

Bullying: Strategies for Prevention & Intervention

Kristine Paranica, NDSU Ombud

Agenda:

- What is workplace bullying?
- What makes bullying possible?
- Types and tactics of bullies
- Causes of bullying behaviors
- Impact of bullying on victims
- Standing up against bullying
- Responses to prevent bullying

What *IS* Workplace Bullying?

While there is no single, formal definition of workplace bullying, several researchers have attempted to define it:

- repeated, unreasonable actions of individuals (or a group) directed toward in employee (or a group of employees), which are intended to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, or undermine;
- misuse or abuse of power by one employee over another which creates feelings of defenselessness and injustice in the targeted employee and undermines the individual's right to dignity at work
- systematic aggressive communication, manipulation of work, and acts aimed at humiliating or degrading one or more individuals that create an unhealthy and unprofessional power imbalance between the bully and the target(s), resulting in psychological consequences for target(s) and co-workers, and cost enormous monetary damage or an organization's bottoms line
- one person or group of people in a workplace single out another person for unreasonable, embarrassing, or intimidating treatment. Usually the bully is a person in a position in authority who feels threatened by the victim, but in some cases the bully is a co-worker who is insecure or immature.



BULLY OR BAD MANAGER?

There are also some behaviors that are usually *not* considered workplace bullying, just evidence of a “bad” manager:

- A manager who is negative and criticizes all of his or her employees. While this is a sign of a bad manager and makes a workplace unpleasant, it is not usually considered bullying unless only one or a few individuals are being unjustifiably singled out.
- A manager who withholds information frequently and doesn't share decision making with staff regularly. Unless one or two employees are specifically targeted and others get the information they need, it may not be “bullying.”
- A co-worker who is critical of everything, always takes credit for successes and passes blame for mistakes, and/or frequently makes hurtful comments or jokes about others. Unless these actions are directed at one individual, they represent poor social skills, but not bullying.
- Negative comments or actions that are based on a person's gender, ethnicity, religion, or other legally protected status. This is considered harassment and, unlike bullying, is illegal in the United States and gives the victim legal rights to stop the behavior.

What other behaviors could blur the lines between bullying and poor managerial or social skills?



What Makes Bullying Possible?

Bullying does not happen unless it is possible, beneficial and triggered. It is the interaction between these conditions that can potentially result in workplace bullying. Salin (2003) describes these conditions as “structures”. They are factors that set the foundation for bullying:

1. Enabling Structures

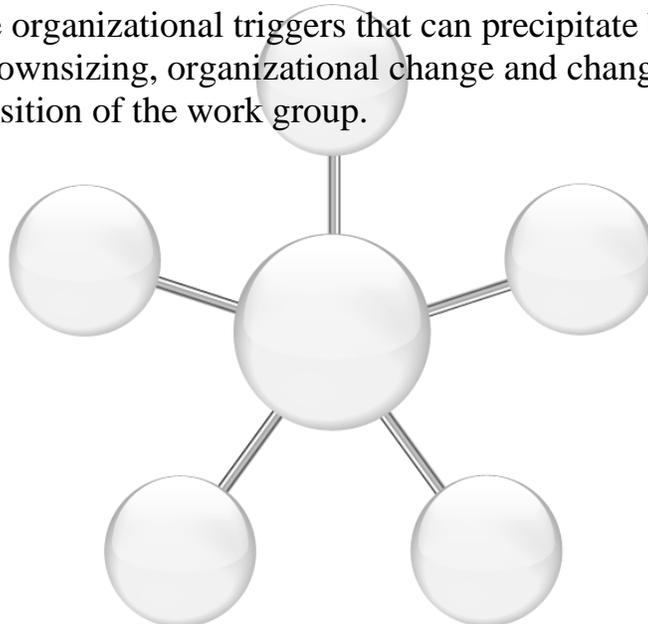
- i. Perceived power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator.
- ii. Low perceived costs for the perpetrator – no or little risk of being reprimanded. Two factors associated with this are leadership style and organizational culture. Some organizations, even though they have policies for discrimination/harassment, fail to enforce them due to lack of either education in how to do that or time to monitor the behaviors of their staff.
- iii. Frustration and dissatisfaction with the work environment. This can include perceived lack of control over one’s job; role conflict; and environmental conditions such as noise, over-crowding and high level of stress on the job.

