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Exploring the Influence of Gender, Race, and Academic Rank on Faculty Bullying in Counselor
Education

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Abstract

While there is much published research into faculty incivility, there is no existing research on bullying in Counselor Education. Data from Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) revealed reports of faculty bullying related to gender, race, and academic rank. Limitations and implications for the profession are discussed.

Keywords: faculty incivility, faculty bullying, education

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Workplace bullying (the persistent exposure to interpersonal aggression and mistreatment from colleagues, superiors or subordinates) is a prevalent problem in contemporary working life, with devastating effects on both targets and organizations through reduced job satisfaction (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003; Rayner & Keashly, 2005). Bullying is common in the higher education workplace, affecting academics and administrators alike (Lipsett, 2005). An “ivory tower bully” may persistently engage in various forms of verbal harassment, embark on memo-writing campaigns that encourage others to view the target of the bullying behavior as morally polluted or intellectually inferior, encourage the dissemination of scurrilous rumors designed to humiliate and embarrass, or describe the target to students in ways that are calculated to bring about feelings of contempt (Nelson, 2001).

Druzhilov (2012) gives the following examples of verbal aggressions: provocative questions, false assertions, doubts expressed about the worker’s level of professionalism and competence, emotional attacks and threats, unfounded accusations, interruption of the target, outbursts of anger which belittle the target, and deliberate failure to provide the worker with complete and reliable information that is necessary to complete the assigned task. Of all the types of bullying discussed in the literature, the behaviors most frequently cited in academia involve threats to professional status and isolating and obstructive behavior (i.e., thwarting the target’s ability to obtain important objectives) (Keashly & Neuman, 2010).

Bullying is repeated and intentional, and it occurs in the context of an unequal power relationship. The majority of workplace bullying, over 80%, is imposed by a supervisor on a subordinate (Namie & Namie, 2003). A consistently defined feature of bullying is the imbalance of the power relationships between the parties involved (Niedl, 1996). An estimated 40% to 50%

of faculty may experience academic incivility by fellow faculty members or administrators, which may result in attrition of those individuals charged with teaching the next generation of health professionals (Clark, Olender, Kenski, & Cardoni, 2013). A pre-existing or evolved imbalance of power between the parties is considered central to the bullying experience, as this may limit targets' ability to retaliate or successfully defend themselves. Senior (tenured) faculty members who engage in bullying will direct their aggression and bullying against untenured faculty members who are lower in rank, students, or staff (Keashly & Neuman, 2010).

The Culture of Academic Bullying

There are several important social, situational, and contextual antecedents to aggression (including academic culture, climate, values, and work practices). Organizational climate is mainly considered as a critical antecedent of bullying. Research on bullying models suggests that a workplace bullying regeneration cycle may exist in an organization, contributing to a climate of bullying behavior which is largely affected by anger and aggression. This behavioral cycle is characterized by reciprocal cognitive and emotional interactions resulting from the perception of inequitable actions from others (Hareli and Rafaeli, 2008). Anger and aggression are most frequently associated with perceptions of unfair or provocative treatment by others. In academia settings, these issues are conceptualized as unjust situations that violate norms and produce frustration and stress (Neuman, 2004). While injustice perceptions are common in all work settings, institutions of higher education may present numerous opportunities for such perceptions by faculty, including subjective decisions affecting promotion, tenure, reappointment, and merit pay.

When faculty bullying does occur, aggression is most likely to be long-standing and indirect in form, given the norms of academic discourse and collegiality (Keashly & Neuman,

2010; Westhues, 2006). Targets experience social ostracization, and are positioned as unpopular, weak, and without credibility (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper 2002; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006; Sobre-Denton, 2012). Subsequently, administrators, other faculty, and students are unlikely defend the victim if the abusive faculty has what they perceive as redeeming qualities, such as content expertise, longevity, good rapport with average or advanced students, or a consistent record of high evaluation scores.

