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Take This Job and . . . : Quitting and Other Forms of Resistance to Workplace Bullying

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Adult bullying at work is an unbelievable and, at times, shattering experience, both for those targeted as well as for witnessing colleagues. This study examines the narratives of 30 workers, some of whom where targeted and all of whom saw others bullied. Their responses paint a complex picture of power in bullying situations that reframe the "power-deficient target" into agents who galvanize a variety of resources on their own or others' behalf but also place them at considerable risk. In some cases, employees evaluate the abusive situation and quickly resign. Others protest but, if resistance fails to stop abuse, they also leave organizations. The paths of resistance, case outcomes, and dialectic nature of resistance and control are discussed.

Keywords: Workplace Bullying; Verbal Aggression; Organizational Communication; Resistance; Power

Adult bullying at work is a shocking, frightening, and at times shattering experience, both for those targeted and for onlookers. Workplace bullying, mobbing, and emotional abuse—essentially synonymous phenomena—are persistent, verbal, and nonverbal aggression at work that include personal attacks, social ostracism, and a multitude of other painful messages and hostile interactions. Because this phenomenon is perpetrated by and through communication, and because workers' principal responses are communicative in nature, it is vital that communication scholars join the academic dialogue about this damaging feature of worklife.

The harm to workers runs the gamut of human misery including "anxiety, depression, burnout, frustration, helplessness, . . . difficulty concentrating, . . .

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lowered self-esteem and self-efficacy" (Keashly & Neuman, 2005, p. 335), alcohol abuse (Richman, Flaherty, & Rospenda, 1996), and posttraumatic stress disorder (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Witnessing co-workers experience increased fear, emotional exhaustion, hypervigilance, stress, and intentions to leave (Jennifer, Cowie, & Anaiadou, 2003; Vartia, 2001, 2003). Bullying also hinders group communication, cohesion, and performance by creating hostile environments marked by apprehension, distrust, anger, and suspicion (Frost, 2003; Lockhart, 1997; Vartia, 2003).

What makes this communicative phenomenon especially grave is its elevated prevalence in US workplaces. From 28% to 36% of US workers report persistent abuse at work (Keashly & Neuman, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2005; Neuman, 2004), and nearly 25% of US companies report some degree of bullying (Blosser, 2004). Furthermore, over 80% of workers say they have witnessed bullying sometime during their work histories (Keashly & Neuman, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003a; Namie, 2003b). Given its prevalence and negative consequences, bullying warrants the attention of communication scholars, particularly those studying power and oppression.

There is a considerable body of international bullying research (e.g., Adams & Crawford, 1992; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003; Leymann, 1996; Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002; Zapf, 1999), and an emerging interest in the subject in the US (e.g., Keashly & Neuman, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003b; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006). A central weakness of this literature is its one-dimensional depiction of power; research usually frames organizational controls (bullies' power/influence) as ubiquitous and impenetrable. In fact, bullying research classifies the phenomenon as a frequent, enduring abusive interaction *distinguished* by targets'—bullied workers'—inability to defend themselves (Einarsen et al., 2003; Leymann, 1996; Rayner et al., 2002; Salin, 2003; Vartia, 2003). As such, the dialectic nature of power remains undertheorized. In addition, bullying research has predominantly focused on the individual or dyadic, rather than communal, nature of the phenomenon. Despite the social nature of workplace communication, researchers have done little to explore the communicative nature of bullying in workgroups or the impact of bullying on observers (exceptions include Jennifer et al., 2003; Vartia, 2003). And finally, limited bullying research examines US workers' experiences. Most continues to come out of Scandinavia (e.g., Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1990), the UK (e.g., Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Rayner et al., 2002), and the European continent (e.g., Zapf, 1999).

Resistance studies, on the other hand, rarely investigate struggles against hostile, abusive treatment at work (exceptions include Bies & Tripp, 1998; Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001). Rather, this work usually examines meanings, rules, or directives against which members resist identifying or complying (Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2001; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Mulholland, 2004). Moreover, the dialectic character of resistance and material risks resistance involves are, at times, given only cursory examination. Rather, as Mumby claims (1993, 2005), resistance studies often frame power/control as ubiquitous and inescapable (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Collinson, 1992; Witten, 1993) or resistance as "pristine" and

decontextualized from controlling forces that contest and defy it (e.g., Hodson, 1995; May, 1999; Tucker, 1993). Moreover, this research rarely examines resistance as a process or its power over time to affect meaningful change (see, for exceptions, Kondo, 1990; Trethewey, 1997). To speak to these issues, this study explores resistance to abuse from US workers' perspectives (witnesses and targets) and considers how control and resistance can intersect to "produce complex and often contradictory" (Mumby, 2005, p. 21) meanings. Further, it examines the course of resistance and resistance leading to change.

Bullying, Power, and the Dialectic of Resistance and Control

Adult bullying at work is a pattern of persistent, hostile discursive and nondiscursive behavior that targets perceive as efforts to harm, control, or drive them from the workplace (Einarsen et al., 2003; Rayner et al., 2002). It includes public humiliation, constant criticism, ridicule, gossip, insults, and social ostracism—communication that makes work tasks difficult or impossible, and socially isolates, stigmatizes, and discredits those targeted (Keashly & Neuman, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2005; Tracy et al., 2006; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2003). Only the potential for negative sanctions appears to limit employee abuse (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Björkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994). Bullying is differentiated from other phenomena, such as incivility (Davenport Sypher, 2004) and conflict (Putnam & Poole, 1987), by the features of repetition, duration, escalation, intensity, and power disparity. These *features*—rather than message *content*—identify the phenomenon, since content necessarily shifts depending on settings, tasks, and actors.

Thus, workplace bullying is repetitive (occurring daily or weekly) and ongoing; the average duration for US workers is 18–20 months (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2005; Namie, 2003a). Numerous hostile messages/behaviors (intensity) comprise bullying (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), and it is often becomes increasingly aggressive if left unchecked (Leymann, 1996; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2005; Salin, 2003; Vartia, 2003). Additionally, bullying purportedly involves interactions where targeted workers are unable to defend themselves (Einarsen et al., 2003; Keashly, 2001; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Leymann, 1990, 1996; Rayner et al., 2002; Salin, 2003; Vartia, 2003).

