their behaviors are intermittently appropriate indicates that the individuals in relationship with those meeting personality disorder criteria often are unaware of their limited ability to respond appropriately in a variety of circumstances.

The limited responses and strategies possessed by those with personality disorders significantly alter the outcome of the problem-solving process from one that is resolved with relief and satisfaction to continuing drama with conflict and dissatisfaction. The individuals demonstrating the characteristics of a personality disorder often assume different roles that change the rules of the interaction. The other participants then must shift their responses and in doing so, the drama continues. Observers who are not involved often feel perplexed and

confused. They are reluctant to even attempt to explain what is being witnessed as the interaction does not proceed typically.

This researcher considered the question of the lived experience of workplace bullying. There are many individuals who behave in a diagnostically significant manner in a wide variety of workplaces, although not all who behave in this manner meet the criteria of a personality disorder outlined in the *DSM-V*. As indicated previously, the category of “workplace” is broad and can include diverse locations: factories, hospitals, corporations, and schools. This qualitative study focused on the K-12 public educational setting as the workplace to be considered.

Statement of the Problem

All employment locations including the K-12 educational setting provide the opportunity for workplace bullying. The individuals involved (the bully, the target, and the bystanders) all experience a consequence as a result of being involved. Time and energy that should be allocated to the tasks of the workplace are expended instead to bullying or withstanding the bullying. The result is a decline in productivity, loss of self-esteem, a negative impact on identity, as well as physical and mental health (Sorrells, Caso, Munhoz, & Sapolsky, 2009; Melamed, Shirom, Toker, & Shapira, 2006; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Leymann, 1996; Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Yamada, 2000; Saunders et al., 2007; Rayner & Keashley, 2004; Westhues, 2008; Dias-Ferreira et al., 2009; Namie & Namie 2003; Ayoko et al., 2003; Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Einarsen & Raknes, 1996; Leymann, 1990; Price-Spratlen, 1995; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002).). When schools are also the workplace, the decline in productivity may mean a decrease in the amount of time and energy that can be directed toward the success of the students.

Roland Barth (1990), founder of the Harvard Principal's Center, observed that "the quality and character of a school and the accomplishments of its students have more to do with the nature of the adult relationships in a school than any other factor" (pp. 512-516), and referred to the importance of collegial relationships among professional educators to improve teaching and schools (Barth, 2005). In a phone discussion with this writer prompted by these statements, Barth shared that the statements were anecdotal, but acknowledged that he did make and believe the statements while acting as a principal (personal communication). Barth (2005) also acknowledged that despite research supporting the importance of adult relationships within a school, he was "aware of a profession full of school people who do" recognize the importance of the adult relationships (p.5).

If staff relationships are tantamount in student achievement, we must move beyond the school-wide and departmental socials that are artificially organized and manufactured and consider the reality of workplace relationships. It is time to address the elephant in the room: workplace bullying in K-12 public educational setting.

The K-12 public educational setting offered a unique workplace to be studied due to the potential impact on scores of children who may witness the acts of bullying or the symptoms of bullying or the outcomes of bullying behavior. Witnessing bullying behaviors between adults without the mature cognitive structures found in adults has the potential to teach children to engage in the same behaviors and denies the opportunities to develop a greater variety of interpersonal skills with which to interact in the social environment (Blase & Blase, 2003).

Methodology of the Study

This phenomenological study was designed to maximize the reporting of the lived experiences of 12 individuals concerning workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting. Using a systems perspective in which the phenomenon of bullying is examined in the environment from a variety of perspectives to gain a complete understanding, this study attempted to gain greater insights by interviewing the targets, bystanders, bullies, and administration. The professional relationships among staff as well as the importance and influence of the workplace community on personal and community growth and development were considered. Literature has been initially reviewed to identify core issues and known information and to determine what aspects may be most applicable to the K-12 public educational setting prior to the creation of the study design.

Participants were selected from respondents to an online survey or through professional networking or referrals. All participants were, or had recently been, professional educators in the K-12 Public educational setting. This qualitative study was based on general systems theory as the theoretical framework.

Participants were purposefully chosen through snowball sampling (Patton, 2000) to allow a variety of employment positions (central office administration, building administration and certified staff) as well as roles (bully, target and bystander) in workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting to participate. A pool of 57 respondents to an online request through the WBI website identifying the study completed a screening survey. The WBI website is a public website that can be accessed through an online search of workplace bullying terms. Eleven participants were chosen from those participants who respond to the screening survey within the allotted time after analyzing the patterns in demographic information, employment positions, or

experiences in the identified role in workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting. The twelfth participant called this interviewer after viewing the survey on the WBI website. While she expressed a desire to participate, she also expressed reticence to share information electronically due to previous experiences. Participants chosen self-identified in one of the following employment roles: central office administration, building administration, department administration, certified classroom staff, certified support staff, non-certified staff, parents, or student of the age of majority. Participants also self-selected a past or present role in workplace bullying: target, bully, witness, or peripheral participant.

Each participant participated in a recorded interview of approximately 60 minutes, with a follow up interview of approximately 30 minutes for a total of 1.5 hours of interviewing per person. A total of 20 hours of interviewing data were collected for the study. Participants were provided referral sources to address any personal issues or traumas that might have been triggered by discussing their experience of workplace bullying (Appendix C).

Data provided by the professionally transcribed recorded interviews was coded, confirmed, and checked to determine clusters, patterns, or themes that are linked together (Creswell, 1998; Van Manen, 1990). Memos and methodological notes were used by the researcher in the reflection and analysis stages. Reference to memos and methodological notes allowed for reflection to explain gaps in information regarding basic personal information or events and identifying information as well as the mental process of the researcher during the interview process.

Significance of the Study

The examination of the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting encourages the self-reflection of the profession and the identification of bullying behaviors that deteriorate staff relationships. The undefined term “bullying” projects fear and promotes negative relationships that can negatively influence student achievement. Examination of the phenomenon of workplace bullying allows the reality of its existence to be acknowledged. That which is defined is afforded no more power or influence than any other concept. Defining and describing a concept allows it to be addressed, controlled, and changed. This study is significant in that it offers increased knowledge of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting, and possibly, how to deal with bullying.

This phenomenological study offers the educational profession the opportunity to lead the future. By examining the phenomenon of workplace bullying, educators create the opportunity to address, control, and change behaviors that can deteriorate staff relationships and impede student achievement.

Research Question

The central research question focused on the description of the roles, events, and behaviors of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting: What is the lived experience of and meaning applied to the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting?

Four sub questions are considered as components of the overarching question:

- What is the result of bullying behavior among adults?

- What is the impact of having a teacher who is chronically ill due to the stress of chronic bullying at work?
- How is the developing child affected by a teacher who experiences the mental strain of preserving his/her own professional identity and who questions the confidence necessary to plan and implement educational activities?
- What are the recommendations to address workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting?

The results depicted the primary experiences of the target, the secondary experiences of witnesses and administrators, and the peripheral experiences of students and parents. Due to the anticipated difficulty of locating participants willing to self-identify as “bully” or “perpetrator,” that particular role was not included, though an opening will be provided should a participant decided to disclose their experiences in that role.

Assumptions

A fundamental assumption in the study of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting was the existence of the phenomenon prior to data collection. It is also assumed that the participants responded honestly, sincerely and accurately. Because participants were accessed from active users of the workplace bullying site and were possibly be more accustomed to sharing their experiences in public forums, it is assumed they were more open to sharing their experiences publically. This researcher assumed that some roles may be more difficult to represent such as bullies or bystanders. For that reason, the term “witness” will be used instead of “bystander.” It was not anticipated that people will come forward and identify themselves as a

perpetrator, but the opportunity will be there for them to share those experiences should they choose to do so.

Limitations

Limitations in the interview method used in this qualitative study included: the personal aspects of the participant (level of cooperation, ability to verbalize experiences, and individual perception and reflection), the level of skill the researcher had in the process, and the lack of total neutrality due to the fact that the information was uncovered and descriptions elicited in the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, Schwandt, 1997). The emotionality of the experience of workplace bullying provided an additional limitation that was traumatic in nature and could be re-triggered by discussion of the event. A final limitation lay in the potential difficulty of interviewing persons holding the role of bully. An anticipated limitation was present: study data did not include the experiences of perpetrators although one participant identified herself as a bully at times until she reviewed the operationalized definition.

This researcher's personal experience of workplace bullying in the role of target was identified as an additional limitation. While this researcher's experiences have inspired the phenomenological study, the purpose of this study was to describe the lived experience of individuals who have familiarity with workplace bullying in the educational setting. This researcher used bracketing in the analysis of the data and worked diligently with the committee members to bracket "false notions and truth" as referenced by Moustakas (1994, p. 90).

Delimitations

The sampling process was a delimitation of this study. Originating with an online request through the WBI, 57 individuals responding to the posting had demonstrated a prior interest in workplace bullying by initiating access to the website. This group of 100 was reduced to a 12 participants for individual one-hour interview session with one 30-minute follow up interview. An additional delimiting factor in this phenomenological study lay in the requirement of employment in a K-12 educational setting for participation.

Summary

What is the result of bullying behavior among adults? What is the impact of having a teacher who is chronically ill due to the stress of chronic bullying at work? How is the developing child affected by a teacher who experiences the mental strain of preserving his/her own professional identity and who questions the confidence necessary to plan and implement educational activities?

This study examined the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the educational setting by examining the systems in which the behaviors occur, based on the responses of 12 participants who have experienced this phenomenon. The researcher considered the impact of witnessing bullying behavior and the impact of stress on the professional educator as well as the student in situations of workplace bullying in the k-12 educational setting.

Definition of Terms

Target

The target is the object of the bullying behavior (Duffy & Sperry, 2007). Common characteristics in targets include resistance to being subservient, resistance to being controlled by others with less knowledge or experience than they have (58%), being the Veteran “go-to person,” possessing superior competence or technical skill (56%); having good social skills, being liked, and having a positive attitude (49%); value ethical, honest behavior and demonstrate integrity by aligning behavior with values (46%) (Namie & Namie, 2008, pp. 57-60).

Witness/Bystanders

Co-workers can be direct witnesses of bullying behaviors toward the target. They can be secondary targets by experiencing symptoms as a result of witnessing the bullying. While not personally attacked, their perceptions and experiences of the workplace environment are significantly altered by being exposed to workplace bullying (Barling, 1996). Witnesses of workplace bullying report insecurities at work, increased work expectations, interpersonal conflicts at work, and unclear roles within the job descriptions (Jennifer, Cowie, & Anaiadou, 2003) as well decreased job satisfaction, increased stress and negativity (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007). They often learn to adjust their beliefs, assumptions, values, expectations, and behaviors to allow them to function within the environment (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007), which results in accommodating the bully’s behavior.

Bully/Perpetrator

A bully is one individual or a group of up to four individuals who demonstrate bullying behaviors toward a target (Duffy & Sperry, 2007). These individuals are perceived as having more power: formal power, as in that of the supervisor, and/or informal power found in the forms of experience, social connections, and knowledge than the target (Leymann, 1996; Rayner & Keashley, 2004; Saunders, Huynh, & Goodman-Delahunty, 2007). The bully demonstrates behaviors that are typically social interactions through which one individual (seldom more) is attacked (Leymann, 1996).

Bullies score high in aggression and anxiety and low in social competence (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). Narcissistic tendencies and egocentricity as well as tendency toward malignant narcissism are included by some researchers in the characteristics of bullies (Namie, 2003). Malignant narcissism incorporates sadism and a sense of superiority in the interpersonal interactions of bullies. Bullies are described as exploiting and manipulating peers and subordinates and behaving reverentially toward supervisors while silently disdaining them and their positions (Duffy & Sperry, 2007).

Bullying

Described as traumatizing (Duffy & Sperry, 2007), bullying behaviors are social interactions used to interact and communicate, but their meaning is altered to a more dangerous communication by significantly frequent use of long duration resulting in hostile and unethical communication (Leymann, 1996). These aggressive behaviors in the workplace are intended and/or are perceived as hostile (Einarsen, 1999), resulting in emotional assault of the target

(Yamada, 2000). Behaviors that would be considered occasional rudeness and incivility do not constitute bullying due to frequency and persistency qualifications (Fox & Stallworth, 2008).

Operational definition. Social interactions consisting of verbal and nonverbal communication directed at a specific individual or group of individuals (target) that occurs frequently over a period of six months or more that is designed to produce physical, emotions or psychological discomfort in the target.

Examples of bullying behaviors. Bullying behaviors range from the subtle, including dirty looks and snide remarks, to the more obvious behaviors such as physical threats or objects being thrown (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003; Baron & Neuman, 1998; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Yamada, 2000). Bullying behaviors can be directed toward materials and toward individuals. Bullying behaviors involving material can include destruction, theft, or sabotage of the required work materials. Physical bullying behaviors directed toward the individual include aggressive eye contact, (glaring or meaningful glances); giving the silent treatment; intimidating physical gestures (finger pointing and slamming or throwing objects). Bullying behaviors can be verbal such as yelling, screaming, and/or cursing at the target; angry outbursts or temper tantrums, and rudeness toward the target. Personal attacks are also demonstrations of bullying behaviors including accusations of wrongdoing; insulting or belittling the target, often in front of coworkers; excessive or harsh criticism of the target's work performance; spreading rumors about the target; breaching the target's confidentiality; making unreasonable work demands of the target; withholding needed information; taking credit for the target's work (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Keashley, 1998; Namie & Namie, 2009; Saunders, 2007; Yamada, 2000). Less obviously negative behaviors are reported as being experienced more

frequently by targets (Baron & Neuman, 1998). A significant component in defining workplace bullying is that the target perceives the behavior as negative and inappropriate (Saunders, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of workplace bullying in the lives of professional educators in the K-12 educational setting using systems theory as the theoretical framework. This chapter provides access to literature that exists as a foundation to a deeper inquiry into this lived experience.

Through the review of literature, this writer intends to establish the theoretical framework of this study and to provide a description of the lived experiences of individuals who are bullied at work that can be used as a springboard to inquire into the specific experiences of professional educators in the public school setting. Resources are varied and include the research findings as well as the perspectives of organizational psychologists, medical doctors, clinical psychologists, and lawyers.

Theoretical Framework

Systems theory provides the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study. Systems theory has roots in the study of biology (von Bertalanffy, 1968). In response to incomplete research that was unnecessarily duplicated, von Bertalanffy offered a description of what is currently referred to as general system theory (GST). Moving from the assumption of randomness and chaos in development of any system toward organization, systems theory considered systems, wholes, or organizations (Lilienfeld, 1978). Von Bertalanffy (1968)

identified the goals of GST as integration of study across disciplines. He noted the significance of unifying principles that lead to the desired integration.

Building on von Bertalanffy's GST first presented in 1937, later researchers and theorists recognized the ability of interdisciplinary application and expanded the usefulness of GST to include study in the areas of social work, mental health, political science, and behavioral sciences (Laslo & Krippner, 1998). Prigogine, Allen, and Herman (1977) noted the application of systems theory in open systems allows conceptual consideration and understanding of the interrelationships of human beings in their environment.

Definition and Description

The description of systems theory includes six key elements: consideration of the whole system, the existence of the system within an environment, engagement in purposeful regulation and adaptation to maintain status as a system, the interrelationship of elements, and a hierarchy of complexity and sophistication (Drake & Apfalter, 2007; Hall & Fagen, 1956; Koestler, 1978; Laslo & Krippner, 1998; Prigogine et al., 1977). The system functions at a level that is greater than the functioning of the sum of the parts (Drake & Apfalter, 2007; Koestler, 1978; von Bertalanffy, 1968).

The system considered in this phenomenological study is the K-12 public school system. Schools are composed of the elements of a system identified by Weiss (1977), von Bertalanffy (1968), and Koestler (1978). A school exists in the larger environment of the district, the community, and legal mandates and policies. It is composed of a wide variety of personnel (parts) who have explicit and implicit expectations regarding roles and behaviors. Each person's behaviors are interrelated with others and with the environment. The organizational charts of the

school districts reflect the hierarchical arrangement of personnel. The behaviors of the system as a whole produce an outcome that is significantly more sophisticated than what can be achieved by any individual part or level of the hierarchy alone.

Conceptualizing Bullying

The study of the phenomenon of work place bullying requires the definition and description of bullying. Because individuals develop personal definitions based on their experiences that include connotations and emotional attachments, this researcher synthesizes a common concept by reviewing definitions of previous researchers.

Global References

The phenomenon of workplace bullying is referred to by a various terms. In Australia, the United Kingdom, Northern Europe, and the United States the phenomenon is referred to as workplace bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Namie & Namie, 2009; Rayner, 1997; Sheehan, 1999). However, in France and Germany the same phenomenon is termed mobbing (Leymann, 1990; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996). These terms have different connotations; bullying by a group is referred to as mobbing while bullying by an individual is referred to as bullying (Westhues, 2008). Other terms such as harassment, aggression, and emotional abuse have also been used (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Keashley, 2001).

Frequency

In both a 2007 and 2010 WBI survey, participants responded to the question: At work, what is your experience with any or all of the following types of repeated mistreatment: sabotage

by others that prevented work from getting done, verbal abuse, threatening conduct, intimidation or humiliation? (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2007, 2010). The results found on the Workplace Bullying Institute website in Table 1 indicate that workplace bullying affects more than half of the population (Namie, 2010).

Table 1

Categories of Bullying

Response Categories	2007	2010
Currently Bullied	12.6%	8.8%
Been Bullied, Not now	24.2%	25.7%
Total: Bullying Experienced	36.8%	34.5%
Witnessed Only	12.3%	15.5%
Total: Bullying Recognized	49%	50%
Not Bullied/Not Witnessed	44.9%	49.6%

(Workplace Bullying Survey, 2007, 2010).

Definition of Bullying

Workplace bullying as defined in this study as a systematic and intentional assault that is frequent and persistent over an extended period of time by one to four individuals (bullies) who are perceived as holding power over a specific person (target). Workplace bullying is beyond the scope of occasional incivility or rudeness and is identified as bullying by the target and witnesses. Workplace bullying results in a hostile work environment for the individual targeted and those who are witnesses. It also results in harm to the target and witnesses in one or more of the following areas: physical, emotional, mental/psychological, social, or economic. This literature review addresses each of the six elements of the definition provided in the order in which they are presented.

Systemic and intentional. Workplace bullying is a systematic and intentional act that is designed to remove a person from the workplace and is executed in a systematic manner (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Leymann, 1996).

Frequent and persistent. Workplace bullying is persistently demonstrated (Saunders, Huynh, & Goodman-Delahunty, 2007). Additional research supports the protracted nature of workplace bullying, finding that it occurs on an almost daily basis for a period of months (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1996).

Bullies. Bullies are single individuals or small groups of up to four individuals who perpetrate bullying behaviors (Duffy & Sperry, 2007). These individuals are perceived as having power over the target. This power can be formal as in that of the supervisor and/or informal as in experience, social connections, and knowledge (Leymann, 1996; Saunders, 2007). The bully demonstrates behaviors that are typically perceived as social interactions through which one individual (seldom more) is attacked by individuals (Leymann, 1996).

Characteristics of the bully are the least accessible of the roles involved in workplace bullying: the bully, the target and the bystander, possibly due in part to the difficulty of obtaining data on individuals displaying the behaviors. In addition, bullies often prefer to remain anonymous and resist admitting to their behaviors or speak openly about themselves. Information that exists identifies high scores in aggression and anxiety and low scores in social competence (Einarsen et al., 2003). Narcissistic tendencies and egocentricity are included by some researchers in the characteristics of bullies (Namie, 2003). Malignant narcissism incorporates sadism and a sense of superiority in the interpersonal interactions of bullies. Bullies are described as exploiting and manipulating peers and subordinates. At the same time bullies

behave reverentially toward supervisors while silently disdaining them and their positions (Duffy & Sperry, 2007).

Despite the limited access to characteristics of bullies, the information that is available can be combined to present a composite of the individual who bullies others. The bully is both aggressive and anxious with a viewpoint that does not consider the perspectives of others. Some bullies demonstrate enjoyment in the suffering of the target as well as a sense of superiority. Bullies are master actors; the appearance of respecting their administrators masks the underlying disdain for both the individual and the position held within the organization.

Supervisors involved in bullying present a different challenge. From positions of power that are difficult to challenge, they demonstrate displaced aggression toward the target who cannot unravel the meaning beyond the observed aggressive intent. One form of workplace bullying is abusive supervision. The impact of psychological violations on the demonstration of abusive supervision indicates that abusive supervision may be a form of displaced aggression that has developed as a result of the sense of loss or injury from violations of the psychological contract that exists between supervisor and worker (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). Confronting abusive supervisors is difficult. Research shows that while a process by which employees could confront abusive supervisors exists, their willingness to confront decreases as the perception of abuse by the supervisor increases. The interpretation of the violation of the psychological contract as hostile determines the perception of bullying. Hoobler and Brass (2006) report that abusive supervision is more closely associated with the perception of aggressive intent rather than actual aggression. What the supervisor explicitly does matters less than the implicit message and intent of the behaviors the supervisor exhibits.

Bullies bully because they can. The bully's personality is unrestricted by the environment of the workplace and is, at times, encouraged by the workplace (Namie & Namie, 2003).

Researchers note that when, intentionally or not, a sense of competition is encouraged among workers it results in interpersonal aggression. The combination of ambitious workers and trusting co-workers is a mix that carries the potential of increased aggression without close adherence to policy by supervisors. Implicit support of the bullying behavior through ignoring behaviors or through a lack of thorough, objective investigation of reported concerns allows bullying behavior to continue (Namie & Namie, 2003).