The most common type of bullying in the academic workplace is “mobbing”. Druzhilov (2012) defines “mobbing” as a form of psychological abuse perpetrated by two or more individuals, harassing a fellow worker in the collective for the purpose of getting him fired. Literature on mobbing indicates four significant characteristics of mobbing: (a) its duration, from one to five years; (b) its scale, with 30–50 percent of employees being the victims; (c) its prevalence, which in the sphere of education is twice as high as in other spheres; and (d) in 90 percent of cases, the persecution is initiated by a superior (Druzhilov, 2012). Zapf and Gross (2001) observed that the number of individuals involved was linked to the duration of bullying. It is manifested in various ways of tormenting an employee over a lengthy period of time (negative assertions, unjustified criticism, social isolation, spreading information known to be false, and so on) (p. 70). Vertical mobbing is the psychological terrorizing of a worker that comes from his superior, and is generally accompanied by the creation of a gang, with other members of the organization joining in to exert psychological pressure on the worker. Similarly, horizontal mobbing is intimidation which comes from colleagues.

Faculty Roles in Bullying

Bullying constitutes evolving and often escalating hostile workplace relationships rather than discrete and disconnected events and is associated with repetition (frequency), duration

(over a period of time) and patterning (of a variety of behaviors involved) as its most salient features (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). McKay, Arnold, Fratzl, and Thomas (2008) found that 21% of their sample reported bullying that had persisted for more than five years in duration. (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). The nature of the bullying experience in terms of its frequency and long-term duration of exposure to negative acts tends to drain the coping resources of the target, thus in itself emphasizing the increasing powerlessness of targets and weakening the organization.

Targets

Junior faculty members are more likely than tenured faculty to be “targets” of bullying, and experience higher rates stress associated with job insecurity, student hostility and incivility, enrollment concerns, workload issues, “publish or perish” fears, and salary concerns. Consistent with the effect/danger ratio cited previously, junior faculty members are not likely to employ direct forms of aggression for fear of retaliation (McKay et al., 2008). Positioned as unpopular and weak, targets often experience social ostracization. Moreover, faculty, especially those who are untenured, are reluctant to bring issues they encounter with students to the attention of administration, as it looks like they are unable to effectively teach or control a classroom. Given the emphasis placed on student evaluations for tenure and promotion, students can wield unhealthy power over the faculty member, particularly faculty that are still in their probationary period (McKay et al., 2008) which contributes to a lack of job satisfaction and efficacy in the classroom.

To complicate matters further, such personnel decisions are made by colleagues in a peer-review process. At the departmental level, where people have “histories” with each other and are often in competition for scarce resources (money, equipment, space, power, high-caliber

students, etc.), hidden agendas can abound (Higgerson & Joyce, 2007). Even when evaluators operate with the best motives, they may not be in a good position to make informed decisions about the quality of others' scholarly work (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Colleagues then either tacitly side with the bully or only offer support when the bully leaves the scene (Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010) which removes the target's recourse in terms of finding social support in coworkers.

Agents

The agent, also referred to as the bully or aggressor, is most often a supervisor or senior faculty member. For example, senior (tenured) faculty members who engage in bullying will direct their aggression and bullying against students, staff, or untenured faculty members who are lower in rank (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). The agent seeks to maximize the effect of their aggression while minimizing the risks to themselves; therefore, when faculty bullying occurs, aggression is most likely indirect in form, given the norms of academic discourse and collegiality (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Westhues, 2006). The agent may persistently engage in various forms of verbal harassment, embark on memo-writing campaigns that encourage others to view the target of the bullying behavior as morally polluted or intellectually inferior, and encourage the dissemination of rumors designed to humiliate and embarrass (Nelson, 2001). In situations in which agents feel exposed or lack power over their targets, they tend to employ indirect and passive tactics that shield them from retaliation.

Rather than accept one's role in bullying behavior, bullies may attempt to assume the role of victim, thereby accusing rule enforcers of having engaged in persecutory behaviors and accusers of exaggerating circumstances or character defamation. Accused bullies may claim that they, and not the complainants, have been aggrieved. They may point to their publication

records, their years of graduate supervision, their work on departmental committees, and their success in obtaining research grants as evidence of their character, and they may further insist that the accusation has inflicted a “catastrophic blow to their reputations,” “ruined their careers,” “devastated their positions within the university,” and “destroyed their life’s work.” (Nelson, 2001).