Although power relations between bully and target are often unequally weighted, no absolute power situations exist in modern workplaces (Clegg, 1994; Foucault, 1982; Giddens, 1982, 1984). Giddens (1982) argues that "in all social systems there is a dialectic of control [with] . . . continually shifting balances of resources, altering the overall distribution of power" (p. 32). Furthermore, human agency enables all organizational actors to create or capitalize on "spaces of control" (Giddens, 1984, p. 16) in day-to-day interactions. Thus, even those who appear to be powerless retain the capacity to resist social processes dominated by persons with ostensibly absolute control (Giddens, 1982). Increased oppression and excessive control likely incite escalated resistance, since power and resistance are contemporaries in which "each

constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit" (Foucault, 1982, p. 794). As such, we should expect a range of communicative acts defying abuse.

Given the tension between resistance and control, we should also expect countering forces that shift toward control-oriented interpretations of worker resistance. That is, resistance and the situations that engender resistance have the potential to either trigger critical examinations of organizational arrangements and meanings or reproduce the status quo by neutralizing or pathologizing resistance. As such, bullying-affected workers might frame their resistance as a moral imperative, essential defensive responses, or efforts to be treated with the basic minimum of human decency. Bullies and their supporters, on the other hand, might frame these same messages and actions as insubordination, disloyalty, and troublemaking. Abuse and resistance produce an ongoing struggle to stress different agendas and push them to the forefront.

Thus, the current study investigates the following interrelated questions: What resistance do bullying-affected workers use to counter abusive treatment? What is the processual nature of resistance? How are case outcomes related to resistance? How does the dialectic tension between control and resistance produce contradictory meanings?

Method

Participants

One hundred fifteen persons volunteered for the study. These potential participants were drawn in two ways: (a) from conversations with personal and professional contacts and (b) from a link on the Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute website (WBTI; www.bullyinginstitute.org). I specifically selected US workers to expand bullying research from its predominantly international focus; this eliminated 21 volunteers who lived in other countries (i.e., Canada, UK, Germany, Holland). I also sought people from as many US regions as possible and so chose only one participant from any given state. Furthermore, participation required that workers had witnessed bullying, whether or not they had personally experienced it, because I wanted to explore the communicative dynamics when bullying was common to a workgroup rather than an individual experience. This choice eliminated over 30 volunteers. I also chose an equal sex distribution.

In total, I interviewed 37 people. Three were omitted, because their experiences did not match the key features of bullying (frequency, intensity, etc.). I conducted four other interviews after data analysis was complete for the purpose of resistance code saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These interviews were conducted solely to determine if resistance codes found in the core data were exhaustive. Core data came from 30 participants: 10 witnesses (5 male, 5 female), 20 target-witnesses (10 male, 10 female); 12 were relations/acquaintances of my professional/personal contacts, and 18 came from the workplace bullying website. Of the 30 participants, 21 were married, 3 were divorced, and 6 had never been married. Twenty-eight were heterosexual and

two were gay/lesbian/bisexual. Mean age was 38.5 and ranged from 24 to 53. Twenty-eight were Caucasian and two were Hispanic. They worked in not-for-profit, for-profit, and government settings, and lived in 30 different states.

I sought persons who had *witnessed* bullying, so all participants, whether targeted or not, requisitely saw others abused. As such, bullying was a shared experience in the social life of the workgroup rather than a situation in which one person was individually targeted. Although bullying is usually targeted at more than one person in a workgroup (Hoel & Cooper, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003a; Rayner, 1997; Rayner et al., 2002), this choice resulted in a specific sample type. Persons who collectively recognize bullying may more often encounter communicative circumstances that enable/encourage collective voice. Collective agreement potentially leads to discussions about abuse, gathering support, and resistance. In workplaces where one person is bullied without collegial corroboration or other targets, there may be less validation, more fear, and thus less resistance.

Furthermore, over half of the sample was drawn through a bullying website created in the late 1990s by organizational psychologists Gary and Ruth Namie, considered by many to be US pioneers in the field. A simple web search (Google, Explorer, Firefox, Netscape) for "workplace bullying" pulls up the site link in the first page of sources. Moreover, the Namie's work has also appeared in numerous trade magazines and newspaper articles (e.g., Carey, 2004; Childers, 2004; Guynn, 1998; Namie, 2003b; Namie & Namie, 2000). Thus, workers may read articles leading them to the website or search the site directly. It is possible that those seeking help and finding the website are at the apex of the bullying experience and, as such, are motivated to *do something*. As a result, the sample may depict more resistance than might be found when persons feel isolated. The current sample is, however, well poised to examine resistance when bullying is a communal experience.

Interview Protocol and Follow-up Contacts

I used semistructured, in-depth, telephone interviews for data collection. For the most part, respondent experiences directed interviews that began with a general question asking participants about their jobs. They proceeded with little other guidance and narrated their experiences in a mostly chronological manner. I asked for specific demographic information (age, marital status, ethnicity, etc.) if not mentioned spontaneously. On average, interviews lasted 2.25 hours and ranged from 65 to 180 minutes. Over an 8-month period during data analysis/writing, I maintained contact with participants still at the jobs where bullying occurred ($n = 18$). Follow-up contacts were mostly through email, although I conducted four follow-up interviews, ranging from 30 to 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

All interviews, including follow-ups, were recorded and transcribed. I read through the transcripts numerous times to assure accuracy and then unitized data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with InVivo qualitative analysis software using the general question, "How do workers respond to bullying?" I marked all *employee responses* in interview

transcripts. Employee responses were participants' reported verbal/nonverbal reactions to seeing or experiencing abuse. Once I isolated responses from transcript data, I open-coded each response using a grounded, constant comparison method (Charmaz, 2001). In this step, I examined each response, created an abbreviated code, and wrote a short memo describing the code. This resulted in 83 open-codes for responses.

From the 83 open-codes, I removed responses that failed to meet the guiding definition of resistance as *any discursive or nondiscursive act of commission or omission that counters, disrupts, or defies the bully or erodes the bully's material or symbolic base of influence* (Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Trethewey, 1997). For example, "praying for relief" failed to meet the definition's criteria. This step resulted in 44 resistance codes. I further examined codes for redundancies and combined responses initially coded separately but that appeared analytically similar. For example, I initially coded (AOB) public verbal agreement of others that bully is unfair, cruel, crazy and (CK) expressed collective knowledge of bullies' hostility separately. In this step toward larger conceptual categories, each maintained its distinct description but was combined into one code (AOB/CK).