Target. The target is the object of the bullying behavior (Duffy & Sperry, 2007). Common characteristics of targets include resistance to being subservient, resistance to being controlled by others with less knowledge or experience than they have, being the veteran "go-to person," possessing superior competence or technical skill; having good social skills, being liked and having a positive attitude; valuing ethical, honest behavior and demonstrating integrity by aligning behavior with values (Namie, et al, 2009).

Targets tend to have a positive set of assumptions regarding the benevolence of others and demonstrate a tendency to act according to karma, the belief that what you send out, you will receive. Targets also demonstrate behaviors that indicate a schema of respect for authority and compliance with directives. While working to help others as a demonstration of their values, targets simultaneously demonstrate a strong work ethic and an expectation of the same from others (Namie, et. al., 2009). Targets also display "exceptional accomplishment, commitment to work, integrity, innovation, and intelligence and competence" (Duffy & Sperry, 2007, p. 398).

The target's lived experience and the meaning constructed as a result of that experience is the determining factor that the behaviors constitute bullying. The term 'target' is preferred over

‘victim’ to avoid the connotation of powerlessness as it pertains to recovering from the experience (Namie, 2007).

Witnesses. Co-workers can be direct witnesses of bullying behaviors toward the target. While it would be hopeful to assume co-workers would intervene and provide support, witnesses often cannot overcome their personal biases to intervene. Witnesses report reluctance to intervene due to philosophical guidelines of tolerance and accepting differences in style, thought, and behavior, as well as giving all individuals the benefit of the doubt. This reluctance is based on the fear of appearing foolish, being ineffective in the intervention, and promoting themselves as a target for retaliation by the perpetrator (Namie & Namie, 2009).

Witnesses of bullying can be considered secondary targets as a result of experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that are described in the *DSM-V* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While not personally attacked, witnesses’ perceptions and expectations or workplace relationships are significantly altered by being exposed to workplace bullying (Barling, 1996). Witnesses of workplace bullying report insecurities at work, increased work expectations, interpersonal conflicts at work, unclear roles within the job descriptions, decreased job satisfaction, and increased stress and negativity (Jennifer, Cowie, & Anaiadou 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007).

In addition, co-workers also become acclimated to the “way things are done here.” They learn to adjust their beliefs, assumptions, values, expectations, and behaviors to allow them to function within the environment, which results in treating the bully’s behavior as acceptable (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). As these relationships between co-workers become increasingly negative, entrenched, and personal, witnesses can seldom remain uninvolved as the targets will tend to seek support for their case (Einarsen, 1996). While some witnesses may support the

target, others may not and may even turn against the target (Leymann, 1996). Aware of their own vulnerability and fearful of becoming targets themselves, witnesses might decide to ignore the situation rather than intervene on behalf of targets (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002). In some instances, witnesses may even collude in the bullying (Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994). Alternatively, observers may suffer in silence with stress, mental health problems, reduced job satisfaction, and increased intentions to leave their job as possible consequences (Namie & Namie, 2009). In other cases, non-exposed colleagues may be subjected to stress if summoned as witnesses when the case is under investigation by senior management (Merchant & Hoel, 2003).

Behaviors. Bullying behaviors are social interactions that by their frequent use and long duration result in hostile and unethical communication (Leymann, 1996). These aggressive behaviors are described as traumatizing and are perceived as hostile resulting in an emotional assault of the target (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Einarsen, 1999; Yamada, 2000). Behaviors that would be considered occasional rudeness and incivility do not constitute bullying due to frequency and persistency qualifications (Fox & Stallworth, 2008).

Examples of bullying behaviors. Bullying behaviors range from the subtle, such as dirty looks and snide remarks, to the more obvious behaviors, such as physical threats or throwing objects at the target (Ayoko, et al., 2003; Baron & Neuman, 1998; Bjorkqvist, et al., 1994; Yamada, 2000). Bullying behaviors can include behaviors that affect the target's materials: destruction, theft, or sabotage of the required work materials. The bullying behaviors can be verbal and nonverbal: aggressive eye contact, either by glaring or meaningful glances; giving the silent treatment; intimidating physical gestures, including finger pointing and slamming or throwing objects; yelling, screaming, and/or cursing at the target; angry outbursts or temper tantrums, rude and hostile behavior toward the target. Bullying behaviors can include assault on

the target's identity: accusations of wrongdoing; insulting or belittling the target, often in front of other workers; excessive or harsh criticism of the target's work performance; spreading rumors about the target; breaching the target's confidentiality; making unreasonable work demands of the target; withholding needed information; or taking credit for the target's work (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Keashly, 1998; Namie & Namie, 2009; Saunders et al., 2007; Yamada, 2000). Less obviously negative behaviors are reported as being experienced more frequently by targets (Baron & Neuman, 1998).

Outcomes. Bullying is detrimental to the target in several areas of life: mental health, physical health, identity, and related social systems. Bullying is experienced as a traumatic event that occurs over an extended period of time, bullying produces significant negative effects on the target's life systems. Targets are negatively affected in their ability to communicate, to maintain social connections in all areas of life, and to maintain their personal reputation, to maintain their occupational situation, and to maintain their physical health (Leymann, 1996).

Mental health impact. The momentous impact of the experience of bullying is compared to PTSD, a clinical diagnosis described in the *DSM-V* (APA, 2013), which is given when an individual demonstrates a collection of symptoms that meet specific criterion after

exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. (p. 271).

The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror. The characteristic symptoms resulting from the exposure to the extreme trauma include persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, a

numbing of general responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal. The full symptom picture must be present for more than 1 month and the disturbance must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, pp. 271-274).

The experience of being a target impacts mental health in virtually all cases. Due to the pervasive nature of the bullying, typical coping strategies to protect mental health and psychological processing are compromised, resulting in observable behaviors and symptoms that have the potential to impair the target's ability to recover from the experience.

Targets describe the experience of bullying as life-altering and traumatic which is confirmed by the symptoms reports. This effect occurs despite variations in personal strengths and personality styles. Psychological symptoms include stress, anxiety, nervousness, fearfulness, depression, loss of confidence, lowered job satisfaction, and decreased organizational commitment (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Leymann, 1990; Price-Spratlen, 1995; Saunders, Huynh, & Goodman-Delaney, 2007; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). Some targets report symptoms that correlate with those of post-traumatic stress disorder, including nervousness, aggressiveness, insomnia, apathy, and social phobia (Bjorkqvist, et al, 1994). Additional symptoms include severe anxiety, stress headaches, sleep disruption, loss of concentration, edginess, and racing heart rate. These are accompanied by obsession over bully's motives or tactics, recurrent memories, or thought intrusion. As a result, targets demonstrate avoidance of feelings and places combined with shame or embarrassment that changes their lifestyle and routines (Namie & Namie 2003).

Individuals experiencing chronic PTSD can demonstrate permanent personality changes in one or both predominating areas: obsession and depression. Workplace bullying as a form of

chronic PTSD has the capacity to trigger these personality changes. Permanent personality changes associated with predominate obsession include: hostile and suspicious attitude toward surroundings; chronic feeling of nervousness that one is in danger; a compulsory accounting of one's own fate (which triggered PTSD) to a degree that exceeds the surrounding's limit of tolerance and which leads to isolation and loneliness; hypersensitivity with respect to injustices; and a constant identification with the suffering of others in a pathological, compulsory manner (Leymann, 1996). Permanent personality changes associated with predominate depression include a feeling of emptiness or loneliness and a chronic inability to experience joy from common events in everyday life (Leymann, 1996). Permanent personality change with additional symptoms that indicate the individual has resigned include: self- isolation, feelings of not being part of society, demonstrating a cynical attitude toward the world around him/her, and being at constant risk of eventual substance use (Leymann, 1996).

Stress negatively impacts the target's ability to make decisions, specifically in the area of outcome-based decisions. Structural changes in the brain that underlie decision-making strategies are noted. The resultant behavior is that after a period of chronic stress, an individual reverts to habitual behaviors over problem-solving strategies (Dias-Ferreira et al., 2009).

While the definition provided in the *DSM-V* does not specify personal integrity, it can be argued that one's personal identity is closely aligned to one's physical integrity and that a threat to one can be a threat to the other. Symptoms presented by targets of workplace bullying compare positively to individuals who have been diagnosed with PTSD.

Psychological studies of individuals suffering from PTSD due to workplace bullying were compared to the psychological responses of train drivers who have hit and killed suicidal individuals while driving the train, and the responses of women who have been raped. The

experiences and responses of targets of workplace bullying compare more closely to those of women who have been raped than train drivers. The researchers hypothesize that the duration of the trauma followed by continued rights violations that may be subsequently experienced in healthcare, the judicial system, co-workers, union, or human resources or personnel interventions increases the negative impact of the events by repeatedly reliving the experience (Leymann, 1996). The threat of potential attack continues as long as support is unavailable and the perpetrator remains free. Because the stress and the trauma are both prolonged and self-renewing, the normal short-term response to PTSD does not occur. The target experiences continual anxiety and rights violations that undermine self-confidence and psychological health.

Physical impact. The immune system's initial reaction to stress is to increase immunity. However, in the event of chronic or severe stress, the opposite effect is noted. Indications of long-term structural changes to the brain include "impaired synaptic plasticity and cognition, decreased neurogenesis and spine density and dendrite atrophy" (Sorrells, Caso, Munhoz, & Sapolsky, 2009, p. 35). Bullying imposes chronic stress on targets, which causes the experiences of chronic burnout. Chronic burnout, which is the experience of post-traumatic symptoms with less intense symptoms, is associated with the development of type 2 diabetes in otherwise healthy individuals (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, & Shapira, 2006).

Related systems. The target's socio-economic situation is threatened as a result of severe psychological trauma and prolonged stress. Relationships at work, home, and in the community are affected as the target's responses and personality gradually change under the chronic stress. The social network through work relationships is compromised as many targets retire early with permanent psychological damage (Leymann, 1996). Aggression that cannot be safely

demonstrated at work is often displaced in the home affecting immediate and extended family as well as community relationships (Hoobler & Brass, 2006).

Threat to identity. Human beings interact with each other using a sense of self that has been developed throughout a lifetime and has been refined through interactions with others.

When workplace bullying takes place the target is faced with the realization that he/she is not perceived in a way that aligns with his/her sense of self, typical attitudes, and values. The target also realizes that his/her behaviors are no longer effective in a crisis situation.

Outcomes within the workplace include humiliation, devaluation, discrediting, degradation, loss of professional reputation, or removal of the target from the organization (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Leymann, 1996). The workplace environment assumes a hostile quality, and the target experiences stressful outcomes personally in the area of financial, career, physical, and psychosocial health (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Yamada, 2000). The target is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position in the workplace (Leymann, 1996).

As an outcome of the experience, targets identify themselves as having been bullied (Saunders et al., 2007; Rayner & Keashley, 2004). Labeling oneself specifically as bullied is less essential than the other components to the definition of bullying due to potential reluctance on the part of the target to identify with the role of victim or failure as well as conflict between the target's understanding of the definition of workplace bullying and the experience of the behaviors (Saunders, 2007). The target may be cognizant of the attack as well as the level of intensity, but may use personally significant terms to describe the experience.

Identity and reputation are the hallmarks of personal interaction in the world. Once compromised identity and reputation can appear difficult to reinstate, which leads to questioning the value of the individual's existence. Individuals who consistently question the value of their

existence often demonstrate behaviors that meet the criteria for depression in the *DSM-V* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Some individuals who meet the criteria for an extended period of time commit suicide (Leymann, 1990; Westhues, 2008).

Summary. Workplace bullying as defined in this study as a systematic and intentional assault that is frequent and persistent over an extended period of time by one to four individuals (bullies) who are perceived as holding power over a specific person (target). Workplace bullying is beyond the scope of occasional incivility or rudeness and is identified as bullying by the target and witnesses. Workplace bullying results in a hostile work environment for the individual targeted and those who are witnesses. It also results in harm to the target and witnesses in one or more of the following areas: physical, emotional, mental/psychological, social, or economic.

The Development Process of Workplace Bullying

To understand the phenomenon of workplace bullying the process by which behaviors escalate must be considered. The development of workplace bullying follows a typical course consisting of a four events: critical event, mobbing and stigmatizing, personnel management involvement, and expulsion. The critical or triggering event is most often conflict that arises from a problem or another difference between the target and bully (Leymann & Gustaffson, 1996). Leymann (1996) suggests that the cause for escalation lies in the personality of the perpetrator and the organizational culture. The process of bullying lasts for 6 to 18 months during which the target experiences extreme physical and psychological stress (Leymann & Gustaffson, 1996).

After an initial work conflict, work relationships appear appropriate until undermining tactics are initiated by the bully with the result of the target feeling stress, which causes the target

to respond in an atypical manner. There is an incident of bullying behaviors from the bully that causes confusion in the target. The target, in an effort to address the situation in a non-confrontational manner, tries to change himself/herself to meet the stated or implied criticisms of the bully. For a period of time, work goes well before the cycle resumes (Namie, 2000).

During the stigmatizing phase, all behaviors are designed to “get” the target. While potentially typical and normal, the interactions are designed to associate the target with negative characteristics. Examples of stigmatizing behaviors include tone of voice, suggesting motives for the target’s behavior, feigning ignorance or confusion to coworkers and supervisors, as well as behaving in unusual patterns toward the target with the goal of causing the target to respond in a confrontational manner that will direct attention toward the target and away from the perpetrator (Namie & Namie, 2009).

When personnel management become involved, the situation often escalates for the target as stigmatization continues. Management inaccurately attributes the cause of the situations to personal characteristics rather than environmental factors or organizational culture. The researchers note that the potential for this approach increases when the management is responsible for the psychological work environment. Targets often resign, resort to disability, or are transferred or terminated. Psychological distress for the target is associated with each scenario (Einarsen 1999; Leymann, 1996). Aggressive acts and psychological assaults are aimed toward the target. The incorporation of more participants increases the assault on the target resulting in increased humiliation and further discrediting of any testimony by the target. The official involvement of administration escalates the psychological attack on the target after ignoring or minimizing the process in earlier phases. Administration often allies with the bully by accepting the description of the target as somehow deficient and troublesome and labeling the

victim as difficult, under extreme stress, or mentally ill. This alliance increases the bullying because it is predicated on the descriptions of the target provided by the bully and other complicit individuals without objective investigation into the situation by the administration.

The expulsion phase occurs last. The target leaves the organization, either through termination by the organization or by choosing to resign to preserve and restore mental and physical health.

An intrinsic aspect of the target's response is empathy for the bully throughout the process. Attribution theory allows the target to consider the bully's behavior to be a result of issues outside his or her control therefore removing accountability from the bully. The attribution of responsibility to a source outside of the bully perpetuates the bully's access to the target (Namie et.al, 2009).

The Environment/Organizational Factors

In an environment where groups of people are in close association a culture with characteristics and patterns of interaction and behavior develops (Einarsen, 1999). Without reflective leadership, these patterns can support workplace bullying. The aspects of the environment associated with workplace bullying affecting witnesses as well as the target are reported concerns about role conflict, social climate, leader qualities, and the ability to monitor one's own work (Einarsen, 1999).

In the event of workplace bullying, the work environment that allows or encourages bullying is seen as a product of the employee rather than the employer. The current framework identifies the individual worker as responsible for his situation. This framework suggests that if bullying is occurring, the individual targeted is in some way responsible. This framework, known

as the fundamental attribution error, is often called the “curse of societal individualism” (Namie, 2007, p 5).

Work environments that foster workplace bullying are described as emphasizing achievement and profit with the goal of meeting the expectations of shareholders rather than employees. These work environments, for example schools, also tend to function with codes of conduct and guidelines for professional interactions. Employees typically expect support from reports of workplace bullying. In the absence of anti-workplace bullying laws, the behaviors associated with workplace bullying are not illegal; therefore, the codes and guidelines are minimally and inconsistently enforced. The hierarchal nature of the setting typically results in administrative responses to these situations in the form of reprimands to both parties. Typically, the target is corrected for having a personality that aggravates the bully. Mediation is available, but ineffective. The researchers note that legal action is often considered at the point when the target realizes that no administrative action will be taken. Particularly noteworthy is that recovery from bullying in this type of organization requires a long duration of therapy (Duffy & Sperry, 2007).

Work environments that foster respect and discourage workplace bullying are often those that have previously mismanaged workplace bullying incidents and have responded by implementing anti-harassment policies that include outlining workplace bullying behaviors, providing supportive training for supervisors, and coaching and counseling for targets while investigating and resolving the issues (Duffy and Sperry, 2007). Duffy and Sperry note that this has been most effectively accomplished in medium-sized, for-profit businesses (2007).

Employer Response

A recent online survey examined employer responses to reports of workplace bullying (Workplace bullying Survey, 2008). Results of the survey indicate that employer responses to bullying varied.

- Employers conducted a fair investigation and provided protection for the target by enforcing negative consequences for the bully 1.7% of the time.
- Employers conducted a fair investigation with negative consequences for the bully, but without protection for the target 6.2% of the time.
- Employers conducted an inadequate/unfair investigation with no consequences for the bully or the target 8.7% of the time.
- Employers conducted an inadequate/unfair investigation with no consequences for the bully while the target was retaliated against 31% of the time.
- Employers did nothing or ignored the complaints of the target with no consequences for the bully or the target 2.8% of the time.
- Employers did nothing while the target was retaliated against for reporting the bully's actions but kept her/his job 15.7% of the time.
- Employers did nothing while the target was retaliated against and eventually lost her job 24% of the time. (Namie & Namie, 2009, pp. 24-25)

According to these results, less than two out of 100 targets experience the support of an employer who investigates the situation, sanctions the bully, and protects the target.

When informed of bullying behaviors, employers typically respond in one of three ways: condemnation of the bullying behavior with punishment for the perpetrator, implicit sanction of the bullying behavior by ignoring or not responding to it, or the bullying behavior is rewarded

and supported. Einarsen et al. (1994) provided information indicating that, “employers tend to ignore the bullying in 44% of cases and actually make it worsen it in an additional 18% of cases” (Namie & Namie, 2009, p. 24).

Research by Hoobler & Brass (2006) supports that violations of psychological contracts perpetuate itself in that abusive supervision may be a form of displaced aggression that developed as a result of a sense of loss or injury from violations of a psychological contract. The ability to monitor one’s own work is affected by the supervisor’s approach to implementing his/her role. Because a supervisor’s role is to monitor and assign work tasks, the total inability to monitor one’s own work is identified as an aspect of abusive supervision. The lack of ability to work with independence has a more significant impact on interpersonal relationships than being overloaded with mindless or hectic work (Einarsen et al., 1994).

Members of organizations have expectations or assumptions regarding their roles and treatment in the workplace. Psychological contracts are employee beliefs regarding workplace entitlements, whether articulated or implied by the employer or assumed by the employee (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Robinson, 1996). The psychological contract is violated when reality does not meet the employee’s expectations, which results in a sense of loss or injury (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Rousseau, 1995). Research regarding the impact of psychological violations on the demonstration of abusive supervision indicates that abusive supervision may be a form of displaced aggression that has developed as a result of the sense of loss or injury from past violations of the psychological contract (Hoobler & Brass, 2006).

Impact of Leadership/ Management

Leadership styles are a significant aspect or mitigating force of workplace bullying (Hoel, Glas, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010). The role of management or administration could be assumed to be one of wisdom and perspective achieved through the lenses of objective investigation; however, the culture and leadership of an organization are the factors that allow and encourage the practice of workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2007). An organizational culture that allows or encourages aggressive, bullying behavior does so with the tacit permission of the organizational administration or management. Leadership styles influence levels of job satisfaction, work design, and morale among workers (Leymann, 1993).

There are three levels of employer perception of bullying. The predominant schema occurs at the interpersonal or intra-departmental level (Namie, 2007). Human resources (HR) personnel typically describe bullying behavior as a personality conflict or tough management style. Following procedures in compliance with existing legislation, HR often attempts to silence the bullied target by applying conflict resolution strategies or investigative procedures. If a complaint is not legally actionable, HR often disregards it. HR may also consider the situation from a perception of a case-by-case basis. Viewed from this perspective, responses are inconsistent with an exaggerated tendency to offer personality adjustment suggestions such as communication skills training or anger management for the bullies.

Supervisors and managers often demonstrate an approach indicative of a lack of training in solving emotional issues. They often side with the bully and provide the target with no specific guidelines for taking action or simplified instructions for the target to work it out with the bully (Duffy & Sperry, 2007).

When a report of bullying behavior reaches the executive level, a negative perception of the reporting employee is generated based on an existing relationship between the executive and offender/perpetrator the identified. Because the known relationship is threatened, the target, who identifies the problem, is dismissed under the implicit understanding that leadership acts to protect managers (Namie, 2007).

Lack of clear, attainable, non-conflicting goals, as well as a lack of “constructive leadership” negatively impacts interpersonal relationships in the work environment (Leymann, 1993, p. 396). The lack of effective leadership permits bullying behavior where “harassment is inevitably linked to an organization’s leadership system” (Einarsen et al., 1994, p. 397). Organizational factors that contribute to workplace bullying include the socially exposed positions of the victim and a low morale standard in the department (Leymann, 1993; Einarsen, 1999).

For the purpose of this study, it is of interest that among teachers, the social and psychosocial climate of the group was more significant than leadership or work control (Einarsen et al., 1994). Einarsen, et al. suggests that the independent nature of teaching mitigates the impact of these areas (1994).