2. Motivational Structures

These are the conditions that encourage persons to harass others. Examples include reward systems within the organization (e.g., an individual who is promoted despite having bullied another), sabotaging the work of others for financial gain, performance evaluations based on quantitative measures where one may bully another in order to meet their own performance requirements.

3. Precipitating Structures

These are organizational triggers that can precipitate bullying. Examples include downsizing, organizational change and changes in the management or composition of the work group.



Tactics typically used by workplace bullies

Workplace bullying behavior can be covert or overt. It may start with isolated incidents and seem to build over time, where co-workers and supervisors start seeing it. Or, it can occur behind closed doors, through email, or with just a “look” in the hallway. There are some typical behaviors exhibited by bullies that are important to be on the lookout for:



- ✓ Harshly and constantly criticize and have different standards for the “target”
- ✓ Has started, or failed to stop, destructive rumors or gossip about the “target”
- ✓ Falsely accused someone of errors or mistakes they have not made
- ✓ Discounted the person’s thought/ideas/feelings in a public setting, e.g. in a meeting with peers present
- ✓ Used the silent treatment or isolation to segregate the “target” from others in the workplace, e.g. removing responsibilities for no reason, excluding them from meetings they are typically a part of, reducing workload without cause
- ✓ Stole credit for work done by the “target”
- ✓ Sabotaged the person’s contribution to a team goal
- ✓ Created unrealistic demands for the “target”, e.g. deadlines, workload, duties
- ✓ Preventing access to opportunities, e.g. promotions, continuing education, on-the-job training
- ✓ Disrespecting the “target” through the use of demeaning language, tone of voice, verbal abuse, hostility, shouting, swearing, sarcasm
- ✓ An employee being excluded from company activities or having his or her work or contributions purposefully ignored

These fall into the **Bullying Typology** that define and identify bullying behavior:

1. **Threat to professional status** – including belittling opinions, public professional humiliation, accusations regarding lack of effort, intimidating use of discipline or competence procedures
2. **Threat to personal standing** – including undermining personal integrity, destructive innuendo and sarcasm, making inappropriate jokes about target, persistent teasing, name calling, insults, intimidation
3. **Isolation** – including preventing access to opportunities, physical or social isolation, withholding necessary information, keeping the target out of the loop, ignoring or excluding
4. **Overwork** – including undue pressure, impossible deadlines, disruptions.
5. **Destabilization** – including failure to acknowledge good work, allocation of meaningless tasks, removal of responsibility, repeated reminders of blunders, setting target up to fail, shifting goal posts without telling the target.

In all definitions and explanations of bullying, it is most often that case that 3 key components are present when the behavior is truly considered bullying:

- **Imbalance of power.** Typically those who engage in bully-like behaviors use their strength, popularity, rank or power to harm, control or manipulate others.
- **Intent to cause harm.** A bully is a person who does not do things by accident. The bully intends to physically or emotionally injure a person or group of persons, or demonstrates lack of interest in the impact of their behavior.
- **Repetition.** Typically incidents of bullying are not a one-time thing. Bullies target the same person or group over and over again.

What type of behaviors are you seeing that represent:

- a) Use of power imbalance to bully?
- b) Obvious intent to cause harm, or seeming lack of interest in the impact of one's behavior on others?
- c) Repetitive behaviors and/or common targets of bullying?

Why do people bully?

Cultural Causes of Bullying

In a culture that is fascinated with winning, power, and violence, some experts suggest that it is unrealistic to expect that people will not be influenced to seek power through violence. Also, implicit bias and stereotyping plays a role with many bullies, especially where a male bullies a female or where the victim is part of a traditionally vulnerable or marginalized group. Sometime traditional cultural values play a role as well.

Institutional Causes

If the organization at which the bullying takes place - whether the home, the school, or the workplace - does not set and support high standards for the way people treat each other, then bullying may be more likely and/or prevalent because it is "allowed."