After removing redundancies and consolidating similar codes, I further collapsed data based on semantic relationships (Spradley, 1979, 1980) among resistance codes. Examining the data codes and memos, I asked semantic questions such as, "Is X a kind of Y?" "Is X a way to do Y?" "Is X an expression of Y?" For example, I classified *developing powerful allies* and *using external expert information* as types of *influential allies*, and *transferring*, *threats to quit*, and *quitting* as varieties of *exodus*. Through semantic analysis, resistance strategies clustered into five core codes: (a) exodus, (b) collective voice, (c) reverse discourse, (d) subversive (dis)obedience, and (e) confrontation. At this point, I conducted four interviews with persons who resisted bullying at work to ensure that the core codes were conceptually saturated and exhaustive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation interviews revealed no new forms of resistance. Table 1 lists core codes and related tactics.

Framing Resistance: Bullying Acts and Risks of Opposition

To contextualize participant actions and preface resistance, the subsequent section provides a sample of reported bullying experiences and participant perceptions of the risks in fighting back.

> [*Mental health HMO*] She came in and told everybody she was the boss, and we would all now do things her way . . . [or] be brought up on charges of insubordination. . . . [She was] intimidating—right in your face—less than an inch away from your face, where her spit would hit you in the face. She would scream at us, her face getting all red and her eyes watering. It was almost like she wanted to reach out and choke you.

> [*Women's multi-service agency*] Staff came and went . . . fast when they saw how crazy she was. . . . She screamed and ranted and raved at us in front of battered women and anyone else who was there in the waiting room. . . . She had big manila

Table 1 Core Resistance Codes and Descriptions

I. EXODUS
Quitting, transferring, helping co-workers find work, intentions/threats to leave, talking to one another about quitting, encouraging each other to quit, championing stories of those who left
II. COLLECTIVE VOICE
A. Mutual advocacy
Agreement bully is unfair/cruel/crazy, collective knowledge—bully known among many inside/outside workgroup, collegial reassurance about bullying, consolation/support, talking with co-workers about what to do, defending co-worker/subordinate, withholding actions that would hurt others, talking in peer networks regardless of bully's admonishment not to
B. Contagious voice
One person's voice encourages others to speak, target becomes advocate, people start going to advocate when experiencing abuse; co-workers groups plan or take action against bully
III. REVERSE DISCOURSE
A. Embracing pejorative labels
Co-opting/adopting labels/epithets, reclaiming "troublemaker," stories of revolutionaries/labor heroes, satisfaction/moral superiority at fighting "good"/righteous battle
B. Influential allies
Developing powerful allies, accessing current powerful allies, finding managerial support, figuring out who to talk to in supervisory ranks, external professionals' advice to "fight" bullying, using expert power as an element of voice (research, newspaper, website)
C. Grievance
Informal/formal complaints (upper managers, HR, union, board, etc.)
D. Documentation
Recordkeeping to support reports of abuse or inoculate against attack
IV. SUBVERSIVE (DIS)OBEDIANCE
A. Labor withdrawal
Refusal to comply, doing just what is required; nothing good enough to deflect abuse, trying then giving up, withdrawing creativity, problem solving, anything "above and beyond"
B. Working-to-rule
Overadhering to delegated tasks (working to rule), especially when mocking bully
C. Resistance through distance
Avoid or avoid talking to bully, especially withholding information bully may want
D. Retaliation
Retaliating or responding to "even score," hostile gossip, fantasy discussions of hurting/killing bully; intentions to hurt bully in retaliation
V. CONFRONTATION
Direct confrontation with bully, using humor to publicly ridicule/parody bully

> envelopes stuffed in the back of her filing cabinets, all taped up, filled with hundreds of notes on scraps of paper . . . —we found them after she was fired—of secret files on people. . . . She slammed doors, threw papers . . . , even furniture when she was pissed, and boy you better *never* argue with her!
>
> [*Sports fishing industry*] The actual office environment was all glass, so he could see into all of the offices. Constant surveillance was deliberate and apparently part of his strategy of control. He could *see* through every office. . . . He'd scream and yell every day. Veins would pop out of his head; he'd spit, he'd point, he'd threaten daily, all day long to anyone in his way, every day that I was there. *Every single day*. Oh, yelling! . . . [From my office,] I could see his eyes bulging, his veins and everything, spitting, and pointing his finger. . . . That was daily, with many people, all the time. He . . . would yell in the speakerphone at his general managers. . . . He'd swear profusely, "You fucking asshole, you don't know *anything*. You fucking

> idiot! You couldn't run a fucking peanut stand. Goddamn it! You were brought up with a silver spoon shoved up your ass."
>
> [*Private security business*] He would call people to the fifth floor conference room . . . where he "held court." Summoning people to the conference room occurred every single day . . . with just a string of people. The intercom would be going off all the time, "So-and-so to the fifth floor conference room. So-and-so to the fifth floor conference room." I'd see people *running*, literally *running*, down the halls. . . . It's just *bizarre*! . . . He'd *scream*, oh yeah, *screaming*! You'd never know why he called you [to the conference room], so you couldn't prepare yourself, so you'd stand there with no answers to his questions, and that made him even madder. So his face would get beet-red, and he'd *slam* his hands down, stand up, and start shaking his finger at you, and *screaming* "*Get out of here! Get out of my sight!*" Everyone waiting outside heard all of it, and you'd go out, and the next person went in for the kill.
>
> [*Children's cancer hospital*] She screamed at everybody, but I saw her screaming at Grace, another one of the nurses, and couldn't believe it. Grace was . . . vulnerable, because she had lost her son about two . . . weeks before. He died of cancer, and so we treated him here, and he died. She [bully] knew Grace's son had just died; she knew; she didn't care. She had her finger [pointed in] Grace's face less than a quarter of an inch away from her nose. She was just totally bullying her into her face, and Grace just stood there and . . . turned bright red. . . . I couldn't believe anyone could treat another human being in that manner. I mean, her son had just died, for god's sake.
>
> [*Adult Education and Training*] I watched her run over person after person. . . . Then she was after me for over two years, driving me crazy, constantly picking at [me] . . . , telling co-workers about my private medical problems and medication I was on, taking away my travel [credit] card, moving my office. She told a new supervisor that I was mentally ill and when that didn't work [drive me out], she accused me of using work resources for personal use. . . . [The investigation] went on for two months, . . . and they found one 41-cent phone call where I called my daughter at college instead of using my cell phone. . . . Since I've filed the [EEOC] suit, she leaves me alone, but now she's starting in on Keri. She's doing the exact same thing to her that she did to me. She tells you one thing, and then she gives you a note, and she tells you to do something else or she sends you an email. . . . It's just the gouging—the verbal one thing, the written another thing—it's a vicious circle.