Aspects of leadership style that negatively impact work environments include an authoritarian approach, lack of constructive leadership, institutionalized harassment, scapegoating, and responding prejudicially (Einarsen, 1999). The combination of the leader’s perception of personal incompetence with power results in increased negative interactions and aggression (Fast & Chen, 2009).

Increased bullying behaviors are noted when the leadership style is unpredictable (Hoel, et al., 2010). Unpredictability is hypothesized to be a result of several factors: the incompetence

of the supervisor; an inability to behave confidently based on education, knowledge or experience; and continual changes in approach by the supervisor resulting in an unpredictable work environment (Hoel et al., 2010).

Addressing Bullying

This study was designed to tell the story of the lived experiences of professional educators who have been affected by workplace bullying in the educational setting. A further goal was to illuminate the situation so that systematic changes can be made for current educators and the generations of educators that follow. A review of the literature provides insight into the type of systematic changes that may be required.

Legislation

Political policymakers, who themselves may depend on ingratiating relationships guaranteeing reciprocal favors and support, do not consistently recognize the need for laws that identify bullying or harassing behaviors outside the narrow scope of discrimination. Individual states are identified as being in the process of introducing legislation regarding the inappropriateness of workplace bullying (WBI website).

Solutions and Interventions

Workplace bullying is both an individual and system issue and research indicates that it must be addressed both individually and systemically. Bullying behaviors are best addressed through the policies of the workplace. Reviewing whether psychological contracts are an accurate reflection of company expectations has been found to diminish aggressive or retaliatory

interpersonal behaviors (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). Organizations, including HR personnel and the public must be provided with a well-developed and defined description of unacceptable behavior in which bullying is identified as a form of psychological violence. Lack of explicit description allows and encourages the perception of managerial prerogative, which is typically viewed by organizations and courts to be limitless (Namie, 2007).

Because self-esteem has been shown to mitigate the impact of bullying, it is also recommended that methods to improve and support self-esteem be implemented. These methods could include the use of strategies suggested by positive psychology or other self-esteem training interventions (Sprigg, Martin, Niven, & Armitage, 2010). It is also important to shift the responsibility for the bullying behavior to the bully and off of the target. This shift enables the target to accurately place blame for the resultant health issues on the perpetrator. As targets move beyond the parameters of the bullying experience, they are able to reframe their identity from that of victims to survivors (Namie, 2007).

Two Case Studies

Two school districts: the Sioux City, Iowa School District and Desert Sands School District in California provided information regarding the development of a plan to address workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting. In a phone interview Allison Benson, Director of Communications in Sioux City Iowa School District, shared the district's approach to workplace bullying in the educational setting (personal communication, August 24, 2011). According to Benson, addressing bullying among adults in the workplace was the outgrowth of implementing an anti-bullying grant designed for students and funded by the Waitt Foundation for Violence Prevention. Building on the framework of prevention, Benson stated that the

transition to include workplace bullying was a result of the adults believing that appropriate anti-bullying behavior should be modeled by all (personal communication, August 24, 2011). As a result, a cross-section of employees and staff were trained to recognize workplace bullying and worked to develop a district policy that was presented to and adopted by the Sioux City Iowa school board (Sioux City CUSD).

Designed to be proactive, the program offers targeted teachers and staff peer assistance in situations of workplace bullying. By providing support to the target, the intensity of personal symptomology decreases. In addition, the personal and environmental factors that caused the bullying situations can be specifically identified and addressed. The team was surprised by the number of cases of workplace bullying that were initially encountered (A. Benson, personal communication, August 24, 2011). Benson noted that many cases were misunderstandings based on poor or lacking communication. However, some cases were sent to HR to be addressed. According to Benson (personal communication, August 24, 2011), having an advocate present supported the target and helped reduce the effect of attribution theory that distorts the reality of the situation being presented. She recommended the process, especially in the educational setting where teachers are isolated in their work and noted that if workplace bullying behaviors are not reported, they cannot be addressed. The less threatening characteristic of peer support has brought a new sense of awareness to workplace bullying in the educational setting.

Dr. Sharon McGehee, Superintendent of the Desert Sands Unified School District, described the initiation of the district's anti-bullying policy as follows:

The District uses a Strategic Planning process for long-range planning. One of the five strategies we have been working on for the past several cycles of the strategic plan is "Responsible, Respectful, Ethical Behavior." Many "action plans" have come out of this "strategy" for example developing a code of ethics, student dress code, positive working relationships with our unions, student bullying, and the last one to come out was workplace bullying. We actually did not have much of a

problem as indicated by the “pre-implementation” survey we had employees take. Still, we wanted to ensure that the district culture was one of a safe and caring environment where every employee was treated with respect. (Personal communication, September 9, 2011)

Vicki Pollard, a retired counselor of Desert Sands Unified School District, also provided a description of the implementation of the district’s anti-bullying program (personal communication, August 31, 2011). The program, based on Desert Sands School Board policy 4119.12 (2010), trains volunteer participants in recognizing, responding to, and providing support for reports of workplace bullying. They were also trained in how to provide referrals and intervene in bullying situations if necessary. Staff responded to the opening PowerPoint presentations with rapt attention (V. Pollard, personal communication, August 31, 2011). The confidential approach used to address reports was explained. Pollard reported that appropriate use of the process has been made and that the outcomes have been generally satisfying (personal communication, August 31, 2011). Outcomes can be limited to support of the target and confrontation of the bully, which is done by a different coach or involvement of HR personnel. Because the process is very new to the district, some issues initially presented had been present for a longer period of time, making them the culture of the environment. Pollard noted that these patterns were responding to the intervention as well, but may take a little longer due to the patterns of communication that had been previously established (personal communication, August 31, 2011). The targets who have approached district coaches have demonstrated exemplary characteristics, according to Pollard. Previous, traditional attempts at intervention had not produced the desired changes.

The characteristics of the bully did not align consistently with those described according to Pollard (personal communication, August 31, 2011). The bullies were described as being very knowledgeable, but unwilling to acknowledge the knowledge and experience of others in general

and the target specifically. The Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources has made herself available by attending any meetings that were held, expressing the desire to be proactive, and offering to be involved as necessary. The support of the Superintendent was described as vital. Pollard stated that if the program had not been sponsored by the Superintendent, it would not have continued (personal communication, August 31, 2011). She further stated that the Superintendent expected that the anti-workplace bullying policy will become institutionalized within the district. The resulting implication is that tolerance for any bullying behaviors will decrease and be addressed at the earliest point of intervention. The process is new and change happens slowly. While all bullying behaviors have not stopped, an awareness of the behaviors is arousing reflective responses individuals who have confidentially questioned others' perceptions of their own behaviors as well as feelings of support and understanding among targets.

Conclusion

The tangible and intangible costs of bullying behavior that occur when the executive approach that the organization is an ethical, moral and socially responsible actor or the business approach must be delineated in this current era of fiscal responsibility. Both approaches if organization executives dismiss bullying behaviors then bullying behaviors are ignored. Ethical concerns are easily dismissed by executives because bullying is technically legal in the United States unless discrimination is involved. Regardless of the evidence of loss, executives often move to preserve alliances with the perpetrators rather than risk their professional relationship. Namie notes that the current trend is to verbally express respect for the individual, but behaviors are purposeful in protecting executive power (2007). Because bullying exists only with implicit or explicit employer approval, teaching employers at each level to accept responsibility for the

outcomes of decisions produced at upper levels is a vital first step in changing the work environment to one that actively demonstrates social responsibility.

The need for a shift from identifying the bully as the problem to recognizing the systemic problem of bullying is key. Correcting the reward-to-effort ratio framework that encourages bullying behavior must be accomplished. While some organizations are likely to make the required changes to be in the forefront of social change, unless business practices in general also change, the practices can be ignored unless there are legal mandates requiring compliance. Encouraging policymakers to recognize and imitate the forward, socially responsible laws in European countries has met with the resistance for being “un-American” and as potentially causing companies to become inoperable as a result of complying with an increasing number of legal mandates. Challenges to this framework lie in verbalizing the observation that opposition to anti-bullying laws is actually supportive of abusing workers. Identifying policymakers who have directly experienced bullying or who have experienced it indirectly through family members is a recommended strategy since political alliances often disintegrate in the presence of actual experience, allowing support and sponsorship of legal mandates against workplace bullying.

Factories produce products. Marketing agencies produce sales. Law firms protect the legal system. Stores provide goods. The medical profession heals the body. Therapists provide a secure environment for the examination of psychological processes. Ministers, priests, and churches provide an eternal, spiritual perspective. Workplaces differ in expectations and cultures based on the outcome of the service or goal of the business. According to research, workplace bullying spans all workplace environments; however, specific research into the lived experiences of individuals impacted by workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting is absent.

The question needs to be raised: How pervasive is the phenomenon of bullying in the K-12 public school setting in the Midwest region of the United States? The educational setting addresses the needs of society's most precious members, children. The K-12 public school system, which provides a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) as outlined by United States federal law and policies and supported by Illinois state law, is unique in that the future is touched by the present.

As a relational art, excellent teaching includes the consideration of the way a student experiences the attitudes and beliefs reflected in the behavior of a significant teacher (Pianta, 2005). Only a relationship will produce the motivation required to apply effort to an unknown skill or cognition. Teachers under attack or witnessing attacks are less able to provide safe environments for their students and are less emotionally available to develop relationships with their students.

Additionally, a common theme in education is that learning and attitudes are caught, not taught (Broudy, 1961). While education strives for the articulation of the metacognitive processes, it must be acknowledged that imitation continues to be the sincerest form of flattery and that behavior witnessed or experienced in a meaningful relationship are often accepted as the norm and repeated throughout an individual's life (Rogers, 1983).

The effect of witnessing bullying behavior is similar to that of post-traumatic stress disorder (Mikkelsen & Eiarsen, 2002). Mitigating the effects of PTSD without professional intervention leaves any individual using whatever personal coping strategies have been developed. Children, by their nature, do not have fully developed coping strategies and are therefore more vulnerable to negative personal impact mentally, physically, psychologically, and emotionally as well as potentially displacing their aggression in the form of bullying others.

Simpson and Jackson (1997) describe Dewey's ten analogies that provide insight into the roles and responsibilities of teachers: "learner, intellectual leader, partner and guide, wise parent, social servant, prophet, physician, engineer, pioneer, and artist." (p. 129). Further discussion of each of the analogies provides descriptions of roles that require the teacher to be self-aware, empathic, and to have the ability to enter the child's world in a non-judgmental manner. These are the attributes to which Rogers (1983) frequently refers. Pianta (2005) also addresses the importance of relationships between teachers and students in the classroom and demonstrates a continuing interest in following Rogers' philosophy.

What then, is the result of witnessing bullying behavior among adults? What is the impact of having a teacher who is chronically ill due to the stress of chronic bullying at work? What is the effect on the developing child of a teacher whose responses have become inconsistent due to the mental strain of preserving his/her own professional identity and who lacks the confidence necessary to plan and implement educational activities? This study was designed to describe the lived experience of workplace bullying in the educational setting by examining the systems in which the behaviors occur. A series of interviews of respondents employed at a variety of levels within the educational setting was used to describe workplace bullying through the lived experience of the actors in the drama: the bully, target and bystander.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of workplace bullying in the lives of 12 professional educators in the K-12 public school setting. This chapter outlines the process and methodology used to research this phenomenon including the approach, study design, data collection, and interpretive analysis. Through this study this writer intends to present a description of the lived experiences of the professional educator who is bullied at work. This description can be used as a springboard to educate teachers, administrators, school board members and the public as the initial step to eradicate workplace bullying in the educational setting. This was done by investigating responses to the overarching question: What is the lived experience of and meaning applied to the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting? and considering the responses to four sub questions:

- What is the result of bullying behavior among adults?
- What is the impact of having a teacher who is chronically ill due to the stress of chronic bullying at work?
- How is the developing child affected by a teacher who experiences the mental strain of preserving his/her own professional identity and who questions the confidence necessary to plan and implement educational activities?
- What are the recommendations to address workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting?

The results depicted the primary experiences of the target and, if possible, the perpetrator. The secondary experiences of witnesses and administrators were also depicted when possible.

Theoretical Framework

Qualifications for the Study

The theoretical framework for this study is systems theory, which views the world in “term of irreducibly integrated systems” (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998, p.11). Systems theory refocuses the research from the individual parts to the positions and dynamics within the system and has an orientation toward decision-making (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). Focusing on whole and complex interrelationships, systems theory encourages development of a global unitary consciousness, teamwork, collaboration, learning for life, and exposure to the universal storehouse of accumulated knowledge and wisdom (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). Systems theory also provides a framework for orderly and coherent study (Boulding, 1956).

Systems theory involves an intuitive element and incorporates a heuristic approach that is less analytical or step-by-step (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998; Tehranian, 1974). It “performs a qualitative heuristic function: it attempts to identify specific entities capable of being modeled as systems and wider areas as their environment” (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998, pp. 12-13). Checkland (1981) explains:

the world, or part of it, in systems terms; his purpose in doing so; his definition of his system or systems; the principle which makes them coherent entities; the means and mechanisms by which they tend to maintain their integrity; their boundaries; inputs, outputs, and components; their structure.

Systems theory defines the environment as the set of all objects that are both the result of impacted changes within the system and that can impact the stem by change within itself (Hall & Fagen, 1956). In a social system, the environment contains three levels of purpose: “the purpose of the system, of its parts, and of the system of which it is a part, the suprasystem” (Ackoff,

1981, p. 23). System theory begins with the analysis of a problem or a situation then describes the impact by working both inward and outward within the system (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998).

Definition and Description

The description of systems theory includes six key elements: consideration of the whole system, the existence of the system within an environment, engagement in purposeful regulation and adaptation to maintain status as a system, the interrelationship of elements, and a hierarchy of complexity and sophistication (Drake & Apfalter, 2007; Hall & Fagen, 1956; Koestler, 1978; Laszlo & Krippner, 1998; Prigogine et al., 1977; von Bertalanffy, 1968). The system functions at a level that is greater than the functioning of the sum of the parts (Drake & Apfalter, 2007; Koestler, 1978).

Systems Methodology

Systems theory uses a four-step method: consideration of the environment that includes the phenomenon researched, description of the individual entities within the environment, focus on the specialized parts of the individual entities, then refocusing on the environment while integrating the new perspectives. The researcher must consider the structure, function, relationships within the environment, as well as the elements and components of the system within the environment resulting in a description of roles and functions within the environment (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). Systems theory allows the researcher of soft systems (systems with people as the principal components) to reduce the phenomena to dynamics rather than individuals to allow consideration of the impact of external forces or events.

Systems Design

Using a systems design approach, the researcher sought “to understand a situation as a series of inter-connected, interdependent and interacting problems” (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998, p. 20). This design allowed the researcher to consider a future and implies that the responsibility for the future is ours within our social and physical environments (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998).

Life is both experience and interpretation. The reality of an experience is both external and internal; it is contained in an objective reality of circumstances and events as well as the internal interpretation (Beckett & Hager, 2002). Professional relationships incorporate the individual’s personal history consisting of their education, experiences, relationships, philosophy of life, and interpretations. The individual engages in interactions on the stage of the workplace using personal history as a basis for the scripts and actions through which professional relationships are played out. Because human beings have the ability to interpret experiences and develop meaning by verbalizing the experiences, reality can be described and examined from several perspectives. This phenomenological study describes the experience of workplace bullying in the educational setting and examines the experiences from several perspectives.

The importance of the workplace community and its influence as a unit on the growth and development of the unit as a whole is important, but it can be argued that the experience of the individual within that unit has been overlooked (Billett, 2007). There exists a risk of ignoring the possibility of the construction of different meanings among individuals with a common experience (Loftus & Higgs, 2010). This might partly explain why resolutions to workplace bullying are difficult to establish. The unique personal histories of individuals in the workplace and the variety of meanings that can be developed by individuals in the same set of

circumstances and events needs to be understood if individuals within the K-12 educational communities are to freely offer their strengths and acquire support for their weaknesses.

The operational definition of workplace bullying and the description of the indicators of the behaviors and the systems that are impacted are shared in chapters 1 and 2. Workplace bullying is the demonstration of negative interpersonal behaviors that are simultaneously systematic, isolating, and demeaning. They are not related to constructive professional growth or implementation of policy or procedure. Bullying behaviors impact the individual physically, mentally, socially, psychologically, and economically. The same behaviors impact witnesses, families, friends, and co-workers by association. While useful, these general definitions and descriptions lack the emotional impact of a primary interview in which the individuals involved share the essence of workplace bullying by expressing the meaning that they have developed as result of the experience.

Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (1998):

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15).

A qualitative paradigm was chosen for this study to allow the richness and intensity of the experiences of the participants to be recorded and analyzed without the limits of researcher-imposed definition and description of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting.

Qualitative research allowed the researcher to consider tone of voice and body language in the expression of personal meaning. It also afforded the opportunity to fulfill the obligation of

referring participants to psychological support if the need was verbalized or demonstrated in the interview sessions.

Systems theory is the lens through which the qualitative research was designed. Each participant described his/her experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting from the perspective of target, witness, perpetrator, or peripheral participant. Each description was analyzed for common themes of experiences and impact on the individual and the educational community.

Phenomenological Study Design

A phenomenological study design was used in this research. Phenomenology tells the story of the lived experiences of several individuals regarding a specific concept (Creswell, 1998). The phenomenon to be studied in this research is workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting as experienced by individuals employed in the K-12 educational setting: central office administration, building administration, department administration, certified classroom staff, certified support staff, non-certified staff, parents, students. Phenomenology is an approach to research that aims at being without presupposition. It describes the world as it is found with the goal of constructing a description of human actions, behaviors, intentions and experiences and making connections that are explicit and reflect universal meaning (Van Manen, 1990). Engaging in a phenomenological study, the researcher must guard against any tendency toward a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology was an appropriate method for this study as it was inspired by this researcher's experiences and recognized the need to bracket the memories and interpretations of these experiences during the analysis and interpretation stages of this study. This researcher has

the personal experience of being a target of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting. Because of the intensity of the experience, this researcher recognized the limitations of total disregard of the experience in the analysis of the data. This researcher worked diligently with the committee members to bracket truth from perceptions or experiences as referenced by Moustakas (1994).

The experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting was shared in common with respondents in this study. Each participant shared his or her experiences as a target, witness, bully or peripheral participant. This phenomenological study addressed the overarching question: What is the lived experience of and meaning applied to the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting? The steps of a phenomenological study begin with the identification of the problem as a systems approach to workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting. The following sections outline the subsequent steps particular to this phenomenological study.

Moustakas (1994) identifies the four stages or steps in a phenomenological study: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. In the epoche stage, researchers empty themselves of existing perceptions and habits of interpretation and understanding. The researcher sees what exists without judgment, requiring an emptying of self that is comprised of individual and/or cultural thoughts, values, interpretations, and perceptions. Additionally, the researcher sets aside or brackets personal experiences, assumptions, or prejudices to be made available to perceive the phenomenon from a totally fresh perspective. Moustakas recognizes the existence of intense life experiences that can preclude the ability of researchers to achieve complete objectivity. However, he expresses the conviction that “false notions of truth and reality can be bracketed and put out of action” (Moustakas, 1994, p.90).

Comprised of three phases, phenomenological reduction is a reflective stage in which the researcher considers the phenomenon prior to and during the data review. Separating the data from any preconceived meanings allows the researcher to describe the essence of the phenomenon in rich detail. A dimension of phenomenological reduction is horizontalization. Just as the horizon gives travelers a point of reference in their journeys, horizontalization provides a similar type of reference in that an emotion is triggered or a memory elicited by a data. This marks a point in the process of phenomenological reduction in which the researcher brackets the response to the phenomenon for further reflection and interpretation. The final phase of phenomenological reduction lies in organizing and describing the data and preparing for the construction of meaning (Moustakas, 1994).

The stage of imaginative variation is associated with the task of seeking all possible meanings by using imagination, considering differing frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and considering the phenomenon from different perspectives. Considering the possibilities imaginatively rather than experientially allows a wider diversity of possibilities as the researcher moves toward the final stage of the phenomenological study, synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994).

During the synthesis phase, a combination of meanings and essences emerge as the researcher considers the essential elements or characteristics of the phenomenon. This allows the researcher to construct meaning and uncover reality in order to develop and present a statement that unites the facets presented. The researcher engages in reflection and study that considers the endless variety of combinations and meanings. The whole statement of presented meaning offers a meaning that is greater than the sum of its parts (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research provides methodology for study of the human experience and the development of understanding that is deeper than the level of consciousness at which the phenomenon is presented. It allows the researcher to acknowledge and respect what is perceived through the senses and to consider aspects from different perspectives for deep meaning and understanding of the phenomenon. It also allows the researcher to humbly recognize that further study revealed meaning that is fuller, deeper, and more meaningful.

Population and Sampling

While typically used in a case study design, purposeful sampling provided the best opportunity to identify potential participants for this study. Due to the personal nature of the inquiry into workplace bullying, this researcher was open to the possibility of the identification of participants through snowball sampling, also referred to as network or chain sampling, in which participants recommend other potential participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling allowed for sampling in a variety of employment positions as well as roles in the experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting. Purposeful sampling has also been used in research situations where conflict is part of the environment and the building of trust is essential (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Purposeful sampling was achieved by posting the link to the survey on Survey Monkey as well as notifying K-12 professional educators of the link and encouraging sharing the link. Respondents' responses related to this researcher's experience of workplace bullying were not included in the study.

