


Interview with Pattie Porter, the Texas Conflict Coach

Everything you always wanted to know about workplace bullying but were afraid to ask: What the research says

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Oh, the things that we do...



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The range...

Incivility
 Low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, **in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect**. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, **displaying a lack of regard for others**. (Andersson & Pearson, 1999)



The range...

Bullying:
 All those **repeated** actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause **humiliation, offence and distress**, and that **may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment** (Einarsen, 1999)



The range...

Mobbing:

A malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse, and/or terror. It is a “**ganging up**” by the leader(s)—**organization**, superior, co-worker, or subordinate—who rallies others into systematic and frequent “mob-like” behavior . . . (Davenport et al, 1999)

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Defining features

- Negative behaviors
- Persistent
 - Frequency
 - Enduring - occurs over a period of time
- Patterned – variety and sequencing/progression
 - Critical consideration
 - Micro-aggressions and micro-inequities
- Power imbalance (formal v. informal)
 - Ability to defend oneself

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Keashly & Jagatic (2010)

Common underlying dimensions

Rayner & Hoel (1997); Baron & Neuman (1996)

- **Threat to professional status**
 - Belittling opinion, public professional humiliation, accusations regarding lack of effort, damaging rumors, undermining the target’s authority, excluding/ignoring the views of the target, unreasonable/inappropriate monitoring, constant criticism.
- **Threat to personal standing**
 - Name calling, insults, intimidation, spreading untrue rumors/ gossip, criticism in front of others, judgment questioned, devaluing with reference to age or other characteristics/ attributes.
- **Isolation**
 - Preventing access to opportunities, physical or social isolation.

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Common underlying dimensions

- **Overwork**
 - Undue pressure, impossible deadlines, unnecessary disruptions.
- **Destabilization**
 - Failure to give credit when due, meaningless tasks, removal of responsibility, repeated reminders of blunders, setting the target up for failure.
- **Obstructionism**
 - Impeding the target’s ability to perform, interfering with/blocking the target’s work, refusal to provide needed resources and support, repeated failure to return phone calls/email, causing others to delay actions.

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New frontier: Cyberbullying

- Email, social media, internet, text messaging, video/picture posting
- Ability of actors to be anonymous
- Span of impact – millions
- Once released, hard to call back
 - Exposure is relived

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Recent US studies...

- Recent U.S. random stratified sample of 2,829 working residents found that 13% had been exposed to workplace bullying in previous 12 months (Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006)
 - Based on checklist of behaviors
 - If endorsed at least one behavior at least weekly for a period of a year, identified as bullied.

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Recent US studies...

Workplace Bullying Institute-Zogby Survey 2014

- 1000; representative of US adult population; online surveys Jan 27-28, 2014
- Provided a specific definition of severe bullying
- 7% bullied in past year
- 20% in working career
- 11% directly witnessed; 10% aware bullying goes on
- 28% no knowledge of workplace bullying
- Of 138 million nonfarm labor force, 37 million have been bullied at some point in their career.
- Add witnessed bullying, 66 million workers affected

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www.workplacebullying.org

Duration

- **Long lasting process that “wears down” and “disables” targets – implicates org’n**
- In the US, average duration is 16.5 months (Namie & Namie 2003)
- Range from 1 month to 10 years (Burnazi, Keashly, & Neuman 2005)
- University studies - range from 1 month to over 3 years.
 - 35% identifying as being bullied **reported duration of over 3 years.**
- **Longer it goes on, more likely others are to be drawn in – Mobbing**

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Who are the actors?

- Equally likely to be coworkers or higher ups
 - Evidence that behavior from higher ups has greater impact (Keashly & Jagatic, 2010)
- Gender
 - Results mixed (Keashly, 2012)
 - Significant proportion is **same sex harassment**
 - Depends upon the nature of the relationship – power/status
 - Women tend to use more indirect behavior; relational aggression
 - Men tend to use more direct and overt behavior

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Who are the actors?

- Single vs multiple actors (mobbing)
 - E.g., 57% in 2 university studies identified more than one actor
 - Faculty (Keashly & Neuman, 2008) – 2X more likely to be 3 or more actors (mobbed)
 - Frontline staff – 1.5X more likely be a single actor

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Risk factors (target)

- Provocative and submissive victim notion
- Outsider position
 - Clash with workgroup norms – “ratebuster”
 - Different in physical appearance, values
- Whistleblower (more broadly expression of dissent)
 - Bullying as retaliation; social control

Einarsen et al 2010

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Process of bullying

- Subtle, covert to overt and direct – escalatory sequence
- Target becomes increasingly disabled in responding; more ineffective responses
- Others getting sucked in
 - Spirals
 - Mobbing

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Consequences

Target

- Emotional responses
- Physical and psychological health damage
- Responses toward the job and the institution
- Behavioral responses
- Spillover effects to family and friends
- Income reduction or loss

Evidence that witnesses similarly affected

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Consequences

The institution:

- Institutional performance and employee productivity – decline in quality & quantity
- Withdrawal: turnover, loss of brightest, absenteeism, disengagement.
- Culture and climate
 - Strains loyalty, fosters distrust, sabotage, resentment
 - Uncivil climate, decreased communication
 - Potential escalation to workplace aggression, violence
- Direct institutional costs
 - Legal liability

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY • Higher workers comp and disability costs

Pathways to Bullying

Baillien et al (2009)

Intrapersonal

- Result from ineffective coping with stressors and frustrations
- Target and actor characteristics – negative affect
 - Affects perceptions and provokes behavior
- Displacement of aggression; predatory bullying

Interpersonal

- Conflict ineffectively managed and escalates by reciprocity
- One becomes unable to defend self
- Challenging to assess and discern genesis

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Intragroup/organizational****

Result of unit or organizational features that stimulate and sustain bullying (Salin, 2003)

- **Enabling** – features that affect whether bullying even possible
 - Power imbalance; rigid hierarchies (top down)
 - low perceived costs/risks for behaviors
 - lack of enforceable policies (unclear, confusing)
 - qualities of working env't such as perceived injustice, lack of autonomy, role state stressors, perceived norm violation, scarce or limited resources (prestige, promotions)

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Intragroup/organizational

- **Motivating** – features associated with bullying as a “rational response” to those viewed as threats or burdens
 - Internally competitive env’t, perceived norm violation; constructive dismissal strategy; “permission to harass”
- **Precipitating** – features that may “trigger” bullying assuming other features in place
 - Organizational change (downsizing, restructuring, budget cuts, changing or unstable leadership, increased diversity)
 - Create stress, anxiety or frustration and thus can lead to aggression;
 - Bullying and mobbing framed as a survival strategy

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In nutshell....

“... some individuals may be more prone to bullying-type behaviors than others, **but without environmental supports**, single negative acts committed by such individuals are unlikely to devolve into bullying. Thus, bullying is clearly an **ethical issue for the system**, rather than simply for the individual perpetrator.” (Gallant, 2013)

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