These excerpts provide a sense of participants' perceptions of their day-to-day experiences. Given that participants reported experiencing and witnessing this kind of persistent verbal aggression on a nearly daily basis, it is not surprising that they also reported fighting back. In fact, only three narratives included no indicators of resistance. Reported resistance was collective, where workers pooled efforts to stop abuse, or disorganized coaction, where workers individually spoke out and later discovered that they were one of many who also complained. "Disorganized coaction . . . [is,] fragmented, dispersed, and uncoordinated individuals doing somewhat similar things without explicit coordination" (Martin & Meyerson, 1998, p. 317).

Whether resistance was collective or disorganized coaction, participants perceived it as high risk. In fact, all but two of the alleged bullies were in higher positions (e.g.,

managers, owners, majority partners). As such, participants believed abusers possessed, or had access to, considerable organizational resources, not the least of which was legitimate power to fire or otherwise punish them. Participants reported that bullies had direct access to upper managers and, as a result, believed bullies were often able to undermine their "versions of the story" by reframing the material interactions, as well as the symbolic meanings of those actions, to organizational authorities.

In fact, participants believed that their resistance triggered escalated abuse and explained that the more they spoke up, the more the bullies used stigmatizing communication to regain lost ground—experiences similar to those of whistle-blowers (Rothschild & Miethe, 1994). These reports underscore arguments that "resistance and control are coproduced" (Mumby, 2005, p. 31) and that power and resistance are uneasy contemporaries (Foucault, 1982). Retribution included having reputations impugned, integrity attacked, and mental health questioned and threatened. Nine participants (seven target-witnesses, two witnesses) said that due to exposure to bullying, they were undergoing mental/medical health treatment and taking antidepressants. They claimed that bullies used this information as "ammunition" against them. Resisting workers also feared losing their jobs in economic environments with scarce alternatives. Job loss was a constantly voiced fear premised on stories, told and retold, of others the bullies had fired or driven from jobs.

Despite the risks, participants recounted multiple acts of resistance, and many voiced moral imperatives to do so. These comments were common, "I have a responsibility to speak up. . . . If somebody says, 'Did you try to do anything?' I can say, 'You bet I did, and I've paid a helluva price for it.'" "How could I live with myself if I just stayed quiet?" "I can sleep at night, because I've done the right thing. . . . I didn't just stand by and let her steamroll people." "How could I face myself if I didn't say something?" It appeared as if normative beliefs partially superseded the fear of speaking out. Even in these discussions of risk, however, the dialectic of resistance and control was apparent. Participants saw dissent as neither romantic nor decontextualized from organizational controls, and systems of control, while frightening and powerful, as neither absolute nor immutable.

Forms of Resistance to Workplace Bullying

Resistance was complex, and workers were resourceful. Most communicative tactics appeared in both collective action and disorganized coaction. The dialectic tension of resistance and control was evident as target-witnesses, witnesses, and perceived bullies "attempted to shape the discursive meanings of interactions" (Mumby, 2005, p. 23). Workers reported gaining and then losing ground as countering bullies politicized and reframed resisters' efforts to stop abuse. I explore this dialectic further in the Discussion. In what follows, I present the modes of resistance as conceptually distinct; however, multiple tactics comprised motivated paths of resistance.

Exodus

Exodus included quitting, intentions/threats to quit, transfers/requests for transfers, and aiding others' exit. *All* participants told stories of co-workers quitting and voiced a desire to resign and, when asked what advice they would give others in comparable situations, recommended leaving the organization (similar to findings in Zapf & Gross, 2001). Counting resignations alone (excluding transfers and firing), the 30 narratives included stories of 224 workers who had quit—allegedly due to bullying. Intersubjective sensemaking was filled with tales of "escape." Workers reported talking to each other about quitting, encouraging each other to leave, spreading information about job opportunities, championing those who had "escaped," and helping colleagues find jobs. If bullying-affected workers had a theme song, it was David Allan Coe's "Take This Job and Shove It," since many quit in ways they hoped would communicate their disgust and anger.

Steve left his 15-year position as a highly trained, technical labor specialist giving 3 days notice and explained, "I did everything I could . . . ; nobody did anything except not give her [bully] the promotion. . . . I spent two days training my replacement . . . and was out of there. Let 'em go down in flames! Maybe this will open their eyes." In Steve's case, multiple workers had filed complaints about bullying. Amy, in the sports fishing industry, also wanted her resignation to "send a message to the bully. . . . He crossed *my* personal line in the sand . . . so I quit." She explained,

> I left because two of my executives—the hardest working people in the company, the most honest, the most direct, the most trustworthy, ethical—and he bullied them, and he bullied them. He'd debase them, and blame them, and debase them, and blame them, and he chipped away at them, and chipped away at them, until they both found other jobs. . . . It was just *morally wrong*.

These experiences indicate that decisions to leave were made in part as statements of defiance. At the point participants reported leaving the organization, they were *extremely* angry, resentful, and hurt. Even in cases where bullying had occurred years before, narratives were marked by acute emotion: bitterness, distrust, antipathy, and incredulity.

Participants also presented turnover as "proof" of their claims. Brad, in the substance abuse treatment field, explained, "Many people here have left for lower paying jobs." Terry, in education and training, said, "When she [bully] was promoted all hell broke loose . . . 8 people left out of an office of 24." Michelle, in a large restaurant chain, claimed that all the bully's subordinates left within 12 months, since she was "impossible to work for." Diane, a hospital nurse, also noted, "Good nurses don't last under this woman. They've lost so many, I'm surprised the unit's still functioning."