The population was chosen from a pool of 57 respondents to an online request through the WBI website identifying the study. The stated goal of WBI is that of education for all parties involved: target, witness, bully, peripheral participant, as well as those persons who initiated

systemic changes in the area of workplace behaviors employers and lawmakers (WBI, 2012). As a result of the worldwide research, education, and presentations, WBI's website is a well-known resource for individuals, employers, and legislators. WBI engages in research through their website, which is also available for other researchers to develop a pool of participants.

This researcher posted the opportunity to participate in the study on WBI's website. The website is a public site that can be accessed through an internet search using keywords such as 'workplace bullying' or 'bullying'. As they navigate the website, potential participants found a "Participate in Research" link where the study was described with risks and benefits identified and contact information shared. Interested viewers responded by completing an electronic questionnaire on Survey Monkey (see Appendix A). The survey asked about the experiences of workplace bullying in the educational setting and the role of the respondent as well as the individual's willingness to participate. Two weeks were allowed for the selection process with an extension to find representative roles.

Interviews were conducted with a variety of survey respondents. Position held in the K-12 educational setting (central office administration, building administration, department administration, certified classroom staff, certified support staff, and non-certified staff) and role in workplace bullying (target, witness, bully, and peripheral participant) was identified. *The role of target and witness at the building level was the focus of the interviews.* Twelve participants were selected to ensure representation of the focus roles. There were not a larger number of participants in the roles than slots available, so a random drawing did not need to be made after gender and racial representation were accounted for. The random choosing of individuals from each role, if required, would have met the qualifications of a purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998). The sample is homogenous in that all respondents are acknowledging an experience of

workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting by originally visiting WBI's website, which assumes an interest in concern about workplace bullying.

The main qualifiers for participants in this study were:

1. They must report alliance with one of the following positions: certified classroom staff or certified support staff
2. They must recognize identification with as either a target or witness role in workplace bullying.

Neither tenure, rank in a position, nor school district size influenced acceptance as a participant.

All participants were volunteers, which may reflect certain common characteristics such as willingness to disclose one's experiences as opposed to non-volunteers. There were no participants in the category of bully.

Investigative Techniques and Data Collection/ Researcher Bias

This researcher has had the experience of being a target of workplace bullying as described by research. As a result of the experience, this researcher reports professional, social and physical repercussions. Phenomenological protocol relies on the ability of researchers to subjugate their personal experience of the phenomenon to achieve a clearer, more universal understanding of the shared experience (Creswell, 1998). Known as epoche, researchers bracket any preconceptions to allow understanding from a variety of perspectives outside themselves. Van Manen (1990) describes bracketing, a term borrowed from mathematics, as the "act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (p.175).

Continuing the use of mathematical terms to describe the function of bracketing, Van Manen (1990) refers to the works of Merleau-Ponty in which the importance of practicing reduction is emphasized as a means to understanding the essential structure of something. Four steps are delineated in the practice of reduction: the animation of questioning the meaning of the experience of the world through a sense of wonder and amazement; recognizing and overcoming any aspect of one's personal experience with its attached meaning that could dilute or distort a deep understanding of the phenomenon; removing the lenses of theory; scientific conceptions, and themes that could prevent viewing the phenomenon completely; and in realizing that reduction is a means to an end, not the end, finally looking beyond the particulars of individual circumstances and descriptions to a universal meaning.

This researcher has a complete description of the circumstances and understanding of the events that comprised the experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting and relied upon the committee members to question and probe any similarities or the existence of any potential blurring of the vision of the *universal* meaning versus the *personal* meaning of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting.

Data collection began with initial screening surveys e-mailed to up to 100 respondents to the posted opportunity. The surveys were analyzed for patterns in demographic information, employment positions, or experiences in the identified role in workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting, which were of assistance for selecting the interview pool. Subsequent interviews were approximately 60 minutes each with an opportunity for additional 30-minute sessions to clarify or expand on responses. This resulted in a minimum of 20 interview hours total for the study.

Open-ended interviews were the primary data collection method because this method has been identified as a fundamental tool in qualitative research to elicit deep and meaningful descriptions of the experiences (Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). Interviews allow for clarification of statements with consideration of vocabulary and tone of voice. They also provide the opportunity for the researcher to observe and consider behaviors and probe for a more thorough understanding of the meaning of the experience for the respondent. Interviews were held in this researcher's office or in a similarly confidential location to assure the participants of their anonymity and confidentiality.

While the interview method provides information, limitations in the use of the method exist as well. Limitations to be considered in the interview process include: the personal aspects of the participant such as level of cooperation, ability to verbalize experiences, and individual perception and reflection; the level of skill the researcher has in the process; and the lack of total neutrality due to the fact that the information is uncovered and descriptions elicited in the dance-like interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005.). Recorded phone interviews provided an alternative method of obtaining interviews that were difficult to schedule due to distance.

The process of the interview followed that of Kvale's (1996) process typology: introduction, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, silence, and interpretive (see Appendix B). The researcher developed questions that probed the manifested aspects of each participant's experience. The questions uncovered those underlying questions that, if asked directly, would incorporate the unconscious meaning and interpretation of the participant. An initial list of questions was developed with the acknowledgment that clarifying questions for deeper meaning were added throughout the process. The interviews were recorded and

transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. After interview recordings were transcribed, participants were contacted to review their transcript and offer any further clarification. The researcher also engaged in memoing to record emerging interpretive thoughts during the interviewing process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The interviews of persons holding a variety of employment positions in the educational setting as well as claiming a variety of roles in the experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting were chosen to achieve the goal of a systems approach in which a phenomenon is examined through the lens of the systems in which it is embedded. This allowed a deeper understanding and decreased the influence of a single perspective. As anticipated, those from the role of the target were easily represented while it was more challenging to locate those from the bully or bystander role.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the identified interview process resulting was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcribed data was then analyzed “through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes and a search for all possible meanings” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Van Manen’s (1990) reference to Merleau-Ponty’s work describing reduction reminds the researcher that to glean meaning from copious amounts of data requires focus on the event to be described, with attention to recurring statements and themes in the data that highlight the essence of the phenomenon. Data was coded, confirmed, and checked to determine clusters, patterns, or themes that are linked together (Creswell, 1998,). Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe use of memos as a process for analysis. Through the process, data is conceptualized and examined for the essence being expressed. The researcher then identifies the

concept with a name that expresses the identity. The basic process begins with the researcher reading the transcription without interruption or notation as soon as possible after the interview. During the second reading, the researcher engages in reflective thinking as the data is explored for ideas that were used to develop detailed descriptions that gave rise to representative name. The essential process includes reading data, analyzing the data, writing the memo, labeling the concept, and assigning a title and number.

Between the recording of memos, methodological notes may be used to provide analytical explanation of the gaps in information that arise regarding basic personal or event identifying information and/or the mental process that produces the memo. The researcher works to engage the reader in the process by which conceptualization takes place.

Assumptions

The reality of the existence of the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting is an assumption that existed prior to data collection. Other assumptions included the honesty and sincerity of the participants as well as the accuracy with which the individual experiences were described. As assumed, the participants were more open to volunteering since they are active users of WBI's site and were accustomed to sharing their experiences in public forums. At the same time, the researcher assumed that some roles were harder to represent, such as bullies or bystanders. Characteristics of the bully were least accessible, possibly due to the difficulty of interviewing individuals displaying the behaviors. Often bullies prefer to remain anonymous and so would resist admitting to their behaviors or speak openly about themselves. Information that exists identifies bullies as having high scores in aggression and anxiety and low scores in social competence (Einarsen et al., 2003). Some

researchers also include narcissistic tendencies, egocentricity, and a tendency toward malignant narcissism in the characteristics of bullies (Namie, 2003). Malignant narcissism incorporates sadism and a sense of superiority in interpersonal interactions. Bullies are described as exploiting and manipulating peers and subordinates and behaving reverentially toward supervisors while silently disdaining them and their positions (Duffy & Sperry, 2007). The option of an anonymous, phone interview was offered to all participants to encourage participation. Additionally, alternative terminologies were used, such as ‘perpetrator’ or ‘aggressor’ to replace ‘bully’, so as to reduce stigma that might inhibit participation.

Limitations

While the interview method provides positive information, limitations in the use of the method exist as well. Limitations to be considered in the interview process include: the personal aspects of the participant such as level of cooperation, ability to verbalize experiences, and individual perception and reflection; the level of skill the researcher has in the process; and the lack of total neutrality due to the fact that the information is uncovered and descriptions elicited in the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2003, Rubin & Rubin, 2005,). An additional limitation lies in the emotionality of the experience of workplace bullying that is traumatic in nature and which can be re-triggered by discussion of the event. Referrals to social services or counseling services were presented to all participants.

An additional limitation lay in the reality of this researcher’s personal experience of workplace bullying in the role of target. The purpose of this study was not to tell a personal story, nor to gain vindication, but to describe the lived experience of individuals who have experienced workplace bullying in the educational setting. This researcher’s experiences have

inspired the phenomenological study. Because of the intensity of the memory and interpretation of the experience, this researcher used bracketing in the analysis of the data and worked diligently with the committee members to bracket “false notions and truth” as referenced by Moustakas (1994, p. 90).

A final limitation lies in the potential difficulty of interviewing persons holding the role of bully. A thorough review of the extensive research completed on workplace bullying reveals no direct interviews with individuals who accept the role of bully. Instead the bully is known through the description of individuals who hold the other roles. As indicated as a possibility, study data did not include the direct experiences of perpetrators. In this way, the perpetrator became a secondary form of participant, through the accounts of targets and witnesses

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study had to do with the sampling process that originates with an online request through WBI. The 57 individuals responding to the posting demonstrated a prior interest in workplace bullying. This group of 57 was reduced to 12 participants for individual one-hour interview session with one 30-minute follow up interview. The sample size of 12 was offset by those participants who were selected through the snowball or network process. An additional delimiting factor in this phenomenological study lay in the requirements of participation: employment in a K-12 educational setting.

Human Participants Protections

Due to the sensitive nature of the study’s topic, several precautions were taken to protect participants. The participants in this study were all adults currently employed in the K-12

educational system. Pseudonyms were assigned and in some cases identities were provided to protect confidentiality. Participants had the option of an anonymous phone interview. A consent form outlining the facets of the research process including confidentiality, data collection, analysis, and participant rights were distributed to all potential interview participants (see Appendix C). Due to the potentially re-traumatizing aspect of the topic discussion, referrals to mental health professionals through the Workplace Bullying Institute were also made available to all participants to use at their discretion. Participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts and memos for accuracy. Research results will also be made available. All participants who complete the process were given \$5.00 at the end of the study.

For the electronically distributed surveys, using Survey Monkey, a statement of informed consent was posted at the start of the questionnaire. A waiver of signed consent form is included in Appendix C.

For the interviews, participants indicated agreement to participate in the study by signing a form that delineates their rights in the intended research as well as consent for audio recording. In the event that a participant would prefer anonymity, the participant had the option to initial rather than sign the consent form. The form included the title of the study and a brief description of the goal of the study. Full disclosure regarding expectations of the participants was included. Each participant agreed to participate in an interview of approximately 60 minutes with a 30-minute follow-up in a mutually agreed location. The voluntary nature of participation in this study with the ability to withdraw without penalty was indicated.

A potential risk to the participant is emotional re-traumatization due to discussion of the topic. Referrals to mental health professionals were made available. The discussion of the topic

offers a potential benefit as well; relief from the stress of the event can often be found in sharing the event with a compassionate and confidential person.

All data and records are confidential with no reference in any written report that could associate a participant to the study. Data is kept in a secure location and will be destroyed three years after the conclusion of the study. The participants have full contact information for the researcher as well as the chair of the Internal Review Board of Aurora University. The researcher had no professional or personal connections with any participants in the study that could jeopardize research ethics and confidentiality.

Conclusion

The methodology of the phenomenological study provided the best vehicle to describe the lived experiences of workplace bullying in the lives of professional educators in the K-12 public school setting. The open-ended interviews of participants allowed expression of deeper meaning through verbal and non-verbal communication, ongoing clarification of meaning for the participant, and investigation of the phenomenon from an intimate perspective.

Through the phenomenological study this researcher intends to present a description of the lived experiences of the professional educator who is bullied at work. A more complete picture of the phenomenon is achieved by describing the essence of the experience beyond that perceived through superficial observation. Juxtaposed against the purpose of philosophy of the educational setting, this study enumerates issues that speak to the core of educational profession.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter 4 articulates the findings from the collection of data as described in chapter 3 from 11 of the 12 research participants who self-identified as having experienced workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting. Partway through the study the twelfth participant rescinded permission due to the emotional impact of sharing and reviewing the experiences. Study participants shared their experiences in an interview of one to two and a half hours in person or by phone. Each participant then reviewed a transcript of his or her interview and was given the opportunity to offer corrections or clarification. Each of the 11 participants who continued in the study indicated that the transcript accurately reflected the experiences. Interviews and follow-up contact occurred during the months of June, 2013 through September, 2013.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of workplace bullying in the lives of 12 professional educators in the K-12 public educational setting. The open-ended interview method of data collection was chosen as a means to provide a greater opportunity to access the lived experiences and insights of the participants. Each interview began with an offer of a review of the definitions and descriptions of the roles of Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Educational Setting.

Participants were chosen from 57 responses to an online survey about the experiences of Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Educational Setting. Of the 57 survey respondents, 28 indicated

willingness to participate in an interview. It should be noted that the twelfth participant, who rescinded permission, did not respond via the survey. Awareness of the survey was gained by visiting a site that announced the survey. This interviewer was called directly due to reluctance by the participant to have any information electronically transmitted due to the cyber nature of past workplace bullying experiences.

The findings of this study begin with a profile of each participant and a summary of the interview as it pertains to the purpose of the study. Direct quotes are used whenever possible to accurately represent the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007).

Participant Profiles

Participant A-Jane

Jane is a 36-year old Caucasian high school teacher in small Midwest district in a subject area that is typically male-dominated. She reports eight years of experience, three of them in a prior Midwest district. Jane recently married a co-worker while serving on the negotiating committee to determine a contract.

Jane identified herself in the role of target in two separate circumstances. In the more recent experience, the identified bully is certified teacher with significantly longer tenure but equal authority in the school. The bully is described as having a “pushy personality- wanting things her way” (Participant A, July 11, 2013, p1. Line26). The bully would demonstrate disregard for Jane’s time by interrupting her planning period and class presentations to deliver a message, make requests or plan for upcoming events. Jane stated that she “was more paranoid when she walked by” wondering “is she going to walk in here?” (p. 5, line 147). Jane first realized that bullying was occurring when she recognized the behaviors that the bullying teacher

demonstrated toward her students. She describes an intense protective emotional response toward her students and realized that the behaviors were directed at her as well.

The earlier experience as a target of bullying behavior occurred in the first three years of her career. At the age of 25, as a new teacher in a male dominated department, Jane reports that she did not receive mentoring or support. Treated as “the little girl,” her positive classroom evaluation was rewritten after she asserted herself when filling the role of the appointed leader of a meeting. Tenure was not granted. During the summer, she received an intimidating call from a department chair to clean out her classroom.

Jane was able to garner support from administrators. and union representation in both situations. The experiences were not without cost. Jane refers to emotionally withdrawing, feeling and behaving in a negative manner that impacted her family. She reported working until midnight at times to be prepared for class and increased illnesses that she worked through most times.

Jane’s recommendation to address Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting begins with the concept of community with respect among all members. Jane stated that awareness of Workplace Bullying must be developed in administrators and teachers, noting that teachers cannot be models for their students if they do not recognize the behaviors among adults.

Participant B- Dave

Dave is a 34-year old school Caucasian social worker in a large Midwest district. He has been assigned to a high school for about five years through a special education cooperative. He has previously worked in alternative settings as a school social worker and as a teaching assistant

in a high school alternative program. He is married about three years and is expecting his first child.

Dave stated that the bully in his experience held the position of special education supervisor at the middle school level with a history of not following the law regarding special education procedures. Additionally, Dave expressed the opinion that it was commonly held knowledge that the administrator had a close personal relationship with the Director of Special Education. The administrator was transferred to the high school, where she became Dave's evaluator. When a student Dave worked with was involved in a contentious meeting, Dave asserted himself to align the team to address the issues and complete the IEP. The administrator sanctioned him by email that was blind-copied to the Director of Special Education, for a variety of transgressions that he had not committed including "not having my social work report in, even though the student doesn't receive social work minutes, ...being late to meetings" (Participant B, June 10, 2013, p. 2, lines 77-70). When Dave received support from his building special education administrators, the bully altered her position, to state that Dave's perception was inaccurate and that she had not intended to send that message that Dave received.

Dave became aware that he was being omitted from meetings and that the administrator was not following special education law and that the administrator continued to avoid following special education law. He described significant amounts of time that was allocated to respond to emails and prepare for encounters. He noted that he feared for his job and for the position that he enjoyed, "This was the worst professional experience of my life" (p. 8, line 267). Dave stated that the experience "sapped his energy" (p. 9, line 254). Dave reported experiencing negative effects in the areas of sleep, weight gain, decreased self-care and social isolation as well as anxiety in anticipation of the next school year. He noted that addressing the accusations "took up

hours of my time” (p. 7, line 24). Dave also shared that “the things that she accused me of in that e-mail really hit me to the core”, insinuating that I was screwing around or just being negligent, (p. 10, line 336 and p. 11, line 352-353).

Dave made a point of reassuring this interviewer that he performs his duties with what is best for the student in mind by offering several examples where he responded in an exemplary manner: and that he considers the hierarchy of the mandates of school social work in prioritizing his approach to his work.

Dave’s recommendation regarding workplace Bullying in the K-12 Public Education Setting focused on the actions of executive administrators in supervisory roles who should initiate a process and follow for improvement or termination.

Participant C- Joann

Joann is a 46 year old Caucasian married teacher with young children who currently holds a district coordinator position in a large Midwest school district. She reports seventeen years of experience in both the classroom and coordinator positions.

After serving as the gifted coordinator and staff developer in her district, Joann interviewed for a district teaching position on a university campus when funding for the administrative positions was discontinued. In an effort to be collegial, despite a new co-worker’s reputation for being angry, Joann e-mailed opening day questions to her team member receiving no reply. She reports being excluded from staff social activities and then having co-workers angry that she had not participated. Co-workers are described as turning their backs when she walked down the hall and watching her struggle with interoffice mail she was delivering to them

as she unlocked classroom doors. Joann reported that she was inaccurately accused of not doing her work.

Joann recounted crying during lunch. Support took the form of reassurance from the special education teacher that she was not doing anything to deserve the treatment she was receiving and that she had good relationships with the teachers at another grade level at the same building.

The two administrators involved, an onsite administrator and a principal who was located at the home school building offsite, offered Joann different responses when Joann made each aware of the situation. The onsite administrator is described as “not know[ing] what to do and didn’t really say too much about it, didn’t really do anything” (Participant C, June 3, 2013, p.2, line 68). Joann refused the principal’s offer to move Joann back to the home school noting that she “came to this situation to be on a university campus, to be part of what’s happening here” (p.2, line 69-70).

Joann received support from both Human Resources and the Union in addressing the situation after she insisted that the letter of intent be followed. In reaction, the principal stated, “I’m just not good at working with adults who have bad behavior” (p. 3, line 79-80). The onsite administrator left the district and was replaced by a retired principal from Central Office who told Joann that she was sent “to remove the bully” (p. 3, line 84).

Joann reports purposefully interacting with the bully in a manner designed to elicit positive response and feeling sorry for the bully because she was unhappy and angry. Joann reports that despite her best efforts, she is aware that she was unable to perform at 100% during the period the bullying occurred. She reported reliving the experiences, trying to figure out what was happening and how to respond and experiencing increased stress in her body.

Joann states that she is about 6 years away from the experience and that she began to experience relief after a year and a half. She expresses the belief that her recovery was accelerated because she was aware that she was not the first person that this bully had targeted.

Joann reports a new, stronger response to inappropriate interactions among people, in this case a racist representation in a school setting that she viewed as a form of bullying:

I will do anything it takes, but this can't go on. It needs to be rectified. The Superintendent knew about it and he talked to her but he didn't do anything about it. The union went in and they were told that because there's only one person who's upset... I wasn't telling people because they didn't want anyone else to feel the negative feeling that I felt. This doesn't need to be blasted all over. It's terrible and it needs to be taken care of and that's it. No more pain and humiliation. So, the superintendent still didn't do anything about it. So, I started working with other people and eventually she was fired. She resigned. But that's what I did because I feel that's kind of a form of bullying and maybe my strong response was having been a victim in a situation that I thought was unjust and now I see this possibly happening to other people (p. 6, lines 196-204).

Joann recognizes the limitations administrator face:

because what an administrator sees and what actually happens are very much different things. But I think having mediation, having team building with the team, having an open door, making sure that different teachers feel like they can take a risk and tell you, not necessarily to complain or tattle, but that shouldn't be happening either, necessarily, but it needs to be in a way that's productive and people aren't hurting each other, type of thing. I don't know that a lot of principals have the skills that it takes to really truly manage these situations (p. 7, lines 214-219).

Participant D- Sandra

Sandra is a Caucasian 56 year old married health science teacher in high school in a southern state. She reports being married for 33 years with young adult children. Sandra reports a total of 14 years of experience as a teacher as well as extensive experience in the health services field as a registered nurse.

Sandra recounts that her experience with workplace bullying began in her fifteenth year of experience with a virtually unblemished record and her second year in the district when the principal and assistant principal who was also her evaluator began bullying her. Over time, a new teacher under Sandra's supervision provided information about Sandra to the administration. The building in which Sandra was teaching was a new building in a tight-knit community. The new building had evoked strong emotional responses from the community who resisted the change to the extent of some people selling their homes to move into the original high school's boundaries for the sake of family tradition. The building principal was a 57 year old female who had been the assistant principal in the original high school. Sandra initially attributed the principal's behavior to the stress of opening a new building.