Social Issues

The fact that one gets more social recognition for negative behaviors than for positive ones can also contribute to reasons why people bully. Situation comedies and reality television, as well as real life situations in schools, for example, show that acting out is more likely to get noticed than behaving oneself civilly and courteously. Jealousy or envy and a lack of personal and social skills to deal with such feelings can also contribute to the choice to bully.

Family Issues

Bullies grew up to be difficult because their families taught them the wrong things or failed to teach them the right things. Their behavior then manifests from this dysfunction. No one ever taught them basic social skills and appropriate ways of interacting with others. As a result, they are often clueless and unaware. They haven't learned things that others take for granted. Growing up in a family that is not warm, loving, consistent, supportive of sharing feelings and being oneself could be a breeding ground for bullying behavior.



The Bully's Personal History

Children who experience social rejection themselves are more likely to "pass it on" to others. Most bullies were bullied, themselves. Some difficult people were not popular among the kids at school and were subjected to taunts, ridicules, cruel jokes and putdowns. They reached a point where they started responding in kind, which then became their pattern of functioning in all settings they find themselves in.

Poor Self-Esteem

Many people who bully have low self-esteem and don't like themselves. Their sense of self and worth is so fragile that they have a strong need to protect by keeping others at a distance. They build themselves up by breaking others down and exhibit poor self-awareness in terms of how inappropriately they impact other people.

Having Power

Some research indicates that the very fact of having power may make some people wish to wield it in a noticeable way, but it is also true that people may be given power without being trained in the leadership skills that will help them wield it wisely. Either situation can contribute to why people bully others.

Why is it helpful to understand why people bully?

Signs and Symptoms that an employee is experiencing bullying:

When someone is triggered, stressed, and struggling to cope with the interactions they are experiencing, i.e. bullying, there are many indicators that can help leadership to notice that something isn't right:

- Increased indicators of experiencing stress
 - More sick days being taken
 - Poor physical health – looking fatigued or run-down
 - Loss of appetite
 - Stomach pains
 - Headaches
- A noticeable change in demeanor
 - Less interaction with co-workers
 - Inability to concentrate
 - Decreased work productivity
 - More self-isolation and self-protective behaviors
 - Doesn't volunteer for committees or events
 - Rarely speaks up in meetings
 - Stops engaging in social activities at work, i.e. going out to lunch, taking coffee breaks, after-hours events
- Some negative effects could also impact mental health of the victim
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Suicidal thoughts
 - PTSD



Survivor's Guilt

Victims can become demoralized and that state of mind makes it difficult for them to believe they could leave and get a better job, or at least a job with dignity, elsewhere – though leaving is the only healthy option available in many cases.

Victims of bullying may also feel that the last thing they want is to allow a manager or a colleague to bully them out of their job.

The witness to bullying has none of these constraints. Indeed, the witness may have the added incentive, researchers suggest, of feeling the workplace is especially unfair when others are targeted and they are not – a sort of survivor's guilt.

Why Victims May Not Stand Up For Themselves?

The reasons people don't assert their right not to be bullied are complex, as the following list of potential scenarios shows:

- The target of bullying has been disempowered through isolation and exclusion
- They are frightened to assert their rights
- They now have artificially high levels of shame, embarrassment, fear and guilt – all stimulated by the bully
- They feel bewildered, often cannot believe what is happening and feels responsible in some way, as evidenced by the nagging thoughts, “Why me?” and, “Why did I let it happen to me?”
- They fear for loss of their job
- They fear they will be unable to obtain a reference
- There is no law against bullying, and the laws that do exist are difficult to apply
- They may be suffering a severe psychiatric injury, are traumatized and unable to articulate their circumstances
- They fear that no one will believe them
- Bullies are encouraged and rewarded, often by promotion
- They don't want to get others into trouble and is reluctant to initiate a grievance

What else could prevent someone from coming forward? What creates barriers to speaking up and standing up?



What can be done about workplace bullying?

PREVENTION is the key!