Collective Voice

Collective voice was when several employees talked amongst themselves about their experiences and what they could or should do to stop the abuse. Participants reported

seeking out colleagues to validate perceptions, provide comfort for emotional pain, brainstorm solutions to stop the bullying, and discuss plans to find other jobs. Like social support, collective voice provided connectedness and a buffer for stress (Sass & Mattson, 1999), but it also had a distinct *action-orientation*. Collective voice manifested in mutual advocacy and contagious voice.

Mutual advocacy. Mutual advocacy came from intersubjective agreement about bullying that played a role in what Andy called "having each others' backs." Nine participants reported mutually advocating for colleagues. This included developing shared action plans, backing up peers (e.g., countering abusers' accounts that allegedly blamed workers for mistreatment), and protecting co-workers/subordinates. Participants described mutual advocacy with metaphors of connectedness, struggle, and survival: "It's like a badge of honor to say we worked for this guy and survived." "We all felt like survivors of a shipwreck." "It's like we're war veterans." In an elementary school, teachers talked about a bullying colleague. These conversations purportedly bolstered their decision to report the abuse, softened the impact of the bully's attacks, and made it difficult for him to turn teachers against one another. In a sports fishing business, protecting subordinates was reportedly upper managers' "code of honor." Amy explained that protecting staff was "an absolute given. The guy with the highest rank takes it . . . under all circumstances!" In a business where the owner reportedly humiliated and ridiculed vice presidents, these department heads went to great lengths to shield their staff from him.

Contagious voice. Another aspect of collective voice was contagion, similar to emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002), in which actors "influence the emotions or behavior of [others] . . . through the . . . induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes" (Schoenewolf, 1990, p. 50). Eleven participants reported initially questioning their perceptions (e.g., "At first, I couldn't believe it.") but then speaking out after discovering that their colleagues shared similar experiences. As Rick, in city government, explained, "At first I thought it was just me . . . [but] when Karen [co-worker] said something . . . I knew I wasn't the only one." Levina reported that after a group of teachers spoke to a school board member,

> It's like when the little boys who are sexually abused by the priests . . . when one of them speaks out, all the others come out of the woodwork? Well, it was like that. Once we talked to Bob [on school board], a lot of other teachers got up the courage to join in and say, "Hey it's not okay." You know what I mean? They weren't so scared anymore.

Spreading agreement was "an enormous relief," "the thing that encouraged me to go to HR," and "what made me strong enough to come forward." In this way, co-worker voice was infectious.

Reverse Discourse

Reverse discourse turned repressive practices and language to liberating advantages. Not surprisingly, resistance often derived its momentum from the controls that generated resistance (Collinson, 1994), and workers developed spaces for resistance

by engaging or coopting these managerial controls in ways that provided alternative readings without "directly confront[ing] the dominant discursive regime" (Mumby, 2005, p. 36). Study participants produced a number of alternative meanings by (a) embracing pejorative labels, (b) accessing influential allies, (c) lodging grievances/complaints, and (d) documenting abuse.

Embracing pejorative labels. This form of resistance occurred when workers coopted derogatory labels as an aspect of their preferred identities. In four cases, participants reported embracing the label "troublemaker." For example, Ben, in the telecommunications industry, explained that he was part of a group labeled "troublemakers." He recounted, "I grew up in a union household. . . . I'm a union activist through and through. I'm used to being called a troublemaker, and troublemakers are standing up and saying 'this is what we're going through.'" Although targeted workers who report abuse are often labeled troublemakers and insubordinate (Leymann, 1996; Namie, 2003a), in this study, pejorative labels were not always effective at silencing dissenters.

Accessing influential allies. Participants connected themselves with influential others and used expert knowledge to reinforce their claims in a way that shifted the relations of power toward subordinate staff. Twenty participants reported speaking with union representatives, EEOC staff, board members, physicians, mental health counselors, attorneys, trusted managers, an agency funder, and a state legislator. Levina's case with the school board member is one such example. Mary, in public safety, reportedly spoke with a lawyer who encouraged her to document abuse. Brad allied himself with a consulting board member, and Rick spoke to a city grant funder about ongoing employee abuse. Aligning powerholders and securing influential support also encouraged action.

Participants also recounted using expert knowledge about workplace bullying to underscore resistance. Nine participants said they "discovered" the bullying phenomenon and examples of others' experiences in newspapers, magazines, and online sources. Mark, in a nonprofit social service agency, read a *New York Times* article and shared the information with co-workers and an upper manager. The workgroup agreed, "This is *exactly* what's happening to us!" Mary read "about workplace bullying in our newspaper . . . [,] sent it to our personnel manager," and distributed it to her colleagues. Similarly, Diane found an article about "bully-busting . . . in *Nurse Week*," and a co-worker copied and distributed it to all 20 nurses in their workgroup. Diane also took the article to HR when she filed a complaint against the abuser. Participants described using expert knowledge to corroborate their claims, as well as to label the bullying phenomenon and educate others about it.

Grievance. Workers protested abuse using formal/informal complaints to organizational systems tasked with problem solving; grievances were often coupled with *accessing influential allies*. Fourteen participants reported lodging complaints or filing formal grievances against the bully. Diane, Rick, Mark, and Carmen filed complaints with HR. Terry and Sylvia filed EEOC complaints. Steve and Ben filed unfair labor practice complaints with unions. In five cases, resisters later discovered that others had filed complaints (disorganized coaction).

Documentation. Another tactic was keeping written records of abusive interactions. Thus, subordinate staff appropriated managerial "retention and control of information" (Giddens, 1984, p. 94) to their advantage. Thirteen participants used recordkeeping developed to monitor them as a tool to "monitor the monitors." Participants reported documenting abuse to support their claims or defend against ongoing attacks. For example, Brad said he kept records of what occurred so that "if I ever . . . have a confrontation, I can go back and look at what actually happened." Documentation seemed to "fight fire with fire" and turn systems of control back upon persons perceived as threats.