For example, when agents perceive that they are in secure or more powerful positions, as relates to their target(s), they may employ more direct and active approaches (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper 2002; Sobre-Denton, 2012; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006).. They may attempt to discredit the persecuted instructor in the eyes of the students, and the students are encouraged, if not actually compelled (by the use of administrative resources), to write complaints and memorandums against the particular instructor, or to commit unethical acts for the sake of the momentary needs of the boss. Faculty whose efforts are diminished in these ways have long-term and severe consequences both for students and for the authority of the department and the reputation of the institution (Druzhilov, 2012, p. 74).

Keashly and Neuman (2008) found in a study conducted with university employees that colleagues were more likely to be identified as bullies by faculty (63.4%), while superiors were more likely to be identified as bullies by frontline staff (52.9%). A study of all faculty and staff of the University of Manchester Institution of Science and Technology found that women were bullied by both colleagues and supervisors, bullies are often at a higher rank in the university than the victims, and women report bullying more readily than men (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002; Keashly & Neuman, 2008). A national study on bullying in higher education found that over 80% of respondents were bullied at one time in their career (Goodyear, Reynolds, & Both Gragg, 2010).

Organizational Climate of Faculty Bullying

The workplace bullying literature suggests that an organization's culture and related climate play an important role in the manifestation of hostile behaviors at work; they influence how members define and perceive the nature of interpersonal interaction as well as how they respond and manage such interactions (Lester, 2009). Cultures that promote bullying and hostility are variously characterized as competitive, adversarial, and highly politicized, with autocratic or authoritarian leadership that does not tolerate nonconformity (Hoel & Salin, 2003). Relatedly, reasons for uncivil behaviors within these cultures include professional jealousy; unclear, amplified, competing, and/or overly demanding work expectations; low salaries and salary compression; the need to adopt new technologies; stressful, volatile work settings; increased demand for research and grant productivity; competition for scarce resources; and pursuit of professional advancement (Clark, 2013; Clark, Olender, Kenski, & Cardoni, 2013).

Issues of rank and power are often the overt or covert determinants of relationships among administrators and faculty, or between faculty members themselves. Power relations in the workplace are defined by organizational structure, privilege, exclusionary practices, coercion, and conformity (Orbach, 2012). Druzhilov (2012) suggests that groups of people who work together in organizational structures have their own traditions, needs, and values; failure to comply with these parameters gives rise to conflicts that are made worse in the context of any reforms carried out in the organization (p. 70-71).

Consequences for the Organization

Job satisfaction is well established as a key predictor of productivity and turnover in all employment settings (Sirota, Mischkind, & Meltzer, 2005), and the quality of interpersonal relations, such as collegiality, is an important factor in retention of faculty (Keashly & Neuman,

2010). Literature suggests that a lack of collegiality is a crucial influence in the dissatisfaction of current and former faculty, resulting in their decisions to leave their institutions (Norman, Ambrose, & Huston, 2006).

If the bullied faculty instead remain at their institutions, they may withdraw from university activities or notably reduce their effort in scholarship, which dramatically decreases their chances for tenure, promotion, or merit pay. Limiting their scholarly and service contributions also affects their ability to mentor graduate students and will cause a shift in the advising load to their colleagues (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Similarly, withdrawal from service by targets following bullying incidents within the institution places a heavier burden on other faculty and staff and reduces the amount and quality of work necessary to keep the institution moving forward (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005). Other faculty may respond to escalating productivity expectations by focusing on their own careers, resulting in fewer who focus on student and/or departmental needs, thereby decreasing faculty cooperation and breeding resentment (Wright & Hill, 2015).