Sandra articulates feeling that she was specifically targeted, sharing that the administrators would have numerous meetings with her during before, during, and after school under a variety of guises but with the result of chastising her or speaking demeaningly to her. As Sandra explained,

I was there in the beginning to help them and at the dedication. There was so much potential to this program that I was involved in, but they sabotaged me and I feel like it was planned. I don't understand why they picked me, but they would sabotage me and they made it to where I was not going to be able to be successful in that program and I really feel like they did so much to me at work. They wanted me to break down, say something inappropriate or do something inappropriate in the public school setting in front of many witnesses so that they would have grounds to terminate me immediately and remove me from the building and I would therefore not have any benefits or any recourse (Participant D, July 13, 2013 p. 2, lines 40-47).

Sandra noted that she was given duties beyond her ability and the expectations of her role, and not only did not receive the help, she requested and was verbally granted but was corrected by the administration for having to address the concerns at the last minute. Sandra

wore school colors as directed by e-mail inspired by the Superintendent's opening day remarks. She was castigated in the presence of a peer by her building principal for her choice in clothing because she wore the previous year's shirt in the correct color due to having given her new shirt to a recently hired employee who had not received one. Sandra describes being ordered to clean her classroom and then found at fault for the way it was done. She states that she was commanded to the principal's office while she was enroute to her classroom with an armful of books. When she agreed but asked to deliver the books and use the washroom, she was given three minutes which the principal then expanded to seven minutes and was verbally chastised for not arriving within the time frame. The principal insisted that Sandra stopped preparing her lessons and paperwork for the beginning of the school year to clean her classroom. When she discovered that Sandra had moved the materials to a locked closet that students did not have access to, she began going through Sandra's belongings and throwing them away with disregard to what belonged to Sandra personally and the intended use of the objects.

In addition, the principal insisted on a specific arrangement of the desks in Sandra's room and that Sandra and another teacher share a desk. The principal corrected Sandra for speaking to another teacher to offer condolences on her mother's death. The administration insisted that she take on duties that they erroneously believed a registered nurse should have the training and knowledge to perform, and identified Sandra as not being a team player when she insisted that her nursing license could be jeopardized in the circumstances being imposed.

Sandra received support from a co-worker who encouraged her to speak to the principal to problem-solve the situation. The conversation with the principal resulted in the principal's assertion of Sandra's motive to be that of defiance. Other co-workers warned her that they had previously been targets and that she should try to avoid being a target. They also helped her meet

some of the deadlines that were being imposed by the principal. The school nurse volunteered to vouch for Sandra's license requirements if the principal asked. As a result of the bullying behavior, Sandra reports that she was unable to think, remember or present lessons that she had presented well in the past. She describes feeling pulled and torn in many directions

Sandra states that she had been under the care of a psychiatrist for medical management of depression involving a minimal dose of an antidepressant. During the period of workplace bullying other physical symptoms became apparent: headaches, anxiety, increased blood pressure GI upset, and exhaustion.

As a result of the negative impact on her health, Sandra applied for a leave of absence through the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The principal challenged her and questioned her about the contents of her application in the presence of co-workers. The principal's resistance to complete her portion of FMLA paperwork resulted in Sandra contacting the head of Human Resources. Articulate and forthright, Sandra shared a passion for addressing the situation she had experienced.

I feel very strongly that I have an obligation that if I see something that is blatantly wrong and I don't say something, or bring it to someone's attention, that I'm just as guilty as the person doing the wrong (p.6, lines 209-210). I want them to know that everybody, except for two people, have been awesome to me in that district. The janitors, bus barn people, everybody has been so nice except for these two. That you are losing good teachers because of this particular administrator (p.30, lines 1123-1125). I think just going down there and telling them, I will have felt like I have done everything humanly possible within my scope to correct something I thought was wrong. Then life goes on (p.30, lines 1138-1139). I'm afraid that years from now I will have regrets that I didn't do the right thing at the right time (p.31, line 1147).

Recommendations to prevent incidents of workplace bullying include having the freedom to consult with peers and department chairs without fear of retribution. Sandra also suggested limiting the amount of time an administrator can hold a position without returning to the

classroom for a period of time so that he or she can remain in touch with current educational issues and practices from the teachers' perspectives.

Participant E- Kim

Kim is a single 40 year old Caucasian special education teacher in the largest Midwest school district. She reports eight and a half years of experience prior to resigning in 2011. She noted close family ties with her mother and siblings and provided emotional and medical liaison support during her mother's experience with cancer.

Kim had received superior ratings each year and had been considered a superior teacher in her district. Kim's duties as a special education teacher included acting as head special education teacher and lead mentor of new teachers. She reports:

the first year that my principal started, was I could see how she was almost bullying, not bullying, but did not understand the role of special education, social workers, case managers, psychologists, their roles. I would say she definitely bullied the case manager at the time, who was an older woman, African American, and just kind of wanted her to do certain things (Participant E, July 9, 2013 p. 1, lines 30-34).

Kim describes ways that the principal targeted special education staff and acted outside special education procedures the first two years of her administration: referring 20 students in one day and changing appropriate settings on IEPs, accusing a teacher of allowing inappropriate sexual activity in the classroom, random reassignments of special education personnel, not providing appropriate support personnel, and overloading caseloads for special education teachers. Other bullying behaviors included speaking aggressively to employees, allowing a mother who had threatened Kim access to Kim during the school day and after school, threatening behavior including the bully putting her hand in Kim's face in the classroom to stop

Kim from speaking. Other bullying behaviors included removing Kim from a lead mentor position for a teacher with less experience with whom the principal frequently conferred, moving positions at the unexpectedly, accusing Kim of having yelled at her when the administrator had yelled at Kim in the presence of parents,

Kim sought help through the union. Despite the fact that the timeline was wrong and other facts were inaccurate, Kim received a two -day suspension without pay. Work friends of Kim's began to be targeted using similar behaviors. She was written up for events that were not under her control while at the same time had been allowed for other staff.

Kim noted that employees who had personal or family health concerns also were fired, or reassigned if possible. At the end of the second year as administrator, Kim noted a change in her behavior toward her and began documenting all interactions.

Kim stated, "at this point I was so beaten down" (p. 9, lin 309). Physical symptoms included hands shaking, physical tremors to avoid crying, and fluctuating weight, poor sleep habits, and crying episodes. Kim had decreased social activity outside of school, was shunned by staff inside school. In addition, the administrator would prevent Kim from being considered at other schools in the district despite Kim's excellent resume. Kim received support from her peers personally. Another peer went to the administration on her behalf. Kim shared the feedback she received from peers:

I just looked around at the situation. I looked around at special ed in general. I thought I was smart enough. I still believed I was a good teacher. I still knew .I was doing the right thing and more for these kids than other people. Even the special ed teachers all told me I was a good teacher. Even though the two were friendly with our boss would tell me they could tell I was a good teacher. We couldn't handle this classroom. You're doing better for these kids than anybody else has (p. 11, lines 367-371).

As she explained,

I would say I was anxious and depressed. Here I am trying to do a good job and I'm not getting recognized for it. Fundamentally, I knew I was still a good teacher, but when you're attacked, almost every day I was worried she would come in. When she put her hand so close to my face....and that was in April and I resigned in December....I was afraid she would hit me. What would happen is people know that this is how she reacts to people and had seen her screaming and yelling at me and not do anything. The assistant principals would see and know what was happening and they'd just say to find another school. I'd say that I'm looking. They'd be like, "Make sure they'd call us and not her." I was trying to do that. (p. 13-14, lines 464-471).

Despite seeking assistance from the union, the environment and the bullying behavior did not change. Kim resigned from the teaching profession. She continues to be consistently under-employed and to suffer symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Kim's recommendations for situations of Workplace Bullying began with supervisors knowing what is happening with their administrators. She also states that everybody needs to be held accountable to their positions and what they have to do (July 9, 2013, p. 16, lines 557-558). She also recommended position specific administrators for specialist positions such as special education teachers.

Participant F- Lana

Lana is a 66 year old Caucasian school social worker who recently retired after 20 years of experience serving in the same large Midwest district. She is married with adult children and grandchildren.

Lana identifies the bully in her situation as the Director of Special Education in her district. Initially, Lana felt that she and the Director had a good relationship based on articulated mutual respect of ability. Lana identifies a situation in which she disagreed with the director in a meeting as a turning point in their professional relationship. From that event on, Lana was

ignored for four positions for which she was qualified by experience and education. From Lana's perspective, the bullying was more apparent due to the fact that the persons chosen for the positions were non-tenured with less experience. Lana was questioned by her peers as to why she had not chosen for the positions. In addition, her positions in two schools were changed without notice as she entered her final years before retirement. Lana was accused of making errors in IEPs that were not her responsibility nor had anyone addressed any concerns. In addition, Lana was asked to do things more slowly

Lana states that she held on to her anger related to the fact that she had inadvertently challenged her directors' position and was being punished. She also reports feeling embarrassed as well as reluctant to speak up on any topic in meetings. She states that she often discussed the situation with her husband at home. She notes "He's just such a counselor. He just listens" (Participant F, June 10, p. 10, line 322). Lana offered no explicit recommendations to address workplace bullying in the K-12 Educational Setting.

Participant G- Ellen

Ellen is a Caucasian 61 year old certified teacher employed as a teaching assistant in a small Midwest school district. She is divorced with adult children and grandchildren. She reports seven years of experience in the field of education.

Ellen's description of her experience with workplace bullying began with a recounting of a recent interview for a teaching position in the school where she is currently employed as a special education assistant. One of the two interviewers, a man in his thirties who holds an administrative position, asked "Why is it that you come to teaching this late in your life?" (Participant G, June 10, 2013, p.1, line 14-15). She interpreted the question as a derogatory

comment on her age and as a result, reported feeling flustered and unsettled during the rest of the interview. Ellen agreed that the interview situation did not meet the criteria for bullying, but shared it as an example of inappropriate interpersonal interactions among staff.

Ellen states that she studied education as a young woman but because job opportunities were limited, she worked in the business world until eight years ago when she earned a Masters degree and spent every subsequent semester enrolled in a variety of continuing education courses. Ellen's description of her role and responses to students in her current position indicates a love of education that encompasses wisdom and understanding in her ability to structure student instruction and in behavior management.

Ellen states that her first year in her current position, all of the teaching assistants were new and the teachers with whom they worked had been there only a year or two "so it was a whole lot of chaos" (p.6, lines150-151). She states that in an effort to be helpful she modified some student work that was need. The teacher with whom she worked "got right in my face, about this far from my face, and it was finger pointing (almost in my chest). "You shouldn't be doing that. You are not to do that. That is my job. That is what they hired ME to do" (p.6, lines 158-159). Later Ellen became uncomfortable with the manner in which she had addressed a situation involving a student. She discussed the situation with the teacher who was her direct supervisor who responded by laughing with her and seemed encouraging. The teacher reported it to the department chair who discussed it with the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and Ellen was put on probation.

Ellen reported thinking:

....oh....well, that's the end of that. I am never saying anything to anybody because I don't know the playing field. I don't know who I could trust. Obviously, I can't trust the first level, because she took it to the second level and

the second level didn't even come and ask me about it, she just took it up there. It felt like they wanted me out of there (p.7, lines 183-187).

Ellen emphasized that she was successful in preventing the impact of the bullying behavior from permeating her home. She did note that the bullying behavior affected the way in which she performed her duties at school:

I was on guard, all of the time. I was very cautious with what I said. I never made any input. I never give any advice. I never give any opinions. I just do what they tell me to do and no more. I didn't get firm with students when I should have (p.9, lines 227-229).

As Ellen explained, "It affected my confidence at work. I guess it – it killed my confidence (p. 11, lines 292-293) and "I didn't really know what was right and what was wrong" (p. 12, line 326).

Ellen said that she avoided after school social situations and chose to eat lunch alone in a quiet, darkened room where she would not be noticed to avoid criticism and hearing cutting remarks from co-workers about her peers several of whom are friends of the bully. While no economic impact was reported, Ellen stated that she felt consistently concerned, as her sole support, that she would lose her job. She noted that she felt no loyalty and would leave her current position without regret if she found a more lucrative position.

Ellen's recommendations to improve workplace bullying situations included starting at the top level and having all individuals consistently and equitably demonstrate high standards in interpersonal interactions.

Participant H- Jackie

Jackie is a Caucasian 49 year old special education teacher in a small Midwest school district. She is married with young adult children. She reports fourteen years of experience. She has also earned a Masters in Counseling.

Jackie described herself as having been in the roles of both witness and victim in workplace bullying. In the role of victim, Jackie identified a co-worker who was new to the building as the bully. The co-worker designed the teaching schedule to be much less difficult for herself and much more strenuous with more challenging student s for Jackie. The same co-worker presented Jackie's summer curriculum work and presented it as her own without Jackie's permission or acknowledgement at a national conference.

Jackie stated that she addressed the situation with the department chair who advised her to speak directly to the co-worker. Jackie did not follow the recommendation because she "felt like [she] was being petty. [She's] not one that deals with confrontation well and this person, [she] felt like she would have twisted it around (Participant H, June 25, 2013, p.2, lines 56-57).

Jackie described the impact of the bullying behavior as stressful and isolating, permeating personal areas of her life:

I was less able to handle, I guess, the stress. I was doing so much avoiding of situations that involved her, that it became difficult to balance everything. I think that stress came out at home. I don't think it affected my teaching. It was stressful and tiring to constantly be thinking, "if I say this, how is it going to be turned around and manipulated." So I found myself avoiding certain situations. So I probably did lose out on even social situations because I would not go eat lunch where that person was. I wouldn't go if they went out after work, if she was there. I would not go. (p.3, lines 66-71).

Jackie also recounted that during the time of stress, her teaching and her ability to team with her co-workers was affected, despite her effort to prevent that from occurring. She stated she was less creative in the classroom and was left out of professional events and had fewer

opportunities for parent interaction. Jackie's longer tenure in the district, and in the school, the fact that she did not need the bully in her job as well as her personality style of appearing to be easily intimidated are reasons that Jackie offers that made her the initial target for this bully.

Jackie reported no co-worker support for a period of up to three years during which time the bully interacted in a similar manner with the co-workers who became supportive of Jackie as a result. About five years, post- workplace bullying experience, Jackie noted that she continues to be cautious in all interactions with the bully

The impact of being a target affected Jackie's subsequent behavior as a witness to two workplace bullying scenarios that she shared. In the first scenario, she became aware that the bully who had been targeting her was moving on to another target. She shared her experience and the need to be cautious in the other person's interactions with the bully. She reports a sense of relief in being able to share her experience in helping her co-worker.

In the second scenario as witness to workplace bullying, the bully was an administrator at the department chair level in which Jackie and a co-worker were insolated after school in an office and scolded for speaking to the principal about a situation. In previous department meetings, the department chair, who had been at the school for two years, had chastised the group, thrown things, slammed books and called the group uncooperative. Jackie explained that she spoke for both herself and the co-worker because the co-worker had personal issues to address as well at the time of the verbal attack. The attack is reported to have been retribution for discussing their concerns regarding the department chair's unethical comments regarding a third co-worker's potentially negative evaluation with the principal. The principal is reported to have been supportive during the discussion, but failed to communicate further with Jackie and her co-worker and shared the information with the department chair that led to the verbal attack.

Jackie emphasized that as a result of her experiences with workplace bullying, she would speak up on behalf of targets in her department and to the extent possible and appropriate in other departments as well. Real changed needs to start at Human Resources with the development of policies and education according to Jackie. She states a concern that if she approaches the principal about workplace bullying behaviors and issues:

She [would] be seen as a problem and ... transferred. It's happened to other people and I know from my experience with the counseling jobs that when I did file a grievance about it, that was 9 years ago, and I'm still looking for a counseling job. So I know that it happens. So when you speak up, and you fight for your rights, there are consequences (p.12, lines 375; 378-380).

Participant I- Samantha

Samantha is a 61 year old Caucasian level II special education teacher and certified math teacher grades 6-8. She is married with young adult children. She reported substitute teaching after earning her degree, then working in the business world until she returned to the field of education about age 40. She stated she had 12 years of teaching experience. Her initial teaching experiences involved working in programs with new approaches. As a result of her teaching experience and her ability to relate well to parents and students, she was sought after as an employee: "The first question the principal said to me was, 'What took you so long to apply here? We've been waiting for you'" (Participant I, July 10, 2013 p. 12, lines 360-362).

Samantha identified herself in the roles of both a target who had been bullied and as a witness. The first incident of workplace bullying occurred in a small Midwest district in which Samantha was the special education department chair during a transition between superintendents. The principal's son was on Samantha's husband's soccer team. The principal routinely asked Samantha why her husband did not play his son in a desired position.

Samantha's stated that she did not have anything to do with soccer. The principal then changed the way in which Samantha's special education students who had significant needs could access on-site job training. She was assigned duties unrelated to her students' needs which made her inaccessible to address behavior concerns when they arose resulting in increased misbehaviors.

Samantha reported that when she did not demonstrate a desired or expected response, her children were targeted accused of behaviors that did not do. One of her daughters was bullied at school to the point that the counselor recommended she transfer to another school and she required counseling. When Samantha discussed the situation with the superintendent, he responded "well, your daughter is very good-looking and sometimes those things happen" (p.5, lines 146-147). When she was elected to the school board a few years later, the superintendent asked her in the presence of one of her friends, what he needed to do to get her to vote with him as a school board member.

At the end of the school year, Samantha resigned and accepted a job at a different district where things went well until a football coach who did not work in the district and whose wife was pregnant needed a full time job. Stress in Samantha's personal life increased when her son was hospitalized for mental health issues while her work performance was increasingly scrutinized and criticized despite following the Special Education laws and requirements. Samantha used a variety of resources to work with the special education students in her class to help them learn the regular education material and prepare for the semester tests. Because two of her students had the same wrong answer, she was accused of being unethical and the superintendent was brought in to interview her coworkers:

Through this whole process I was walked out and told I was unethical. They sent their lawyer in. I went to the union. Basically you had to plea bargain or go to messy court. They would probably have all of this information on you being

unethical and you would probably never work again. The superintendent has threatened to take my license and ruin me forever (p. 3, lines 86-90).

Samantha's coworkers were verbally supportive and informed her of the proceedings stating "they are throwing you under the bus" (p. 3, line 81). Parents called to see if they could do anything to change the situation. Students attended school board meetings for a year to rectify the situation. The football coach accepted the position she vacated on the following school day.

The stress with work coupled with Samantha's concerns about her son led to a diagnosis of depression which kept her bedridden for a couple of weeks. During that time, no coworkers contacted Samantha despite highly collaborative relationships and Samantha had no idea what they were told that might have led to their non-initiation of contact. In addition to depression, Samantha was negatively impacted financially. She states she had two children to send to college and at the age of 59 found jobs scarce.

When Samantha was hired by a district in a large Midwest city, she stated she was scared and wanted to avoid the experience of workplace bullying again. Samantha explained that the principal received reports regarding her poor performance. Despite the fact that she had not been informed, she was criticized for not following district procedures when writing IEPs. Her mentor quit speaking to her after two weeks for no apparent reason. Samantha described being criticized for not asking for assistance, for not speaking at meetings, but was disregarded when she did speak up at meetings. Samantha was sanctioned for collaborating with regular education teachers and a given a plan developed and closely monitored by the principal.

Samantha stated that she was required to post scripted lessons online that often took her all weekend to produce and that were not required of other teachers. During a district training, one of Samantha's scripts was used as an example of how to write a lesson plan, but her

personnel folder indicated that she was unable to perform this task. Samantha was unsupported and undermined by the principal in classroom management decisions. Samantha was not allowed to arrange her room in manner she found productive. When Samantha was on leave, the principal and a substitute teacher went through her belongings and threw them away.

Support was provided by coworkers who validated Samantha's experience. They also included her and expressed appreciation for her ideas in the grade level planning sessions. At meetings, they would support her ideas and verbally invite her to participate in their ideas.

Samantha stated that as a result of her experience with workplace bullying she is now less creative in performing her duties and will not speak first at a conference or workshop when opinions are solicited. She also reported second guessing herself in all interactions involving school, even innocent comments. She stated that she isolated herself in school and social events because she could not trust how any interactions would be interpreted. She refused the assistance of two male students in Samantha's class came to her stating that they knew what was happening and offered to take care of the situation.

Recommendations to improve workplace bullying include starting at the top. Samantha stated that administrators in previous years had often spent a significant amount of time in classroom teaching which offered wisdom with which to lead. She noted the difference between running a business and leading a school or school system. Improving communication skills and processes to a less impersonal process would be beneficial:

if you want children to have these sort of skills – you need to be treating the teachers that way, too. You can't be treating them a different way and then expect them to turn around and teach the children a different way (p. 21, lines 617-619).

Participant J- Barb

Barb is a mid-thirty year old Caucasian guidance counselor in a middle school in a small Midwest district. She has also been employed as special education teacher. Barb is married with young children.

Barb reported bullying during her tenure as a resource teacher serving students with significant needs. The regular education teacher who has been described as having a strong personality and with whom she worked became aggressive in tone with her and was “almost lying about different circumstances, discussions or things I was supposed to do” (Participant J, July 11, 2013, p.2, line 41).

As a result of support and encouragement from another regular education teacher that Barb received, and motivated by the desire to protect her students more than herself, she tried a more personal approach to relate to the bullying teacher. Barb recognized that the teacher was overwhelmed and would make discouraging and unprofessional statements in the presence of students.