Subversive (Dis)obedience

Subversive (dis)obedience included well-documented tactics in which workers altered work output or communication patterns in ways that disadvantaged the bully. In combination with other tactics, participants reported labor withdrawal (Mulholland, 2004), working-to-rule (Fiori, 1999; Jones, 1998; Mulholland, 2004), resistance through distance (Collinson, 1994), and retaliation (Jordan, 2003; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

Labor withdrawal. Labor withdrawal was increasing work and then withdrawing output, or withholding effort as an initial response to abuse. Working harder and then retracting effort emerged in 12 narratives. When abuse persisted despite task adjustments (e.g., working harder), participants reported giving up, since working harder allegedly resulted in a brief respite followed by escalated demands and demoralization. Greg, a police officer, reflected this sentiment, "There's times where you're so beat down by it that you realize that you can't accomplish everything and even if you do, it's not going to be to his satisfaction, so you just give up."

Four participants reported withholding labor and doing "only enough to get by" as an initial response to abuse. Ben explained, "When you attack or bully an employee, it has a negative effect. Productivity on the job suffers. You push me hard like that, and I just stop putting out." He claimed that when the men in his shop were creative or independently solved problems, they were punished or humiliated. As a result, they slowed down, stopped, or masked these efforts. Kurt, in a law firm, recounted, "we do day-to-day tasks . . . but when it comes time to do things that are above and beyond, we don't do them anymore. The firm loses, but when the partners don't intercede with this guy's tirades, what can they expect?" Thus, abuse engendered recalcitrance rather than consent.

Working-to-rule. Doing exactly what is required or the minimum required is working-to-rule (Fiori, 1999; Jones, 1998; Mulholland, 2004) and creates spaces of control that provide workers with plausible deniability ("I was just following orders.") (Deetz, 1992). If failing to follow directions is insubordination and grounds for firing, doing exactly as directed provides an oblique way to resist. Eight participants reported using this okay-you-asked-for-it tactic when following bully's directives—perceived as highly controlling or insulting—to the letter. For example, Mary said,

> I have to copy her on everything I do. . . . I was out of my office and didn't answer my phone once, and after that, every time I went to the bathroom, every time I left my office, I was to call her secretary. . . . So if I had to send a fax, the fax machine . . . is right across the hall from my office, by god, I was leaving my office, so I'd call the secretary.

Prior to the new supervisor's entry, Mary reported 10 years' success at her job overseeing grant funds. She ridiculed the bully's demands by exaggerating allegedly menial, insulting directives.

Resistance-through-distance. This resistance strategy dissociated or removed workers both physically and communicatively from bullies (Collinson, 1994). Twenty-seven participants reported avoiding or withholding information from bullies in ways that masked the action/actor, ostensibly to protect themselves from retaliation. Vice presidents in a sports fishing business figured out how to "duck" the owner. As Amy put it,

> You learn to duck; you learn to just avoid. . . . You learn not to show up at work too much. You make arrangements to go to meetings. You're just too busy to go to the office; . . . you lie, and you scheme, and you're not there. . . . You just learn to not come to work.

Vice presidents prided themselves in creative ways to "duck." Workers framed avoiding the bully like a near art form. Ducking, like working-to-rule, also provided plausible deniability.

In addition to physical distance, participants reported withholding valued information from bullies. In the private security business, high-level staff earned substantial salaries—what Lynn called "golden handcuffs." Because of the owner's reputation for abusive volatility, "no one would tell him anything. They knew he'd detonate, and so you learned to just keep your head down and then laugh all the way to the bank." Participants withheld information for self-protection, but their explanations also displayed satisfaction at holding back something bullies probably wanted to know.

Retaliation. Many participants verbalized desires for vengeance or reciprocation of injury in kind. Relation took the form of hostile gossip (Hafen, 2004; Tucker, 1993) and fantasies/plans for physically harming or killing the bully. The most common was "character assassination"—talking behind the abuser's back. This was reportedly done to support individual's reports to others and counter the gossip/rumors perpetrated by the bullies. Eighteen persons reported speaking to many, many others, both inside and outside the organization, about the bully's "bizarre behavior." This tactic was often embedded in *accessing influential allies* but also appeared in numerous incidents where the central purpose of the conversation appeared to be derogating the bully.

Workers also reported fantasies and plans to physically harm bullies. Four participants recounted workplace or family conversations focused on desires or plans to physically retaliate for bullies' cruelty up to and including *murder*. Amy explained that after particularly trying days, "all we did was plot to kill him . . . [as a means to] debrief and de-pressurize." They discussed poisoning his tea, wiring a

bomb in his car, and "hiring a professional hitman." Linda, in a publishing company, explained that her husband became so angry at the ongoing abuse that "he was going to wait for Ira [bully] after work with . . . [her husband's] brother and beat the bejesus out of him." Linda said she talked her husband out of confronting the bully, but only dissuaded him after promising to quit. These violent fantasies/intentions suggest another dangerous potential of unchecked bullying.

Confrontation

Confrontation was face-to-face conversations with the bully or public challenges through humorous retorts. Ten participants reported talking to the bully to defend against unfair accusations and/or explain how the bully's actions had hurt their or others' feelings. Confrontation usually occurred at or near the onset of abuse and ostensibly "made matters worse." For example, Ted, in the mining industry, occasionally intervened when Dirk (abusive co-worker) bullied him or others. Ted believed these confrontations infuriated Dirk, based on Dirk's subsequent sabotage of Ted's equipment that reportedly endangered Ted's life, and Dirk's increasingly aggressive attacks that included threatening the lives of Ted's family members. Despite Dirk's aggression, a few years later he was promoted, and he fired Ted soon afterward for "failing to follow orders." Ted nonetheless defended his actions. "I couldn't just take it lying down. Somebody had to stand up to this guy."

Another form of confrontation was using humor to criticize bullying acts (Martin, 2004; Trethewey, 1997). Sandy, a bullying manager, publicly accused a targeted employee of fund misappropriation during a team meeting. Rick, a witnessing colleague, explained, "I just started laughing and said, 'What are you talking about? She can't even go to the bathroom without your approval.'" His humor ridiculed the bully's controlling tactics in a city department where staff was allegedly responsible for processes over which they were given little or no authority. Rick's story was one of the few examples in which workers used humor as defiance, although there were ample dark jokes made about bullies' mental states and participants' experiences.