Workplace bullying is an important job stress factor, mainly because of its strong impact on physical and mental health (Niedhammer & Degionni, 2006). Literature reviews and personal accounts from targets in the academic setting suggest that the consequences of bullying can be quite damaging to individuals (physical, psychological, and emotional damage), groups (destructive political behavior, lack of cooperation, and interpersonal aggression), and organizations (organizational withdrawal behaviors, theft, lowered organizational commitment, and sabotage) (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Westhues, 2004).

Method

There is no literature on how faculty bullying exists in counselor education. Therefore, this study explores whether a relationship exists between academic rank and bullying in counselor education faculty.

Participants

A Qualtrics survey link was distributed electronically to counselor educators and supervisors subscribed to the CESNET-L listserv. Eligible participants were counselor educators and supervisors currently occupying a role as tenured, tenure-eligible, or non-tenure eligible faculty. Respondents had four weeks to complete the questionnaire.

Procedures

An informed consent document preceded the questionnaire and participants were required to click “accept” after reading the consent before proceeding to the survey. Anonymous responses were stored in the Qualtrics database on a secure server. No identifying information was collected in this process.

Instruments

A demographics questionnaire asked participants to identify demographic information including race, gender, and academic rank. The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) was used to explore the prevalence of bullying in the counselor education workplace. This instrument examines three underlying factors: personal bullying, work-related bullying, and physically intimidating forms of bullying, and has a Cronbach's alpha for the 22 items in the NAQ-R is .90, indicating excellent internal consistency while also suggesting that it may be a reliable instrument with an even fewer number of items.

Results

To explore possible existing relationships between gender, race, and academic rank in relation to reported bullying by tenured faculty, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the percentages of participants who self-report being targets of bullying by Tenured faculty in counselor education across these categories. Dependent variables included gender, race, and academic rank. The independent variable was question 23 on the NAQ-R (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009): “I have been a target of bullying by Tenured Faculty in Counselor Education”.

In the gender category, only one respondent identified as the target of bullying in the following categories: non-binary/non-conforming, and transgendered. Due to the lack of sample responses in these categories, they were not included in analysis. More males than females reported being targeted (n=12, 67% and n= 58, 64% respectively). In the race category, only one respondent identified as the target of bullying in the Asian or Pacific Islander category. Due to the lack of sample responses in this category, it was not included in analysis. In Table 1, data show that the greatest categories identifying as targets were White or Caucasian (n=57, 63%), and Hispanic or Latino/a (n=4, 100%). The highest category reporting experiences as targets of academic bullying were tenure-eligible faculty (n=38, 76%).

Table 1

Percentages of Academic Bullying by Tenured Faculty by Gender, Race, and Academic Rank

	<i>n</i>	I have been a target of bullying by Tenured Faculty in	Valid Percent
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		Counselor Education		
Gender identification:	Male	12	8	67%
	Female	58	37	64%
Total Average				66%
Racial identification:	White or Caucasian	57	36	63%
	Black or African American	4	1	25%
	Hispanic or Latino/a	4	4	100%
	Biracial or Multiracial	4	2	50%
Total Average				60%
Academic rank:	Tenured	10	6	60%
	Tenure Eligible	38	30	76%
	Non-Tenure Eligible	26	11	42%
Total Average				59%

Discussion

Literature largely suggests that in most reported cases of academic bullying, agents are tenured faculty and targets are untenured faculty. In this study, untenured faculty were classified as tenure-eligible and non-tenure eligible, including adjuncts and instructors. Bullying in this study was defined as “an escalating process in which someone is targeted by negative acts or microaggressions by another individual or group of individuals who have authority or influence in the career of the bullied individual”. Data suggests a relationship between the analyzed categories and academic bullying in counselor education. Participants from all categories reported being targets of bullying, and all categories were over 50% of respondents except for

the following categories: Black or African American (n=4, 25%), and Non-Tenure Eligible n=26, 42%).