Barb explained that she handles stress well, but did experience nights of stomach churning as she reviewed events of the day or prepared for the next interaction. Barb also recognized the impact of bullying on teacher collaboration and student’s academic and social progress. Recommendations for improving Workplace bullying in the K-12 public education setting included consideration of the environment and its cohesiveness and interpersonal acceptance and the fact that it is an effort between administration and teacher-leaders.

Participant K- Diane

Diane is a 60 year old divorced Caucasian special education teacher in a district on the east coast. She reports thirteen years of highly successful experience.

Diane identified the bully in her experience with workplace bullying as the interim special education supervisor who was new to the position. The principal, who was also recently hired, played a less significant role, but accepted the reports of the bully and treated Diane in the same manner. In addition to the special education interim administrator, other participants included the new school psychologist, the new speech pathologist and the school social worker , who “was kind of part of that group” (Participant K, July 8, 2013 p. 4, line 134).

The bullying behaviors were hostile and appeared to be driven by an agenda throughout the year. Diane noted she would be asked a question and criticized for her response repeatedly. As a result of highly negative reports about Diane that were submitted to the principal, the principal, who was not well versed in special education, began interacting with Diane in a similar manner. The administrators would make broad statements with no basis that could not be defended including that “people” say she’s ineffective. During some discussions, they would roll their eyes and shake their heads in others, statements were made that they were just trying to help.

Workplace bullying was evident in Diane’s description of the lack of support in classroom management with a highly destructive student with special education needs.

Diane reported becoming reclusive to avoid seeing her supervisor. She stated that she felt anxious and helpless when either administrator was in the room:

I couldn’t say anything to defend myself, but I couldn’t say anything at all. I just had to accept what they were saying and it was highly stressful, very stressful. I

started showing it in physical ways as well as becoming highly anxious driving into work. (p.1, lines 22-25).

Diane reported meeting the criteria for diagnoses of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. She addressed symptoms through therapy and medication:

I had a very depressed year. I only felt safe in my house. I ended up not going out very much, not eating very well. I stopped exercising. It was bad for my mental health, bad for my physical health, everything. I just kept dealing with this. I still have to deal with this. (p.6, lines 211-213).

The workplace bullying experience that Diane endured resulted in days of absence to address her medical concerns which impacted her ability to teach her students. She reported that she does not share her knowledge openly and often prefaces her comments with an apology for possible interpretation of being confrontational.

Co-workers asked Diane where her “friend” was, commenting that her “friend” was too busy targeting Diane that she would not bother the rest of the department:

My colleague in the same classroom just kind of let it happen too. She had a little bit more clout. She just retired after 30 years. She works in a multi-faceted way. She always keeps herself squeaky clean. She doesn't work in a whistle blowing type of way. In other words, why is not...people doing anything about this? Why are you acting like this? This is not appropriate, encouraging people to have a more collegial environment. I was intimidated by February or so. I was totally intimidated. Nobody was standing up for me. Nobody was doing anything. The girl upstairs, the sped teacher upstairs, just said well, “I just thought this was a downstairs thing.” I thought, “Oh, well, thanks a lot. (p.6, lines 180-186).

The union was contacted without response and later it was determined that a personal friendship between the union representative and a co-worker in the department prevented the union representative acting on Diane's behalf. Diane initiated a discussion with the school

psychologist once when they were alone who responded, “Oh we’re a family, that’s how it goes” (p. 4, line 137).

When the principal submitted Diane’s February evaluation in April using regular education criteria to evaluate special education performance expectations, Diane was given a “Needs Improvement” which she considered to be retaliatory. A “Needs Improvement” rating requires a plan for support for the following year. The union president supported the steps Diane identified that she felt would be supportive in actuality including:

a neutral, supportive, collegial help for my supervisor. I want neutral people to come in and observe me. I want a collegial and a non-hostile atmosphere. I want the 2-3 teachers to follow through with the behavior plans and to come to me if they have problems. What else? If there is a behavior problem with one of my students, I need help and support not criticism and blame (pp. 7-8, lines 253-257).

When Diane realized the extent of workplace bullying, she filed a bullying report which entailed meeting with the union president and a Central Office representative and each bully separately. The school psychologist, the school social worker and the speech pathologist were all reassigned to other buildings, however, their friendship with the interim special education administrator continued.

The environment supported workplace bullying according to Diane as a place “that encourages this kind of behavior and professional jealousy: bullying, rumor-mongering, philandering (p. 5, lines 149-150.) She went on to explain that “The environment is one of distrust. The environment is one of tearing down other teachers, tearing down their reputation (p. 5, lines 174-175). Eventually, she concluded that one aspect of the environment meant “they’re going to let a teacher get beaten up.” (p. 5. Lines 177-178)

Recommendations to address workplace bullying included offering more support and less Scrutiny for new principals. Principals need to be aware of all aspects of education, both regular education and special education. Utilizing a neutral person outside the system, who can listen to teacher concerns and perspectives and act as an intermediary between teachers and administration offers protection from the impact of unequal or personal relationships between evaluators and individual staff members. Diane noted that while scores are important, interpersonal behaviors are also important and need to be effectively addressed. Offering support to reach a resolution as well as clearly articulated plans regarding the individual teacher's retention in that building would allow the teacher to choose a course of action that included requesting a transfer.

Participant L-Ina (Permission rescinded)

Because permission was rescinded due to the potential re-traumatization of the participant, only very generic, but accurate, information is shared in this summary. Ina demonstrated extreme caution in the manner in which communication was established and maintained and shared that the caution she exercised was a direct result of her experiences with workplace bullying in the K-12 public education setting.

Ina had been employed as a special education assistant for at least six years when a supervising teacher reported to central office administration that she had witnessed a building administrator initiating nonverbal interaction with Ina that was inappropriate and unprofessional. The teacher witnessed the behaviors and made a report without consulting Ina prior to the report. Ina concluded that instead of being supported, she was targeted. Ina identified that particular

incident as the initiation of behaviors consistent with workplace bullying, despite the reassurance of the central office administration of support for her.

After consistent positive evaluations during her tenure in the district, fault was found in numerous areas. Ina shared that materials necessary to performing her job and access to classrooms were denied. Peers accused her of losing student materials, manuals and assignments. To reduce the impact on special education students who had to redo the missing work, Ina photocopied student work and kept it with her, a procedure which she shared with her supervising teacher and peers. Student work was no longer missing.

Ina was asked to perform duties such as writing reports regarding student behavior or progress outside of her role. When she questioned the appropriateness of the duties, that were not required of other staff in her position and inquired if the change was due to the report made to central office, personnel denied that a report had ever been made. She reported being sanctioned for not attending meetings or performing duties that she had not been informed of. Ina's personal historical information, unrelated to her role in the school, was discussed among peers in her presence without her having shared it.

Ina asserted that she had seen similar behaviors to a lesser degree toward staff that the district wanted "gone" and felt that the district wanted her to resign as well. She reported that the union representative supported the district and that when a parent threatened her, she was told to make a police report.

As a result of requested reference from the superintendent, Ina was offered and accepted a job in another district. After the first two years in the new district, during which Ina noted she was left alone, the district appeared to want to remove a teaching assistant who had been working at the district for a number of years. Ina received some of the assignments that had been

the other assistant. Ina reported that she did not want to be part of the bullying process and did not want to share her experiences with the new principal and staff; however, a staff member had her spouse do a background check which uncovered issues at the previous district. The information was shared with other staff members with the result of being targeted in the new district.

Ina reported physical, mental, social and financial stressors as a result of the experience of being a target of workplace bullying. She stated that she experienced an upset stomach regularly as well as sleepless nights. Ina sought professional mental health assistance while she had insurance and was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She shared incidents that reflected how she avoided situations that were similar to those in which she had been targeted. Family members, who were initially supportive, became tired of the issues and told her that she needed to develop a 'thicker skin.' Peers who had been friendly stopped speaking to her when she greeted them. Ina stated that some peers let her know that they were aware of what was happening but that they could do nothing to help.

District administrators wrote letters stating that she should not contact outside agencies for assistance. Ina stated that her employment was terminated at the end of the school year. She was notified with about five weeks remaining in the year.

While, Ina could not specifically describe what strategies might be helpful to address workplace bullying, she did state that it would be helpful to have a neutral individual to support the target.

Themes

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting. Transcripts were deeply reviewed

and coded in alignment with chapter 2 descriptions of workplace bullying and its components. The tone of voice of each participant indicated stress, anxiety and frustration as well as relief that his/her story was being heard and validated. Participants had pressured speech, paused at times to apologize for emotionality or for needing to take a drink of water. These factors coupled with the actual words lead to the development of the themes.

Systems Theory was used as the framework of this phenomenological study to allow the researcher to examine the interrelated components of the lived experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting. Understanding the elements of Systems Theory is fundamental to the discussion of the data in relationship to the research questions.

Six key elements in the description of Systems Theory include consideration of the whole system, the existence of the system within an environment, engagement in purposeful regulation and adaptation to maintain status as a system, the interrelationship of elements, and a hierarchy of complexity and sophistication (Drake & Apfalter, 2007; Hall & Fagen, 1956; Koestler, 1978; Laszlo & Krippner, 1998; Prigogine et al., 1977; von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Using a four-step method in Systems Theory, the environment that includes the phenomenon is researched, description of the individual entities within the environment is articulated, and specialized parts and dynamic interactions of the individual entities are identified, then the environment is viewed through the lens of new information. The environment for the phenomenological study of workplace bullying is the K-12 public educational setting. The professional roles of the participants are described as well as the specialized roles that were assumed through the experience of workplace bullying. Then the K-12 public educational setting is considered through the lens of the described experiences of workplace bullying.

Five major theme clusters emerged in relationship to this phenomenological study: the **Significance of Professionalism, Isolation, Longing for Responsiveness, Clutching for Closure/Will It Ever End** and **System Survival and/or Sustenance**.

The **Significance of Professionalism** thematic cluster considers the professional role held by the target and the professional role held by the bully. Further discussion will illuminate the interactions between the professional roles that resulted in the experience of workplace bullying with significant concern expressed regarding the professional evaluation and offense taken in regard to one's professionalism. Professionalism as a theme arose through consideration of participant statements regarding the perception of the unfairness of the evaluations and attacks on the target's professionalism.

Isolation includes the impact on the teacher that results in confusion and helplessness. Participants describe being segregated from their colleagues by the experience, their unique perception of the situation and by the professional, physical, mental, psychological and financial repercussions. Participants were both isolated from others and deliberately isolated themselves from social situations.

Longing for Responsiveness is the theme that provides the venue to articulate the recommendations offered to address or prevent workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting that were a result of the participants' intense desire to be heard and helped by the union, the building administration, central office administration and co-workers.

The participants described engaging in behaviors that incorrectly assumed the standard protocols were being followed.

Table 2

Sample Participant Quotes with the Derived Meaning

This was the worst professional experience of my life and I hope I'm expressing that, but with the passive aggressive nature of it, it's hard to really...cu it's not like she's yelling at me, "you're not doing your job", it's not like she's threatening me (Participant B, June 10, 2013, p. 8 lines 267-269).

We want you to know about this because don't feel she should evaluate her or us at this point, because she's talking about evaluations. She shouldn't be our evaluator. He assured us at that time that she would not evaluate this person and he would get back to us about whether or not we would be evaluated by her. And then, there was no communication until this department chair confronted us (Participant H, June 25, 2013, p. 9, lines 272-276).

My evaluation had dropped. She was calling me in and aggressively speaking to me more often (p. 5, lines 176-177). She wrote me up as saying that I screamed at her and was unprofessional in the office (Participant E, July 9, 2013, p. 3, lines 89-90).

More of the leaving me out of things, not teaming with us. Making decisions and changes to my kids without talking to me (p. 8, lines, 265-266) and I was too tired to go out with my buddies and watch the Sox or the Hawks or whatever. Wasn't playing my video games that I enjoy. I was basically coming home and laying on the couch and watching TV(Participant B, June 10, p. 9, lines 299-301)

My colleague in the same classroom just kind of let it happen too. She had a little bit more clout. She just retired after 30 years. She works in a multi-faceted way. She always keeps herself squeaky clean. She doesn't work in a whistle blowing type of way. In other words, why is not...people doing anything about this? Why are you acting like this? This is not appropriate, encouraging people to have a more collegial environment. I was intimidated by February or so. I was totally intimidated. Nobody was standing up for me. Nobody was doing anything. (p. 6, lines 180-185); they didn't address it. They just sort of like....I had a speaking relationship with them, but I just learned not to speak about things that really mattered (Participant K, July 8, 2013, p. 6, 194-195)

I started to counsel with him [a therapist]. I needed this last year. I took a Saturday spot and man, he just walked me through this whole year and gave me kind support and helped me through it. He referred me to a Christian psychiatrist. So I started going there. I had a very depressed year. I only felt safe in my house. I ended up not going out very much, not eating very well. I stopped exercising. It was bad for my mental health, bad for my physical health, everything. I just kept dealing with this. I still have to deal with this (Participant K, July 8, 2013, p. 6, 209-213)

The target perceives the implicit criticism of his performance of his job and recognizes that his **professionalism** is being questioned.

The participant's reluctance to be evaluated by the perpetrator reflects concern that her **professionalism** may be demeaned.

The perpetrator questioned the participant's **professionalism** as well as evaluated her lower than in the past.

Both personal and **professional** relationships are negatively impacted.

While peers were aware of the situation, they remained separate, leaving her **isolated**.

A therapist and psychiatrist provided the understanding that school personnel could not provide. Mental and physical health were impacted and the participant was increasingly **isolated**.

So I just stay away. I stay away from friends... We are supposed to get breaks... but if I was in a classroom and my taking a break meant the teacher was there alone, I would generally just stay because... it just depended what students were in the class. At lunch, I eat lunch alone... I just sit in [teacher's name] room. I sit real still so nobody knows I am in there (Participant G, June 10, 2013, pp. 9-10, lines 245-253)

The participant **isolated** herself from co-workers

I e-mailed my building rep, my union rep in the building and said that everything I said to her was wrong (Participant K, July 8, 2013, p. 1, lines 12-13)

The participant looked to the union for a helpful and understanding **response**.

I knew I would be thrown under the bus. The school district would not back me up. I could lose my nursing license. I kept telling this assistant administrator that, yes I'm a registered nurse, but I'm not qualified. I haven't been trained (Participant D, July 13, p. 18, lines 683-685). It's my nursing license I need to protect (p. 19, line 694)

The participant looks for a **response** from her administrator that reflects understanding of the implications of professional licensure outside of the school setting.

I got in my classroom, I got my purse and I locked my door and I left. I came home and it took me a while to calm down and then I put in an e-mail, everything that had transpired, to the head of human resources. I said please help me because she says she will not sign these papers without me explaining my situation which is clearly in violation of HIPAA. I cced that to the superintendent of the school district. I knew when I hit send, and this is probably 7:30/8:00 at night and I knew then that I would not go back to work in that district. She'd make sure I had a black mark against me and all (July 13, p. 26 Lines 965-972).

The participant was reduced to pleading for a helpful **response** from the head of human resources.

I remember at one point 2 years into it, I just cried on my lunch. I've not done anything to deserve this. I did go to the special ed pullout person and said, "Is there something I'm doing on this team that warrants this treatment?" (Participant C, June 3, 2013, p. 2 lines 61-62)

The participant looked to a co-worker for an objective **response** regarding her behavior so she could understand and correct it where possible.

The principal of that school even said to me, "You know [name], I'm just not good at working with adults who have bad behavior." (Participant C, June 3, 2013, p. 3, lines 78-8)0

Administration does not understand the process to **respond** to the bullying behavior.

Why should I allow this to happen to me? You know what I mean? It's my livelihood. I worked darn hard for this. I got a masters and I worked hard. I'm not perfect. I'm not a perfect teacher at all. I have my things that I have to work on. I know that. But I do believe that unless you give me an impossible situation, I'm a pretty darned good teacher. (Participant K., July 8, 2013, p. 14 lines 497-500)

The participant **clutches for closure** wondering **will it ever end** without discovering what she did and why it happened

I am hoping – how can I take this ... I am one of those people that say, “How can I learn from this? How can I take this to the next step?” How can I pay more attention to what is happening to other people to help them recognize what is going on with them? It may sound simple, but maybe it will help someone else (Participant A, July 11, 2013, p.14, lines 378-381).

I’ve not done anything to deserve this. I did go to the special ed pullout person and said, “Is there something I’m doing on this team that warrants this treatment?” (Participant C., June 3, 2013, p 2, 62-63)

I did go to the department chair, afterward on several occasions. I think the department chair was giving this person the benefit of the doubt and the department chair wanted me to talk to her 1:1 and address it with her and I just never did that (Participant H, June 25, 2013, p. 2, lines 52-54).

That is the culture of the building (Participant J, July 11, 2013, p. 7, line 150).

It was “I have these new ideas” and was told to just shut their mouth and sit there (Participant J, July 11, 2013, p. 7, lines 191-192).

In a small school district ... just because everybody knows everybody and there’s the good ol boy or good ol buddy system and how dare that new person come in and say that about me. (Participant D, July 13, 2013, p. 33 1248-1250).

It starts from the top and flows downward. From being on the school board, the lawyers for the schools, their wives work on the school board association where the school board members call for help in knowing whether they are doing something right. If you get an administrator and a lawyer who are making decisions for themselves personally, there is almost no way things will change. There are a system of board members that don’t have anything to do with education, (Participant I, July 10, 2013, pp. 19-20 581-593).

The participant **clutches for the closure** with the hope that the experience **will end** by using the lessons of the experience to help others.

Hope for **closure** lies in determining what behavior or character trait earned this treatment so that it will **end**.

An aspect of a **system** is that the hierarchy is followed and respected as a function of maintaining its status as a system. (Drake & Apfalter, 2007; Hall & Fagen, 1956; Koestler, 1978; Laslo & Krippner, 1998; Prigogine et al., 1977; von Bertalanffy, 1968)

The culture and the **system** are mutually supportive and work to maintain the status as a system

A **system** maintains the status as a system.

A **system** maintains the status as a system.

A **system** maintains the status as a system.

Clutching for Closure/Will It Ever End identifies the behaviors and thought patterns in which the participants engaged to find meaning and responsibility for the experience of workplace bullying. As participants were clutching for closure, they hoped to gain insight into the role they had in the experience. They longed to identify at least an element of the experience that had been within their control that either may have warranted the bullying treatment and/or flagged how they had been at least in some control during the experience.

System Survival and Sustenance is the theme that is recognized by participants as a support to the bully and a barrier to the protection the target needs and desires. A system, by definition, maintains its identity and existence through homeostasis. The importance of self-preservation of the system identity results in the elimination of any elements that threatens that which already exists within the system as our participants reported.

Theme One: Significance of Professionalism

Professional Role of the Target

Each of the participants was a specialist within the educational setting. Of the 11 participants who remained engaged in the study, six worked in special education services. Of the six, one was a certified teacher employed as special education assistant; the remaining five were employed as special education teachers. Two of the participants were school social workers and one was a registered nurse who was also a certified health teacher. The remaining two participants were classroom teachers. One classroom teacher was a female in a predominately male subject area and department. The other classroom teacher had previously held a central office coordinator position in the same district.

Professional Role of the Bully

The professional positions of the bullies were almost evenly divided between teachers and administrators. Four of the bullies were classroom teachers, while six were administrators. The remaining identified bully was a special education teacher who supervised the certified teacher who was employed as a teaching assistant. The manner in which each of the persons filling the role of bully demonstrated the requirements of their supervisory role acts as a facet of workplace bullying. Bullying behaviors included a lack of boundaries on the part of the administrator when athletic privileges were suggested (Participant I), using regular education evaluation criteria for a special education teacher (Participant K), the administrator defying special education procedures (Participant E), supervisor throwing objects, making accusatory statements (Participant H), an administrator admitting ignorance in addressing bullying behavior (Participant C) and fear of job loss (Participant G).

Participant G relives her realization that her job was threatened, indicating the implied and overt threat of hierarchy being a part of the dynamic:

the next thing I know, I get called up to [name's] office and I have a probationary...I was put on probation. I could lose this job. And there is nothing I can do about it..., it is in my file. I go...holy cow...is this how this all works? I thought....oh....well, that's the end of that. I am never saying anything to anybody because I don't know the playing field. I don't know who I could trust. Obviously, I can't trust the first level, because she took it to the second level and the second level didn't even come and ask me about it, she just took it up there. It felt like they wanted me out of there (June 10, 2013, p. 7, lines 178-187).

Participants reflected on being charged with being unprofessional. Participant B' manner and vocal inflection indicated indignation as he mentally reviewed an e-mail challenging his attendance at meetings and his professionalism. He recounted, "the only reason I am ever late for meetings or miss meetings. It's because something sets precedence over it. None of my

supervisors have ever accused me of any of those types of things in the past. It just talked about being unprofessional and judgmental. I thought it was very nasty (June 10, 2013, p. 3, lines 86-88).

Participant D spoke of how she was treated: “some of this stuff that is grueling and just outright unprofessional treatment (July 13, 2013, p. 30, lines 1131-1132) and that she felt forced to respond in a manner that she felt was unprofessional: “He Cced that to the person in all of administration that’s over career and technology. You know, he didn’t have to involve that man, because to me it’s unprofessional. But he did and I could tell her did. And so, I included that man when I responded” (pp. 22-23, lines 834-837) and ultimately she took FMLA “I felt unprofessional walking away, but I knew my health could no longer, could not continue if I’d be there” (p 21, Lines 791-792).