Research Interview as Resistance

In an interesting development, many interviewees framed their involvement in the research project as a type of resistance. They may have even used the research process as a channel for speaking out, since many voiced their willingness to verbally relive the experiences if, by doing so, speaking out could stop bullying or help others. They characterized participation as "spreading the news." As Ted said, "it gets my heart going and it makes me feel, have bad feelings . . . but if it's beneficial to somebody, you know, it's all right." Thus, the research interview itself may serve as a politicized forum for abused, muted group members (Varallo, Ray, & Ellis, 1998). Rick explained,

> Somebody's gotta speak up, you know, uncover this cancer that's growing here. So many good people have left and the rest of us want to go, and I'm telling you it's downright criminal. I'm just not going to take it from that bastard anymore. Maybe

> your research can expose the stuff that's happening behind closed doors in this place.

Participation may have also encouraged acts of resistance after the interview and served as another motivated "tactic" in resistance paths. I take this up further in the Discussion.

Target-Witness and Witness Experiences

The previous discussion combined the reported experiences of target-witnesses and witnesses. Here, I explore the differences and similarities between these two groups in how bullying impacted them and their subsequent responses. Although the experiences of target-witnesses and witnesses differed in some ways, overall, their reactions were quite similar. Target-witnesses were allegedly treated more brutally than were witnesses, so they understandably described fear at work that was palpable. Then again, witnesses also described being exceedingly fearful of speaking out and then coming to the bully's negative attention. Seeing what happened to others apparently communicated in no uncertain terms what would happen if witnesses became targets. There is no question that bullying environments were marked by profound fear within entire workgroups.

Target-witnesses did report higher rates of directly confronting bullies than did witnesses, most likely because they felt as if they were under direct attack. Both groups, however, reported informally lodging complaints with organizational authorities at approximately similar rates. Target-witnesses were, however, more likely to report filing formal grievances, EEOC suits, and unfair labor practice complaints. Furthermore, those directly targeted talked about being extremely traumatized by the experience. For example, of the seven under medical care allegedly due to exposure to bullying, five were target-witnesses.

On the other hand, witnesses were also deeply disturbed by their experiences. Similar to target-witnesses, they spoke of how the workplace experience took over their entire lives—they worried about it at and away from work, they talked about it continually to family and friends, they spent large segments of work time speaking with others or figuring out how to deal with or avoid being abused. Witnesses and targets reported that their experiences and failure of organizational authorities to stop abuse stripped away their beliefs that "good prevails over evil." As Ken, in the retail industry, claimed, "I felt robbed. . . . I felt violated. . . . I felt like I go through life with the basic assumption that people are . . . good to people, and that has been stripped away."

Members of both groups were evenly represented in collective and individual resistance and reported distancing themselves, withholding information, and accessing expert knowledge at similar rates. In sum, although target-witnesses understandably reported greater injury and more often used formal communication channels and face-to-face confrontations as redress, the two groups' emotional reactions and resistance were remarkably similar. Thus, it appeared that when

bullying was a collective experience, that collectivity extended to how workers fought back.

Paths of Resistance

Whether witness or target-witness, participants reported using multiple communicative tactics to (re)create a workplace environment marked by respect, dignity, and justice. Participants described experiences that included an average of seven resistance tactics, ranging from zero to ten. It was only after numerous efforts, and reportedly being disappointed and disillusioned again and again, that they gave up. The temporal order of communicative resistance tactics was unique for each participant; I found no two participants whose resistance sequence mapped exactly the same.

The following describes five randomly selected paths providing a sense of how resistance unfolds, is met by control/punishment, shifts to different tactics, and results in different ends. Each path alludes to the resistance–control dialectic and risks of resistance in an already risky environment. For example, Shelly, in a consulting firm, reported initially talking with the bullying partner-owners to defend against allegedly unfair accusations. Abuse escalated, and she started avoiding the partners and keeping crucial information to herself. The partners reportedly intensified public criticism of her in staff meetings and talk behind her back increased, so she again spoke to them privately. Eventually the partners "counseled her out" of the consulting firm, offering her a substantial buy-out package.

Terry reported speaking directly with the bully after hearing rumors the bully had supposedly spread about Terry. The bully denied spreading rumors but soon after, canceled Terry's credit card for travel. Terry appealed this decision and, when the appeal was denied, reported speaking confidentially with an upper manager. Later, the upper manager hired an outside consultant to problem-solve staff issues. In a meeting without managers present, Terry discovered that others shared her experiences so began talking with them about what to do. Terry and a group of co-workers reportedly went back to the upper manager. In the meantime, the bully apparently escalated abuse by, among other things, moving Terry's office to a hot, cramped space across the hall from the restrooms and divulging her private medical information to workgroup members. Terry began avoiding contact and communication with the bully and keeping detailed records of interactions. The bully launched an exhaustive investigation of her "unauthorized use of department resources," so Terry conferred with her union. She subsequently filed an EEOC complaint and, after settling, left the organization.

Ted reported intervening on numerous occasions when the bully "raged, swore at, and cornered" his co-workers. In response, the bully allegedly sabotaged Ted's equipment, and Ted reported this to the supervisor. Ted continued to stand up to the bully in the face of abusive, humiliating treatment of himself and others. When the bully reportedly threatened Ted's family members' lives, he again reported this to the supervisor and assiduously avoided all communication with the bully. Ted recounted that the aggression died down for over a year, after which, management promoted the bully. A month after the promotion, the bully fired Ted.

Brad described being shocked by the insulting, humiliating messages from the new agency director and immediately going to her and presenting his concerns. When she continued to criticize and micromanage his work, despite over 20 years' experience in the substance abuse treatment field, he again spoke with her. When the bully's insults allegedly escalated, her micromanagement became an unswerving response to his efforts, and she repeatedly altered his treatment programs and outreach plans, he spoke with a consulting board member. He reported that little changed so began documenting demeaning interactions, reducing work output, doing exactly what she asked, withholding information, and talking to community members about her.

Karla worked in an organization that ironically operated a battered women's shelter. She explained that four managers began talking in her office one afternoon about what they could do to stop the bullying director. Eventually, seven program managers secretly went to the home of a board member and explained the extent of the problem. They reportedly stated, "we just can't take it anymore" and were ready to find other jobs if the director was not removed. (The board had evidently sanctioned the director numerous times in the past without effect.) They each prepared written documentation for the board member, only to be used in case of a lawsuit. As much as possible, they all avoided contact and communication with the director, but reportedly spoke with many others about the director's abusive behavior. The board eventually fired the bully after a protracted, 7-month process in which the resisting workers were terrified of discovery.