Your Ideas to Address Bullying on the NDSU Campus: (46 responses, 1/2017)

Accountability:

- Hold people accountable for their behavior – address bullying openly and directly, fully, promptly and appropriately (zero tolerance) – create harsh penalties (6)
- Do not promote people who bully (4)
- Stop current bullying behavior by central administrators who set a bad example; need to change the management culture (2)

Training:

- More training targeted to staff, administration and faculty and consider an online option for taking bullying training, maybe even required training; consider training for every department so you are reaching beyond “the converted” (7)
- Require all who supervise others to take this training
- Minorities are often targets – we need more cultural competency training (2)
- Create a video on bullying
- Teach people how to stop using passive/aggressive behavior
- Work on bullying prevention
- Provide information on what it is to be a bystander and how important it is to report bullying
- Provide specific examples on what to say if you are bullied or witness bullying
- Provide conflict resolution training to everyone (7)
- Hold “I Matter” workshops with open platform dialogue
- Provide strategies for having difficult conversations (training)
- Recognize that ND legislators are bullying NDSU and NDSU needs to stand up for itself. The SBHE should receive training in this topic.
- Do a follow-up training to this one on bullying – e.g., Bullying II

Policy & Research:

- Create, distribute and promote an anti-bullying policy that has consequences for those who are bullying others. Consider an ad campaign on campus re: the policy, e.g., “we take a stand against bullying” similar to what was done with sexual assault, or sign a pledge or hang a decal that says “I pledge to prevent bullying”, consider creating pamphlets (12)
- Research and report bullying incidents on campus – survey staff in particular and find out who is bullied, what kind of bullying, when it happens, and where it happens
- Enforce a zero-tolerance policy for bullying

Groups/Safe Spaces/Advocacy/Promotion:

- Create an advocacy office for undergraduate and graduate students

- Create more open door and safe locations to bring concerns to a higher power, maybe support groups as well for those who are targets of bullying behavior – Let people know where they can go, who they can tell, and how to stick up for themselves (6)
 - Need more support against bullying from administration, including role modeling – Department heads/chairs should talk to their staff/faculty about bullying and behaviors (2) – do not tolerate bullying because the bully holds a position of power or are friends with someone in power.
 - Start a social media campaign defining bullying, increasing awareness
 - Provide help to the average staff person as to how to stop bullying they experience or witness – maybe create a committee of peers who could intervene if they are intimidated – find ways to protect staff
-

What you can do if your immediate supervisor is NOT the bully:

- Explore if you may be contributing to the situation or conflict
- Tell your supervisor the effect the bullying behavior is having on you:
- Work with your manager, supervisor, HR rep, ombudsperson, or conflict resolution center to devise strategies for addressing the problem
- Plan a meeting together, where you clearly identify what the behaviors are and determine a way to mitigate the problem
- Ask to schedule a mediation, and consider whether you may need an advocate or support person present
- Management may consider a team-building approach, where conflict/issues are addressed by the entire team, including management, so new norms and social expectations can be developed and agreed upon
- Keep a log of all bullying incidents, focusing on patterns and repetition of the behavior including copies of any emails, written communication, notes that the bully has used to intimidate or harass you
- Expect the bully to deny and perhaps misconstrue your accusations, so protect yourself by having a witness/co-worker with you during interactions with the bully
- **Do not retaliate**, or there may be a perception or even evidence that you are also engaging in bullying behavior