Participant I described how her integrity was questioned through her work with special education students to learn the English curriculum, using class notes and online resources to drill and practice.

“When they [the students] come with the semester test and take the test in my room, I would have them sign in and out of my room so I knew when they were there. It happened that after the tests were all given, this teacher went to the principal and accused my kids of cheating because they all had a similar answer that was wrong. I even found it on the data that I found online that I used to study with them and she accused them of cheating. So then I was accused of being unethical (July 10, 2013, p 3, line 73-78)... through this whole process I was walked out and told I was unethical (p. 3 lines 86-87).

Theme Two: Isolation

The impact of isolation on targets fell into two general categories: personal and professional. Personally, targets reported experiencing physical, mental, social, and financial consequences. Professional consequences reported by targets included social, performance,

identity and as impacting students. The impact experienced both personally and professionally isolated the targets in the uniqueness of the experience.

Personal Impact Participants B, J, and K provided examples of the physical impact on the target of workplace bullying: low energy, less satisfactory sleep, increased eating sweets, decreased self-care, and upset stomach.

The impact of workplace bullying in the area of mental functioning was noted by Participants B, C, D, E, F, H, I, and K. Participant B went into detail about these impacts:

Definitely sleep; definitely, I'm a stress eater. I definitely put on weight. I was in the Oreo cookies a lot. That's my vice. Thankfully it's not alcohol. Definitely sleep disruption. A lot of difficulty sleeping. Eating a lot more. A lot more sweets. And lack of interest. Losing some interest in doing the things that I normally enjoy doing. Wasn't taking care of myself as well as I should have been. Not doing my stress relief activities. I was too tired to go out with my buddies and watch the Sox or the Hawks or whatever. Wasn't playing my video games that I enjoy. I was basically coming home and laying on the couch and watching TV (June 10, 2013 p. 9, lines 295-301). Participant F referred to feeling confused and embarrassed when other social workers on the team questioned her about the situations involving leadership positions and new assignments. Participant H was impacted in her relationship at home with her husband, whom she said "was tired of hearing about it all the time" (June 25, 2013, p. 3 line 79), and K stated, "I ended up coming home and just doing nothing, just curling up in a bed (July 8, 2013, p. 6, lines 203-204).

Personal social relationships were reported to be impacted by Participants A, B, F, H and K.

Participant A reported "a feeling of trying to hide and not wanting to face things. I retreated more into myself – less social with other people (July 11, 2013. p 4, lines 113-114). Participant B reported that the experience of workplace bullying affected his relationship with his wife:

I think she saw how it was affecting me and then of course she was having difficulty dealing with that. I kind of hid it from her for a while too, because I'm a guy and I feel like I should just shoulder everything and not have to...so I really didn't talk about it for a couple weeks with her. I didn't want to unload on her (June 10, 2013, p. 9, lines 303-306.) Participants D and K reported decisions that impacted them financially either

currently or in the future by making decisions to resign or use a significant amount of sick time that would ultimately affect retirement benefits.

Professional Impact Professional social relationships, either formal teaming relationships or extracurricular interactions based on working together professionally were reported as being impacted by Participants C, F, G, H and I. Impacts included being excluded from staff social activities and then criticized for not attending (Participant C) and not included as part of staff discussion or receiving responses to e-mail inquiries regarding building procedures (Participant C); unfounded criticism of the manner in which she produced IEPs despite having positive feedback about the same IEPs in the past (Participant F); having no supervisor from whom she could seek direction or guidance without fear (Participant G); lack of teaming opportunities (Participants C, H, and I) presentation of target's research as her own (Participant H).

Participant E summarized the impact of workplace bullying on professional social relationships as pervasive: "it was one of those things that you would talk about a lot, because you're trying to figure out what's going on and you're, not blaming yourself, but like, why would this happen if you do a good job" (July 9, 2013, p. 12, lines 398-399).

Each participant made statements regarding a change in the manner in which they viewed themselves as professional educators as indicated by thoughts, or behavior. Identity based on professional activities was reported as impacted by all participants. Participant K described how her perception of herself as a professional changed:

When she [the administrator] came into the room I started feeling very anxious, totally anxious. Once they called me into the room she sounded much like what [name] was saying. Saying these broad statements that had no basis. Highly negative broad statements with no back up so I didn't understand what was going on. She was shaking her head, rolling her eyes, actually that was my supervisor and making me feel very helpless in the back. I couldn't say anything to defend myself, but I couldn't say anything at all. I just had to accept what they were saying and it was highly stressful, very stressful. I started showing it in physical ways as well as becoming highly anxious

driving into work... I'd been teaching in that building for 13 years, highly successful. (July 8, 2013, p. 1, lines 18-27)

Participant A referred to developing an atypical negative attitude. Participant B stated that the accusations and implication of not putting students first “really hit me to the core” (June 10, 2013, p. 10, line 336). Participant C consulted with other peers to verify her behavior as professional, asking what should change.

Participant D reported having an unblemished teaching record prior to becoming the target of bullying and leaving the workplace under the Family Leave medical Act. Participant E also was considered an exemplary teacher and performed lead teacher duties prior to removing herself from the workplace. Participant F reported serving in a variety of leadership roles during her tenure and then being inexplicably left out of the discussion of positions. She also discussed being corrected for the way she completed paperwork in a specific situation after having been reviewed positively for her paperwork completion.

Participant G stated that she was no longer considered herself to be a confident employee. Participant H stated, “you think that it’s crazy when it’s happening to you. You think that you’re ridiculous. You’re the one that’s got the problem” (June 25, 2013, p. 5, lines 135-136).

Participant I referred to herself in the past tense as having been a great teacher. Participant J stated that she didn’t know how to handle the situation. Participant K stated that she had thirteen “highly successful years” (July 8, 2013, p. 1, line 27) in the same building prior to becoming the target of workplace bullying.

Professional interactions with students were impacted by the experience of workplace bullying by all participants. Areas described as impacted included the ability to be creative, to require successful student behaviors, to advocate for student needs and rights, team with co-workers, and interact with parents.

Participant A reported that she did not realize what was happening to her until she saw the bully's behavior and her responses as it played out in front of her students. Participant, B described the impact on his interactions with students:

I hate to admit that, because I definitely did my best to not let it affect, but I know when I would call a kid down, at certain times, up until the second they came through my door I was kind of like, Oh, I don't want to be here I hate this place. Then when they came in I would turn on the, Hey how are you today? What can I do for you? How are things going? That kind of thing. Realistically, I think it probably did affect my interactions. It probably affected how effective I was (June 10, 2013, p. 11, lines 357-361). Participant C referred to "not bringing my 100% to my classroom (June 6, 2013, p. 4, line 152). Difficulty presenting familiar lessons and tearing up in class were reported by Participant D. Participant D stated that workplace bullying "changed and my ability to think and perform in the classroom" (July 13, 2013, p. 1, line 31).

Decreased creativity and increased caution in working with students as well as concern for her physical safety in the classroom were described as an impact of being the target of bullying behavior were reported by Participant E.

Participant F stated, "I can't say it affected my work. Except that I held onto those things. You know, the anger" (June 10, 2013, p. 4 lines, 207, 209). Increased caution in student interaction-- specifically in correcting student behavior-- was reported by Participant G.

Participant H reported her teaching was impacted by not being part of the team resulting in decreased creativity and staying with procedures and techniques that had been previously used without criticism as well as decreased opportunities for parent contact..

Participant I shared that as a result of her experience as the target of bullying, she did not assert herself on behalf of her special education students' needs and rights. Participant J referred to the impact of students being a result of teachers not teaming to share strategies and cross-curricular opportunities. Participant K stated that despite loving her students and wanting them to

do better, “I just couldn’t deal with kids that day. I ended up taking a couple days off” (July 8, 2013, p. 9, lines 323-324).

Theme Three: Longing for Responsiveness

Each of the participants repeatedly sought support from peers, administration, or the union hoping for the neutralizing of political connection within the school system, validation of his/her professionalism, and identification of the offending behaviors with a plan to address the behaviors. In each scenario, the response repeatedly did not meet the participant’s needs or was ultimately used against the target as extension of the experience of workplace bullying.

Recommendations to address or prevent workplace were offered by all but one participant with most participants readily offering more than one recommendation. A commonly held recommendation was related to decreasing the influence of political connectedness in procuring and continuing in a position in a K-12 public educational setting (Participants B, D, E, G, K). Participants E, G, H, and I offered recommendations that referred to initiating change at the top.

Participant D noted that in her district,

a lot of people are related that work there. Like on my campus, two of the secretaries were sisters. At the main administration office, two of the secretaries are sisters. I was careful not to say too much to people because I didn’t know who was related to who. I didn’t know all the players (July 13, 2013, p.22, lines 883-886).

One participant empathized with the administrators’ difficulty in determining the most appropriate action in addressing workplace bullying in school stating, “I don’t know that a lot of principals have the skills that it takes to really truly manage these situations (Participant C, June

6, p. 7, lines 218-219). This participant continued, “The principal of that school even said to me, “You know, I’m just not good at working with adults who have bad behavior” (p. 3, lines 78-80).

Participants B, H, and I compared the bullying behavior among adults to bullying behavior among students and noted that if it’s not acceptable in one setting, it is not acceptable in another. Participant A also made the recommendation stating:

I know it may not be an immediate problem, but what we are worried about going on with our students is going on with us. I think that is the only reason I recognized it, because I realized that this was happening to me and I was like, “wait a minute, this shouldn’t be happening”. So bullying isn’t just happening with kids. It is happening with adults, too. How are we going to lead by example and help our kids get through it if we don’t recognize it ourselves? (July 1, 2013, p. 13, lines 366-371).

The importance of building a positive environment was identified by participants H and K. Developing a process to address bullying interactions was supported by participants B and D:

I believe, in the line of command. I believe one of them needs to say to her, here is what we need to see you change. I believe everybody should be given that chance. And then if they don’t make those changes, they need to go. I don’t think there is a process in place. I think that’s the problem. (Participant B, June 10, 2013, p. 12, lines 388-390, 392).

Participant K recommended decreasing the pressure on administrators to perform, stating, “I would suggest that in order for her, maybe she could lay low the first year to get to know the lay of the land” (July 8, 2013, p. 12, lines 415-416). Participant D offered having administrators return to the classroom as a fulltime teacher on a cyclical schedule to maintain awareness of the demands on teachers. The importance of an administrator developing a positive environment was recommended by participants H and K.

Participant A recommended that the administration should be approached by a group rather than an individual to discuss workplace bullying issues while participant H suggested that a team approach between administration and teachers as a recommended approach.

Participant C sought the insight of a peer to gain an objective perspective of her behavior and what if anything required improvement:

I remember at one point 2 years into it, I just cried on my lunch. I've not done anything to deserve this. I did go to the special ed pullout person and said, "Is there something I'm doing on this team that warrants this treatment?" (June 3, 2013, p. 2 lines 61-62).

Theme Four: Clutching for Closure/Will It Ever End

The participants of this survey so ached for the relief that closure could bring that several avenues of reflection were considered: self-examination, consultation with peers and family and in through therapeutic consultation. Each of the participants offered statements that indicated self-examination or social referencing as evidence of a lack of perfection and a potential source of the bullying behavior directed at them.

Participants D and G reported engaging in self-examination. Participant D insisted on sharing her personal insight regarding a legitimate professional challenge:

Now I need to own up to something else too. The very first school year that I worked for this district, we had not moved yet and I did bite off an awful lot. I bit off starting in a new district, going to two campuses, helping to open a new school, which I thought was a neat challenge, and then driving an hour each way. I don't like to drive that much. I'm not much of a morning person. So, instead of being school at 7:00, like I was supposed to be, I was getting there right at 7:25, which is when school starts for the kids. I did get written up by an administrator last year and she was very nice about it. She goes, "I'm just going to make a record of it. You've just got to find that sweet spot." I mean, it was me. I own it. I'm an adult. I should have been there at 7:00, I should have been there at 10 till 7 probably (July 13, 2013, p. 31, lines 1168-1176).

Participants A, B, C, D, E, H, I, and J used social referencing as a means of attempting to gain perspective and insight regarding their experiences of workplace bullying. Participants A, B, C, D, E, H, I, and J cautiously consulted with peers with peers and other staff members regarding the experience. Participant H shared:

I was able to go to certain people, but ... you had to be very cautious as to who they were aligned with. Because you may think that they were listening to you and then the information would get back to the bully. So they were actually kind of spying or pumping you for information and then it ended up getting back to the bully who would manipulate it. So that was actually exhausting also. Not knowing who you would trust to talk to. But then when I did find somebody that helped with the situation too. That, I guess, when I wasn't the only one, when there was somebody else that was supporting me, it made me more confident and ended up making the bully less confident in their attempts (Participant H, June 25, 2013, p. 5, lines 142-1490).

Participants A, B, and F described discussing the workplace bullying situation with family members. Participant K relied on the encouragement of her counselor, "I spoke with the counselor and he encouraged me, he was very kind" (July 8, 2013, p. 8 lines 270-280).

Theme Five: System Survival and Sustenance

A key characteristic of a system includes an implicit goal of the maintenance of its identity or system homeostasis. The specialist nature of each participant, with the concomitant requirements and restrictions associated with each specialty provided a challenge to the system that attempted to apply standard procedures, policies and expectations without allowances for the specialties. Hence, system sustenance may function in and of itself only if exceptions, such as study participants' specialties, are disregarded or left unnoted. To that end, our participants note how standard protocol alongside their specialties and/or need for varied protocol sets may equate to the metaphoric "square peg in the round hole" that systems theory may not accommodate. "

Each participant indicated personal relationships between the bully and other staff members with formal or informal influence that further threatened the targets' ability to survive in the system. Participant E stated, "I think the biggest issue is that people knew it was happening. Her superiors knew it was happening. The issue in this district is the fact that her political clout overrode any of her bad behavior (July 9, 2013, p. 16, lines 541-542). Participant B describes the difficulty of dealing with the bully, "The staff over there feels they can't do anything because she's got this relationship with the AP" (June 10, 2013, p. 7, line 223). Participant E shared that her bully had political connections:

She's politically connected in the city and so her son works for the finance department with [name], who is the big...but one of the most corrupt alderman, is in charge of. She got that. she would do things like, just politically connected, like when [name] was running for mayor, she'd have his wife speak about why we should elect him, which is against like, voter rights. You can't campaign in public buildings. (Participant K, July 9, 2013, p. 12, lines 427-429)

Summary

Chapter 4 articulates the findings from the collection of data as described in chapter 3 from 11 of the 12 research participants who self-identified as having experienced workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting. The purpose of the phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting using the open-ended interview method of data collection to access more deeply the lived experiences and insights of the participants. Participants were chosen from 57 responses to an online survey about the experiences of Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Educational Setting. Of the 57 survey respondents, 28 indicated willingness to participate in an interview. The twelfth participant, who rescinded permission, did not respond via the survey, but became aware of the

study by visiting a site that announced the survey. Due to the nature of the workplace bullying experience, the twelfth participant called this interviewer directly to be considered for the study. As a result of the emotional impact of sharing and reviewing the experiences, the twelfth participant rescinded permission.

Between the months of June 2013 and September 2013, participants were interviewed in person or by phone regarding their experiences of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting. After reviewing the transcripts of the recorded interviews, each of the 11 participants were offered the opportunity to correct, clarify or approve the information shared. Each of the 11 participants who continued in the study indicated that the transcripts accurately reflected their experiences.

Transcripts were deeply reviewed and coded in alignment with Chapter 2 descriptions of workplace bullying and its components, including Systems Theory. Five major themes emerged including Significance of Professionalism, Isolation, Longing for Responsiveness, Clutching for Closure/Will It Ever End and System Survival and Sustenance. These themes encompass the professional role held by the target, the professional role held by the bully, the impact on the teacher, and the recommendations offered to address or prevent workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting.

According to each of the 11 participants, the role of the target was held by a specialist within the K-12 Public Educational Setting. Six participants worked in special education: five special education teachers and one certified teacher employed as a special education assistant. Two participants were social workers and one was a registered nurse with a teaching degree. The remaining two were classroom teachers: one a female teacher in a male dominated subject areas and one who had previously held a coordinator position in the same district.

Both teachers and administrators filled the role of the bully. Four of the bullies were classroom teachers, while six were administrators. The remaining identified bully was a special education teacher who supervised the certified teacher who was employed as a teaching assistant.

Targets described the workplace bullying experience as impacting them both personally and professionally. Physical, mental, social, and financial consequences were reported in the personal areas of the targets' lives. Targets reported professional consequences of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting in the areas of social interactions, work performance, professional identity and interactions with students.

Empathy for the bully was referred to by several participants as well as the challenges of performing the duties of an administrator; however the discrepancy between the approach to bullying among students and the approach to bullying of staff was noted by several participants. Recommendations of participants included a focus on the system of policies and procedures, addressing the political connectedness that develops among staff and developing appropriate interpersonal skills at all staff levels to address workplace bullying in a professional and dignified manner.

The data provided by this phenomenological study articulates the existence of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting and its personal and professional impact on the individuals involved as well as the students involved.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview of Study

This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting. The professional roles of the target and the bully, as well as the personal and professional impact on the target and recommendations to address workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting were studied by the researcher. Like all employment locations, the K-12 educational setting provides opportunity for workplace bullying. As a result of their encounters with workplace bullying, the individuals involved (the bully, the target, and the bystanders) all experience a consequence. Time and energy that should be allocated to the tasks of the workplace are expended instead to bullying or withstanding the bullying.

Identified outcomes of workplace bullying include a decline in productivity, loss of self-esteem, a negative impact on identity, as well as physical and mental health. (Sorrells, Caso, Munhoz, & Sapolsky, 2009; Melamed, Shirom, Toker, & Shapira, 2006; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Leymann, 1996; Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Yamada, 2000; Saunders et al., 2007; Rayner & Keashley, 2004; Westhues, 2008; Dias-Ferreira et al., 2009; Namie & Namie 2003; Ayoko et al., 2003; Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Einarsen & Raknes, 1996; Leymann, 1990; Price-Spratlen, 1995; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002).). When schools are the workplace, the decline in productivity may mean

a decrease in the amount of time and energy that can be directed toward the success of the students.

Data for this study was obtained through eleven participant interviews that were recorded and professionally transcribed, information provided through the initial screening survey, and field notes that were analyzed. The twelfth participant rescinded permission to use the information provided due to the emotional impact of reviewing the transcript of the recorded interview. Significant statements were identified and developed into three thematic clusters as presented in Chapter 4: the significance of professionalism, isolation, and longing for responsiveness. These themes were formulated based on System Theory (Drake & Apfalter, 2007; Hall & Fagen, 1956; Koestler, 1978; Laszlo & Krippner, 1998; Prigogine et al., 1977; von Bertalanffy, 1968).

A discussion of the implications of these findings from Chapter 4 that describe the lived experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 public education setting are provided in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 is organized to address the overarching question: “What is the lived experience of and meaning applied to the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting?” as well as the sub questions: “What is the result of bullying behavior among adults?”; “What is the impact of having a teacher who is chronically ill due to the stress of chronic bullying at work?”; “How is the developing child affected by a teacher who experiences the mental strain of preserving his/her own professional identity and who questions the confidence necessary to plan and implement educational activities?”

In addition, Chapter 5 will address patterns and commonalities involving the professional positions of the target of workplace bullying in the K-12 Educational Setting, the professional positions of the bully, the personal and professional impact of the experience of workplace

bullying, and recommendations to address workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting.

Limitations

Limitations in the interview method used in this qualitative study included the participants' ability to cooperate, ability to verbalize experiences (including individual perception and reflection), the level of skill the researcher had in the process of data collection, and the inability to ensure total neutrality due to the fact that sensitive information was uncovered and descriptions elicited during the interactions between the researcher and participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, Schwandt, 1997). The emotionality of the experience of workplace bullying provides an additional limitation that is traumatic in nature and which can be re-triggered by discussion of the event. A final limitation lies in the difficulty of interviewing persons holding the role of bully. Data does not include the bully's perspective of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting.

This researcher's personal experience of workplace bullying in the role of target is identified as an additional limitation. While this researcher's experiences have inspired the phenomenological study, the purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of individuals who have familiarity with workplace bullying in the educational setting. This researcher used bracketing in the analysis of the data and worked with the committee members to bracket "false notions and truth" as referenced by Moustakas (1994, p. 90).

Research Questions Discussion

The discussion of the research question addresses first the overarching question followed by a review and discussion of the existing research presented in chapter 2 with an examination of each of the sub questions following. *Research question: What is the lived experience of and meaning applied to the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting?*

This research question provided the basis for the interview protocol for this study and can be considered the overarching framework for the additional sub questions. Deep review and coding of the transcripts of the participants' responses led the researcher to identify three theme clusters: the significance of professionalism, isolation, and longing for responsiveness.

In the instance of each of the 11 participants, the role of the target was held by a specialist within the K-12 Public Educational Setting. Six participants worked in special education: five special education teachers and one certified teacher employed as a special education assistant. Two participants were social workers and one was a registered nurse with a teaching degree. The remaining two were classroom teachers: one a female teacher in a male dominated subject areas and one who had previously held a coordinator position in the same district. This data is supported by previous studies conducted in the past ten years that identify targets as being an individual possessing superior competence or technical skill; (Namie, et al, 2009) as well as "displaying exceptional accomplishment, commitment to work, integrity, innovation, and intelligence and competence" (Duffy& Sperry, 2007, p. 398).