It is important to observe that the majority of respondents racially identified as White (n=57) and reported less targeting than respondents who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a (63% and 100% respectively) but more targeting than Black or African American (25%) or Bi/Multiracial (50%). Barriers to the promotion and tenure for faculty of color include lack of personal time, institutional climate, bias in the promotion process, a marginalization of research, a lack of mentoring, and covert discrimination. In addition, academic bullying limits faculty of color in their ability to attain tenure and promotion on traditional campuses (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). This explanation offers insight into the reported racial disparity between White and Hispanic or Latino/a respondents in this study but does not address the gaps between the other racial groups compared with Whites which is contrary to other studies presented in faculty bullying literature. Also, it seems congruent that long-term employees can tolerate negative acts, which leads employees to not be fully cognizant of the microaggressions inherent to bullying. Faculty who are exposed to negative behavior cycles frequently and systematically over a long duration of time may not label themselves as targets of bullying.

Further, faculty with marginalized group identities and particularly those with multiple marginalized identities are more likely to be bullied regardless of rank, and faculty of privileged group identities are more likely to be the agents of bullying (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). The gender results of this study are contrary to this concept, with the data showing a slightly higher rate of reported bullying among male respondents than female (67% and 64% respectively). This is unpredicted based on the higher rate of female counselor educators in the field, and noted

inequities in faculty incivility, with women and minority faculty more at risk of disrespectful treatment and negative teaching evaluations (Boring, Ottoboni, & Stark, 2016).

One explanation which may frame the results is the top-down nature of organizational bullying.

In academic organizations, the target usually is in an inferior hierarchical position than the perpetrator (Moreno Jimenez, Munoz, Salin, and Morante, 2008), and in some cultures, especially in masculine cultures, bullying may be considered as part of the job or as a reasonable managerial practice (Escartin, Rodriguez-Carballeira, Zapf, Porrua, and Martin-Pena, 2009).

This study did not examine the relationship between gender identity and administrative roles, but it is possible that male respondents experience a higher rate of bullying due to an administrator's perception of gender-based bullying as a normative practice.

Limitations

This study has notable limitations. The low response rate impairs comparative and advanced analyses and limits the generalizability of the results to the counselor education and supervision field overall. This low response rate may be due to a lack of interest, or avoidance of the topic for reasons of fear or traumatic triggering. While the study is valuable as an initial exploration of faculty bullying in this field, this topic requires further research to establish the validity and reliability of existing relationships between factors.

An additional limitation is the use of a convenience sample. The distribution of the survey on a singular electronic resource limits the potential number of respondents who are not members of the identified listserv, thereby limiting external generalizability of the results. Further, respondents from the listserv self-reported their experiences which may cause skewness in the results due to the voluntary nature of the respondent. There are several disadvantages to

self-report research studies including biased responses pertaining to social desirability, question order effects, and primacy or regency effects (Dillman, 2000).

Finally, the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) may be culturally biased in the sense that some negative acts may be more frequent or perceived as more severe in some cultures than in others. For example, the counseling field is historically dominated by females, though that demographic is noticeably shifting. It is important to examine the impact of cultural dimensions, such as assertiveness and in-group collectivism, or gender dominance in the academic organization from which the respondents are sampled.

Suggestions for Future Research

It would be beneficial to explore additional variables which may impact the reporting of bullying including years of experience in teaching, primary role in the department, leadership experience in the academic department, disability, or age cohort. Additionally, it would be helpful to expand the sample population to increase sample size and to do comparative analyses between counselor educators and other helping fields. Lastly, future research should include data on the impact of social media used in bullying behaviors among Counselor Education faculty.

Conclusion

Workplace bullying includes repeated actions and practices of an unwanted nature that are directed against one or more employees, and though the actions may be carried out deliberately or unconsciously, these actions clearly cause humiliation, offense and distress, resulting in lowered job performance an unpleasant working environment (McKay et al., 2008). Faculty-to-faculty incivility or bullying is most simply defined as disruptive behavior designed to cause psychological or physiological harm to a colleague or subordinate (Clark, 2013). Few proposals on effective interventions regarding faculty bullying in higher education settings are

evident in the research literature, but patterns of bullying and its harmful personal, psychological, and organizational effects are established and documented across the health and helping professions. Therefore, it is essential that this topic be further examined, and solutions generated, to alleviate bullying and incivility among counselor education faculty.

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