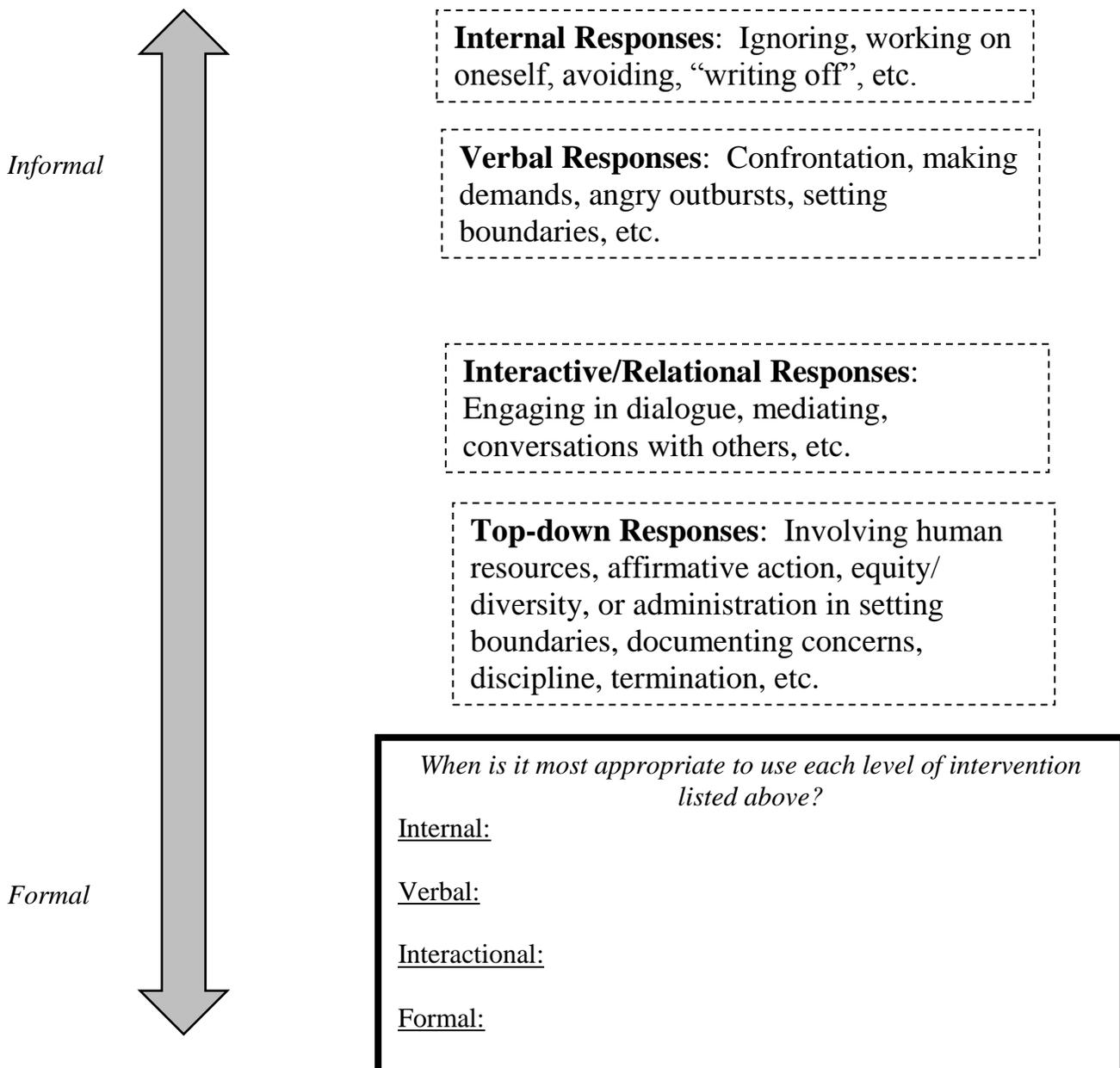
What if your supervisor is doing the bullying?

- Try to have a conversation about the behavior the first few times it happens
 - *When you do/say _____, I feel personally attacked and uncomfortable, and embarrassed in front of my colleagues. I'd like to talk to you about this and ask if you could do/say _____ differently in the future."* Consider documenting the conversation.

- Learn to take a breath and make a considered vs. a reactive response
- Listen to hear what's beneath the bullying so you can respond
- Go over their head to a manager/administrator that could help
- If you are being harassed because of your identity:
 - Document discriminatory activity (Affirmative Action)
 - Develop allies
 - Track your own accomplishments
 - Alert HR and Affirmative Action for policies, procedures, and support in stopping the bullying.



Range of Responses:



Confrontation:

con·fron·ta·tion

noun

a hostile or argumentative meeting or situation between opposing parties.

"a **confrontation with** the legislature"

synonyms: conflict, clash, fight, battle, encounter, faceoff, engagement, skirmish;



While confronting bad behavior may be a first or last resort, there is something about it that we like. Movies that depict a perceived victim confronting their oppressor, we cheer. However, confrontations come at a cost and so therefore should be used sparingly and when all else has failed. What might be more likely to create the change you want is to set boundaries and communicate in a way that is less hostile.