Teachers and administrators filled the role of the bully. Four of the bullies were classroom teachers, while six were administrators. The remaining identified bully was a special education teacher who supervised the certified teacher who was employed as a teaching assistant. Previous studies cited in Chapter 2 identify bullies as individuals who are perceived as having

formal, such as that exercised by a supervisor, or informal power, such as experience, social connections, or knowledge, over the target (Leymann, 1996; Saunders, 2007). This was reflected in the data in that while not all bullies held formal positions of authority over the target, a good portion did.

Similar to the research presented in Chapter 2, participants described the workplace bullying experience as impacting them both personally and professionally in the areas of financial, career, physical, and psychosocial health (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Yamada, 2000). Physical, mental, social, and financial consequences were reported in the personal areas of the participants' lives. The research reviewed in Chapter 2 aligns with the impact of the experience of workplace bullying as negatively affecting the target's ability to communicate, and to maintain social connections in all areas of life, personal reputation, occupational situation, and their physical health (Leymann, 1996).

Participants in this study described psychological symptoms identified in Chapter 2 including stress, anxiety, nervousness, fearfulness, depression, loss of confidence, lowered job satisfaction, and decreased organizational commitment (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003; Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Leymann, 1990; Price-Spratlen, 1995; Saunders, Huynh, & Goodman-Delaney, 2007; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). Some participants in this study also reported symptoms that correlate with those of post-traumatic stress disorder including: nervousness, aggressiveness, insomnia, apathy, and social phobia (Bjorkqvist, et al, 1994). Additional symptoms included severe anxiety, stress headaches, sleep disruption, loss of concentration, and edginess. Participants reported their obsession over bully's motives or tactics, recurrent memories, or thought intrusion with the resulting avoidance of

feelings and places combined with shame or embarrassment that changed their lifestyle and routines (Namie & Namie 2003).

Participants also reported thoughts and behaviors that indicated relationships at home and the community as well as work were negatively affected and that the social network developed at work was compromised as indicated by Leymann (1996). Participants in this study reported professional consequences of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting in the areas of social interactions, work performance, professional identity and interactions with students. Compromised decision-making skills resulting in decreased creativity in the classroom and increased stand-by presentations were reported by participants in this study and is supported by Dias-Ferreira et al. (2009).

The participants' interview responses regarding their personal and/or professional sense of identity is supported by research in Chapter 2. When workplace bullying takes place, the target is faced with the realization that he/she is not perceived in a way that aligns with his/her sense of self, typical attitudes, and values. The target also realizes that his/her behaviors are no longer effective in a crisis situation. Participants reported feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, devaluation, discrediting, degradation, and loss of professional reputation as well as the sense that their job was in jeopardy (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Leymann, 1996).

The participants indicated that the workplace assumed an unfriendly, hostile quality as identified in research presented in Chapter 2 (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Yamada, 2000). When the workplace environment assumes a hostile quality, the target experiences stressful outcomes personally in the area of financial, career, physical, and psychosocial health (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Yamada, 2000). The target is therefore pushed into a helpless and defenseless position in the workplace (Leymann, 1996).

The data provided by this phenomenological study articulates the existence of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting and its personal and professional impact on the individuals involved as well as the students.

Sub Question One: *What is the result of bullying behavior among adults?* Workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting results in an unfriendly and hostile environment that compromises the professional creativity of the targeted professionals which negatively impacts students. Professionals are personally impacted in the areas of compromised physical and mental health, social functioning, professional opportunities, financial security, and personal and professional identity.

Sub Question Two: *What is the impact of having a teacher who is chronically ill due to the stress of chronic bullying at work?* The participants in this study reported a sense of determination to meet their professional expectations based on a commitment to their students. They reported that the lessons presented and the quality of their interactions with students was negatively impacted by the stress and by the limiting of professional teaming. Those participants that reported requiring extended absences, or who either resigned or were terminated, expressed concern for the lack of transition for students in their classes. The participants who reported unplanned community contact with their students reported that students expressed excitement to see their teacher and concern about the teacher which aroused an emotional response in the teacher.

Sub Question Three: *How is the developing child affected by a teacher who experiences the mental strain of preserving his/her own professional identity and who questions the confidence necessary to plan and implement educational activities?*

The impact on the developing child was not directly articulated by the participants; however, the potential impact can be extrapolated based on participant references to recognizing that they were unable to consistently present creative lessons and at times acknowledged difficulty with well-rehearsed lessons that had previously been successful. Difficulty in the area of correcting student behavior or teaching appropriate behaviors was also compromised. Security developed through a consistent relationship with a knowledgeable and trusted adult of group of adults is vital for healthy physical, mental, and emotional development in children. The difficulty providing a secure environment due to the distracting stress of the experience of workplace bullying would cause a negative impact on students.

***Sub Question Four:** What are the recommendations to address workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting?*

Recommendations to address workplace bullying center on interpersonal relationships and procedures and must be viewed as equally significant to the attention that is given to bullying among students. The influence of personal relationships in procuring and mainlining employment in the K-12 Public Educational Setting must be considered and addressed. Administrator education is necessary beginning “at the top” to develop administrators who are able to identify workplace bullying and its components of behaviors, target, bully and effectively intervene using consistent procedures based on policy. Administrators and staff education about the elements of a positive environment and the steps to develop it are recommended. Policies and procedures must be followed or changed through a systems approach, rather than based on emotion or personal perspective including a specific policy and procedure to address workplace bullying.

Systems offer various areas and means to intervene and make changes. Each person and role within the system is driven to maintain their role within the system and the system itself.

The target is often rendered helpless and voiceless at the point in which the bullying becomes evident. Typically, targets believe that it will spontaneously resolve itself; bystanders look on in horror, grateful that he/she is not targeted and administration wants the chaos to end. Each role in the system of schools is afforded opportunities to address workplace bullying.

Recommendations and considerations for each role as they become aware or experience workplace bullying:

As a teacher in the role of target

- Document events including your response and the reason you chose that response
- Seek support both within and outside of school
- Consider the personality of the bully and what strategies might deflect the behaviors
- Maintain your personal health schedules
- Keep a list of accomplishments or update your resume so that your professional identity is maintained.

As a teacher in the role of bystander or witness-

- Listen empathically
- Offer support
- Correct misperceptions
- Disengage in conversations involving innuendo or that lack clarity of purpose
- Offer suggestions and feedback if any behaviors by the target could be misconstrued

- Substantiate the target's experience to administration, Human Resources or union representative

As an Administrator or Supervisor

- Consider the combination of your previous experiences with your previous experiences
- Become educated about workplace bullying and personality styles and disorders
- View the reports through a systems lens asking
 - Who are all the participants?
 - What does each stand to gain or lose?
 - Who is making the report?
 - What is the goal of the reporter?
- Consider alternate interpretations of the reported behaviors
- Did the reporter provide an evaluation of the behavior or describe the behavior?

Develop a policy that allows support and information to be shared that does not jeopardize the target's position. Insist that procedures be followed at all levels of the system without exceptions for personal understanding or friendships.

Suggestions for Further Research

The data of this phenomenological study established the reality of and provide a description of the lived experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting. Suggestions for further research would focus on overarching questions from a systems perspective that consider the school a subsystem within and influenced by a larger system as well as the school as the system itself influencing the elements that comprise it.

Questions that prompt study of the school as a subsystem:

- Using a quantitative approach
 - How widespread is the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting?
- Using a qualitative approach
 - What political, social, and economic factors in the community, state, country and world contribute to the development and tolerance of workplace bullying?
 - What beliefs and practices are present in or mitigate the impact of workplace bullying in the k-12 public educational setting?

Questions that prompt study of the school as the system:

- Using a quantitative approach
 - What other systems elements in the K-12 Public Educational Setting have been targets of bullies?
 - What is the effect of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting on student academic achievement?
 - What is the effect of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting on student behavior?
 - What is the effect of workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting on student social/emotional functioning?
- Using a qualitative approach

- What are the characteristics of specialists (special education teachers, nurses, social workers, psychologists or other minority professional educators) that lead to workplace bullying?
- What are the effective intervention points to address workplace bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting?
- What is the triggering event for the development of workplace bullying?
- What are the characteristics of a bully in the K-12 public educational setting?
- In what ways has the existence and /or application of system theory in itself failed the target?

Studies designed either qualitatively or quantitatively or using mixed methods have the potential to uncover significant finding that contribute to the educational system.

Summary

Workplace Bullying exists as a complex phenomenon in K-12 public educational settings. The data of this study revealed that specialists or professionals that are unique within their roles or buildings are targets of administrators or teachers who have explicit or implicit power over the target. Real and negative impact in the areas of physical well-being, mental and emotion health, financial security and social functioning that is significant is the result of being a target of workplace bullying. As targets endure the increasing impact of workplace bullying, professional obligations are compromised including interactions with students.

Action to address Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting has begun in a few school districts in the United States. Further action such as the development of policies

and procedures and the willingness to comply with them, administrator education about workplace bullying and effective intervention at all levels are initial recommendations to address Workplace Bullying in the K-12 public educational setting. Further research at all levels of the systems could provide deeper insight and identify significant intervention points to decrease Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting and positively impact education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AGREEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Residents of the United States are invited to participate in a research study about the lived experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 public education setting. This study will examine the phenomenon of workplace bullying by examining the systems in which the behaviors occur and will consider the impact of witnessing bullying behavior and the impact of stress on the professional educator in situations of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Participants are invited to complete a survey of their experience of work place bullying in the K-12 educational setting. All information is confidential and participant identity need not be shared unless the participant is willing to be interviewed by phone or in person.

Participants who volunteer to be interviewed at the end of the survey and are chosen, will participate in an interview of up to 60 minutes regarding their experiences of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting. After this interview has been transcribed, participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy before participating in a second interview of 30 minutes to review and clarify information regarding their experiences.

The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon location that will ensure confidentiality or by phone during which the interview will be recorded within 3 weeks of the agreement to be interviewed. Follow up interviews will take place within 2 weeks after allowing 3 weeks for transcription and review of the interviews.

The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed by a paid transcriptionist who will be made aware of the importance of confidentiality. No identifying information will be shared with the transcriptionist.

RISKS

The risks involved are related to any re-living of the experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting in emotional, mental, or physical areas. Referrals will be made to Workplace Bullying Institute to all participants who volunteer and are chosen for interviews as a resource in the event emotional/mental health support is required.

BENEFITS

Participants who are chosen and complete the interview process will receive \$5.00. Participants may also personally feel a sense of empowerment or relief in sharing their experiences. Educators in the K-12 public educational setting may benefit from improved workplace environments and relationships.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The sources of information in this study will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless written permission to do otherwise is given by the participant. No written or oral reference will be made that could identify the participant to this study. Participants will have the right to review the transcripts of the interviews in which they participated. All data will be destroyed after 3 years.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Beth Plachetka, at 76 S. Main St, Suite A, PO Box 806, Sugar Grove, IL 60554, by phone at 630-272-4959 or e-mail at bplachetka@aurora.edu . If you have questions about your rights as a participant, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, contact Dr. Jane Davis, chair, Institutional Review Board, Aurora University, (630) 844-4579; jdavis@aurora.edu.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide not to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data collection is completed your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the agreement.

Survey

A doctoral candidate from Aurora University in Aurora, Illinois is conducting a study about workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting entitled “A Systems Approach to Workplace Bullying in the Educational Setting.” The study is designed to elicit and document the constructed meaning of the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced workplace bullying in a K-12 educational setting in any of the following roles: target, witness, perpetrator, or peripheral participant. The goal of a cross-categorical representation of educational positions as well as roles in the experience of workplace bullying will limit the number of volunteers who will be accepted for interviews

Description of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is an intentional, deliberate, and emotional assault that creates a hostile work environment for the target (Yamada, 2000). To be considered bullying, the behaviors must occur persistently (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). While researchers acknowledge the subjective nature of the term bullying, the frequency, duration and intensity of the behaviors are described as occurring more frequently and for longer periods of time with greater intensity than similar behaviors that are not bullying. Bullying behaviors are social interactions through which one individual (seldom more) is attacked by one or more (seldom

more than four) individuals on an almost daily basis for a period of many months. These attacks bring the person into an almost helpless position with the potentially high risk of expulsion (Leymann, 1996). To be considered workplace bullying, the target must perceive an imbalance of power. This imbalance can be in formal power such as with a supervisor or in informal power found in the forms of experience, social connections, and knowledge (Sanders, 2004). Bullying behaviors are defined as communication that is unethical, hostile and systematic by one or a few toward one individual who, as a result of the communication, is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position (Leymann, 1996). Bullying behaviors are repeated and enduring aggressive behaviors at work that are intended as and/or perceived as hostile by the recipient (Einarsen, 1999).

Roles in Bullying

Target

Targets persistently experience negative, aggressive behaviors directed at them specifically from a person with real or assumed authority over them that results in psychological, social, financial, or physical harm. Targets have difficulty defending themselves and typically label themselves bullied.

Witness

Co-workers can be direct witnesses of bullying behaviors toward the target. While it would be hopeful to assume intervention and support, witnesses often cannot overcome their personal biases or fears of retaliation to intervene. Witnesses report the reluctance to intervene is based in fear of appearing foolish, being ineffective in the intervention, and promoting themselves as a target for retaliation by the perpetrator.

Perpetrator

Perpetrators are individuals with real or assumed authority over the target. They frequently demonstrate aggressive behaviors that are outside the typical manner and procedure for the setting over an extended period of time.

Peripheral Participant

Peripheral participants are often, but not always, part of management or administration. They are used to perpetuate rumors or innuendo that cause the work environment to be perceived as hostile by the target. Participation is generally intended to remedy the situation, but due to lack of thorough investigation and /or reflection the responses or involvement of the peripheral participant increases or continues the bullying behaviors and perpetuates the perception of hostile work environment.

Identification of Role

Using the above descriptions, the role in workplace bullying that most accurately describes your experience is as a:

Target Perpetrator Witness Peripheral Participant

Bullying Behaviors

Please check/highlight all that you have witnessed or personally experienced:

- Dirty looks
- Snide remarks
- Physical threats
- Objects being thrown
- Sabotage of the required work materials
- Aggressive eye contact (glaring or meaningful glances)
- Giving the silent treatment

- Intimidating physical gestures
 - Including finger pointing
 - Slamming or throwing objects
 - Yelling
 - Screaming and/or cursing at the target
 - Angry outbursts or temper tantrums
 - Nasty, rude, and hostile behavior toward the target
 - Accusations of wrongdoing
 - Insulting or belittling the target often in front of other workers
 - Excessive or harsh criticism of the target's work performance
 - Spreading rumors about the target; breaching the target's confidentiality
 - Making unreasonable work demands of the target
 - Withholding needed information
 - Taking credit for the target's work
 - Other (please describe) _____
-

How frequently did the identified behaviors occur? (number of times per day/ week)

Over what length of time did the behaviors occur? (number of days/ months/years)

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being minimally and 5 being extremely, at what level were these behaviors perceived as negative and inappropriate?

Minimally 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely

Outcomes Experienced

Targets, and to a lesser degree, witnesses, experience harmful outcomes in several life areas as a result of bullying. These areas include mental or psychological health, physical health, identity, and in related social systems. Examples of the manifestations of the harmful outcomes follow.

Please check/highlight all that you have observed in others or have personally experienced:

Mental Health/Psychological Impact

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Nervousness
- Fearfulness
- Depression
- Loss of confidence
- Lowered job satisfaction
- Decreased organizational habits
- Aggressiveness
- Apathy
- Loss of concentration
- Feeling edgy or easily startled
- Obsession over bully's motives or tactics
- Recurrent memories or thought intrusion
- Avoidance of feelings or places
- Shame or embarrassment that changed lifestyle/routines
- Inability to make decisions

- Hostile and suspicious attitude toward surroundings
- Chronic feeling of concern that one is in danger
- Hypersensitivity with respect to injustices
- Constant identification with the suffering of others in a pathological, compulsory manner
- Feelings of emptiness or loneliness
- Chronic inability to experience joy from common events in everyday life
- Isolation
- Individual no longer feels part of society
- Individual shows a cynical attitude toward the world around him/her
- Increased risk of eventual substance use

Physical Impact

- Decreased immunity to illness
- Impaired cognition
- Decreased spine density as diagnosed by physician
- Development of type 2 diabetes in otherwise healthy individuals
- Stress headaches
- Sleep disruption
- Racing heart rate
- Skin disorders

Related Systems

- Change in socio-economic status
- Early retirement

- Displaced aggression, often the home and family setting

Threat to Identity

- Threatened sense of self
- Belief that typical attitudes, values, and behaviors are no longer effective in a crisis situation

Given the description of workplace bullying provided in this survey, have you been involved in or aware of any incidents in the K-12 educational setting that correspond with the description of workplace bullying?

- Yes
- No

What position do you hold in the K-12 educational setting?

- central office administration
- building administration
- department administration
- certified classroom staff
- certified support staff
- non-certified staff

Are you willing to participate in this study through an interview process either in person or by phone ?

- Yes
- No

If willing to participate in an interview, please provide contact information. You will be notified by e-mail or letter regarding the interview process.

Name

Address

Age

Ethnicity/Race

Gender

Relationship Status

- Single
- Married
- Committed
- Community Living

School district

Position

Length of tenure

Personal email

Phone number

Best times to be contacted.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. Introductory Question (after reviewing definitions of roles).
 - a. How would you describe your role in workplace bullying?
2. Can you describe what happened?
 - a. Who was involved and what was the position of other person?
 - b. What did he/she do?
 - c. How did you respond?
 - i. Externally
 - ii. Internally
 - iii. Interpersonally
 - iv. What support did you seek?
 - v. What support did you receive?
 - d. How did the situation end?
3. Referring to the list outcomes experienced can you describe what symptoms you experienced (see Appendix A which was completed to determine participation)?
 - a. How did your experience of those symptoms affect your ability to perform your work duties?
 - b. What effect, if any, did your experience of those symptoms have on
 - i. the students in your classroom/classes in terms of behavior, participation, work completion, test scores, and/or grades?
 - ii. the staff whom you supervised in terms of their productivity and/or attendance?
 - iii. your interactions with the parents of your students?

- iv. your interactions with your peers in the work setting?
 - v. your willingness to try new methods or innovative procedures?
 - c. In what other ways, if any, did your experience of the symptoms affect your life?
4. The process of recovery from an experience of workplace bullying takes time. Where are you in the process?
- a. How did you reach this point?
 - b. To what extent does your experience continue to affect you?
 - i. Can you give details or explain more?
5. As a result of your experience, what would you like to see happen to address workplace bullying in the K-12 educational setting?
6. Is there anything that you were not asked specifically regarding your experience that you would like to share?

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Aurora University

Institutional Review Board

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

A Systems Approach to Workplace Bullying in the K-12 Public Educational Setting

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study about the lived experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 public education setting. This study will examine the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the educational setting by examining the systems in which the behaviors occur. This study will consider the impact of witnessing bullying behavior, the impact of stress on the professional educator, as well as the impact on students in situations of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Participants will participate in an interview of up to 60 minutes regarding their experiences of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting. After this interview has been transcribed, participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy before participating in a second interview of 30 minutes to review and clarify information regarding their experiences.

The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon location that will ensure confidentiality or by phone during which the interview will be recorded. An option of using a remote phone system will be available.

All initial interviews will take place within 3 weeks of the agreement to be interviewed. Follow up interviews will take place within 2 weeks after allowing 3 weeks for transcription and review of the interviews.

The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed by a paid transcriptionist who will be made aware of the importance of confidentiality. No identifying information will be shared with the transcriptionist.

Initials _____

RISKS

The risks involved are related to any re-living of the experience of workplace bullying in the K-12 public educational setting in emotional, mental, or physical areas.

Referrals to professional mental health practitioners through the Workplace Bullying Institute will be provided.

Participant Initials _____

BENEFITS

Participants will receive \$5.00 upon complete of the interview process. Participants may also personally feel a sense of empowerment or relief in sharing their experiences and bringing

greater awareness to the issue of Workplace Bulling in the K-12 public education setting. Educators in the K-12 public educational setting may benefit from improved workplace environments and relationships.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in this study will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless written permission to do otherwise is given by the participant. No written or oral reference will be made that could identify the participant to this study. Participants will have the right to review the transcripts of the interviews in which they participated. All data will be destroyed after 3 years.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher, Beth Plachetka, at 76 S. Main St, Suite A, PO Box 806, Sugar Grove , IL 60554 or by phone at 630-272-4959 or e-mail at bplachetka@aurora.edu . If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact Dr. Jane Davis, chair, Institutional Review Board, Aurora University, (630) 844-4579; jdavis@aurora.edu.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide not to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study. I am aware that the interview will be audio- recorded. I have been offered a process by which professional emotional &/or medical support can be accessed. (Jessi Brown , MS, LMHC, LPC, NCC of WBI 1-360-656-6630) Initial _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D
REFERRAL SOURCES

This researcher is a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) in the state of Illinois. As an LCSW, this researcher can offer specific information regarding the manifestation of symptoms of distress and the procedures to access professional support.

1. Recognition of symptomology- note significant changes in quality over a period of times
 - a. Sleep Patterns
 - b. Eating Patterns
 - c. Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
 - d. Feelings of anxiousness
 - e. Heightened awareness of environment
 - f. Feelings of fear
 - g. (refer to PTSD)
2. Types of support available
 - a. Personal support- family & friends
 - b. Medication- provided by a medical doctor: family or psychiatrist
 - c. Therapy – provided by LCSW, LCPC, PsyD, or psychiatrist
 - d. Referral to Workplace Bullying Institute therapist and coach 360-656-6603
3. Accessing
 - a. Consult insurance
 - b. Review community resources
4. Provide follow up for participants requesting it.