Why Are Boundaries Important?

Boundaries are important because they define the limits and responsibilities of the people with whom you interact.

Clearly defined boundaries allow an organization to work more efficiently.

Setting proper boundaries can result in a sense of accountability for all staff members.

Job responsibilities can be more precisely assigned and job performance can be more accurately measured.

Boundaries are important to maintaining good productivity and social dynamics within the work environment.

Without boundaries, there are no firm guidelines for behavior.

Weak boundaries or having no boundaries can cause an unhealthy work environment and lead to:

- Poor performance
- Workplace bullying
- Over-worked employees
- Acts of violence
- Reduced motivation to take on additional tasks or responsibilities
- Disrespectful staff
- Low morale
- Sexual harassment
- Legal liability

Long-Term Prevention Strategies:

- **Create a Zero Tolerance Policy** on certain behaviors including bullying that canvasses the entire organization, to help create a climate of openness, support, healthy interactions, and increased awareness of interpersonal relationships
- **Investigate** the extent and nature of the problems – get to the bottom of the issue before it balloons out of control and the overall climate of the organization is negatively affected
- **Improve the organizational and departmental climate** to make bullying behaviors less likely. Ensure communication is inclusive and decisions are transparent to ensure “in groups” do not form or other forms of power imbalance.
- **Mediation** for those affected, both directly and indirectly so a conversation can be had about the issues in the workplace. Planning for a group mediation and having qualified, experienced facilitators can support all members of group in being able to say what is important
- **Modeling/Mentoring** appropriate, healthy, positive behavior. It should be the responsibility of management and supervisors (and co-workers) to be polite, kind, and mindful of how one’s own behavior impacts other people.
- **Provide Training** and education for the workplace on signs and prevention of bullying. Put the issue out in the open and deliver a clear message.
- **Develop and Share** an outline of acceptable and non-acceptable workplace behaviors as well as consequences that will be enforced for failing to display appropriate behavior, such as creating a civility agreement.
- **Create a Complaint Resolution Process.** It is useful to provide a number of resolution options to employees that range from taking action personally to lodging either an informal or formal complaint.

What are the benefits of addressing the bad behavior?

- ✓ Improved staff satisfaction and retention
- ✓ Enhanced reputation for the organization and its leadership
- ✓ Creates a professional, supportive culture
- ✓ Reduced liability, grievance complaints, and risk management incidents
- ✓ Self-aware and self-confident employees who recognize and reap the benefits of working with others to address difficult issues

REFERENCES:

The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility is Damaging Your Business and What to Do About It. Pearson & Porath (2009). Portfolio Publishing.

Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces. Heinz Leymann. *Violence & Victims*, 1990, 5(2), 119-126.

The content and development of mobbing at work. H. Leymann. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 1996, 5(2), 165-184.

Destructive conflict and bullying at work. H. Hoel & C.L. Cooper. *University of Manchester, Institute of Science and Technology*, 2000.

Bullying in the workplace: Recent trends in research and practice--an introduction. D. Zapf & S. Einarsen. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 2001, 10(4), 369-373.

The nature and causes of bullying at work. S. Einarsen. *International Journal of Manpower*, 1999, 20(1/2), 16-27.

Bullying at work: An introduction to the symposium. A.P.D. Liefoghe. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 2004, 32(3), 265-267.

The 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey. G. Namie.

The significance of organizational factors for the incidence of bullying. M. Agervold. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 2009, 50(3), 267-276.

Workplace bullying: Escalated incivility. G. Namie. *Ivey Business Journal*, 2003, 68(2), 1-6.

Defining workplace bullying behaviour professional lay definitions of workplace bullying. P. Saunders, A. Huynh & J. Goodman-Delahunty. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 2007, 30, 340-354.

The relative impact of workplace bullying as a social stressor at work. L.J. Hauge, A. Skogstad, & S. Einarsen. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 2010.

Conceptualizations of workplace bullying: Gendered rather than gender neutral? J. Escartin, D. Salin & A. Rodriguez-Carballeira. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 2011, 10(4), 157-165.