Unlike general acts of resistance against managerial (Collinson, 1992) or corporate interests (Fleming & Spicer, 2003), or even specific resistance against pressure to increase output (Mulholland, 2004), in cases of bullying, resistance was a systematic series of actions directed to an end: stopping abuse. Although none mapped entirely the same, some underlying patterns were discernable; I take these up in the Discussion.

Case Outcomes

In many cases, bullying continued unabated. In others, however, abusers were negatively sanctioned (fired, involuntarily transferred, failed promotion, quit) and bullying allegedly abated. When workers resisted collectively, even in the absence of organized labor, they reported more positive outcomes. Of the 30 participants, 12 (40%) collectively resisted. These workers were fired and quit at lower rates than individual resisters and also reported that their organizations more often took punitive action aimed at bullies' behavior. At the study's completion, seven were still at their jobs, three quit, one transferred within the organization, and one filed an EEOC suit, settled with the organization, and subsequently quit. Four of the bullies in the collective-resistance situations were fired, three were transferred, and five remained at the job, although one failed to secure a promotion.

Fifteen (50%) participants individually resisted. Of these, six remained at the job (one of whom filed an EEOC suit and won), six others quit, and three were fired. Eleven of the bullies in the individual-resistance situations remained at the job, three

were fired, and, in one case, an employee filed a formal grievance against the bully, and the bully subsequently quit. For those who resisted collectively, in over 58% of the cases, organizational authorities meted out negative sanctions for the abuser, and none of the employees were fired. For those who resisted individually, in 27% of the cases, the bully was negatively sanctioned, and 20% of these workers were fired.

In addition to the collective-individual dynamic, certain communicative tactics were more often reported in cases where organizational authorities took action to ameliorate the problem. Overall, 11 bullies were reportedly sanctioned, and 1 quit after an employee filed a formal grievance. In these cases, the most common tactic reported was informal or formal complaints (grievance) to organizational authorities. Complaints were particularly effective when substantiated with written documentation and expert opinion (e.g., research on workplace bullying). Although intervention took months to materialize, in cases where workers channeled resistance through organizationally legitimized systems, they more often reported that decisionmakers took action.

Two tactics commonly reported in cases where organizations left bullying unchecked were confrontation and withholding information. The former reportedly enflamed more than ameliorated the situation (finding similar to Zapf & Gross, 2001), and the latter may have been invisible to all but the resister. Thus, it appeared that communicating directly with organizational authorities, that is, working within the organization's system of grievance/problem-solving, was most often associated with organizational interventions. Organizational authorities also appeared to favorably respond to rational-legal documentation and substantiating expert opinion.

Discussion

The study's findings suggest a number of valuable insights for understanding resistance and workplace bullying. Specifically, findings suggest considerations for (a) the dialectic possibilities for interpreting resistance and the risk of these unintended interpretations, (b) the social/communal experience of bullying, (c) the ongoing process of resistance, (d) the framing of power in bullying research, and (e) research participation as resistance.

Dialectic Character of Fixing Meaning to Resistance

This study specifically draws resistant acts from extensive narratives. As such, it may paint a picture of resistance that, although complex and processual, appears cleaner or more effective at exacting change than experienced. In fact, change took a considerable amount of time to transpire; the time lapse is potentially one of the dynamics that leads workers to report feeling impotent in the face of bullying. It was in follow-up contacts that participants reported organizational changes, and often by that time, both interviewees and many more of their co-workers had suffered more abuse, left their jobs, or were fired. And sadly, despite resistance, bullying continued unabated in many cases. Moreover, resistance may have hurt resisters more often than it contributed to organizational changes.

Resistance is risky business for workers, and there is always the potential for unintended consequences: They want change but get punished; they report abuse but are stigmatized for reporting; they fight back and are labeled insubordinate. The inherent risk is why most resistance is covert. Although resistance always holds risk for workers, the risk is even more pronounced in environments where employees are systematically abused. Resistance is high-risk because all such acts have the latent potential for multiple interpretations and meanings, depending on who is doing the interpreting. The meanings of resistance are never fixed. Rather, the essence of the control–resistance dialectic is "the ongoing tensions and contradictions that constitute the process by which organizational actors attempt to shape workplace practices" (Mumby, 2005, p. 23) and fix the meanings of those practices.

To illustrate the precarious, shifting dialectic of fixing meaning to resistance in workgroups where bullying occurs, I provide three reinterpretations. These demonstrate how resistance, usually carried out with a desire for humanizing organizational communication, can be reframed in ways to neutralize resistance, or worse, restigmatize and punish resisters. These examples provide a sense of how resistant acts are, in and of themselves, anything but straightforward. Rather, resistance is inherently ambiguous as different actors or sets of actors (upper management, abusive supervisors, affected workers) interpret and assign meaning to resistant actions and messages.

First, although resisters point to worker exodus as statements of defiance and evidence that there is something seriously wrong—proof of bullies' abusive communication and actions—workers also note that bullies' goals often include desires to drive certain workers from the organization. Indeed, worker exodus can be interpreted as a triumph for both the abusers and for the exiting workers. Moreover, if those with compelling voice resist, then lose hope and leave, this does two things: It provides evidence that something is seriously wrong, while at the same time mutes the remaining workgroup's voice. Exodus may also leave the organization blameless in a sense; once the resisting worker leaves, organizational authorities may see no reason to act or examine the departed person's reports of abuse. Writing off the departed worker as disgruntled can neutralize the essence of that worker's past complaints or grievances. Thus, bullying-affected workers may perceive exodus as successful escape and valid proof of wrongdoing, but it can also mean that abusive supervisors/co-workers "won"—it can be effectively framed as both control and resistance.

Second, collective voice and reverse discourse give credence to affected workers' claims, bolster their courage to speak out, and encourage them to plan pooled resistance strategies. Conversely, these workers can then be labeled insubordinate, troublemakers, mentally ill, disgruntled employees, and anti-team players. Workers who speak out against organizational power and control can be depicted as disloyal or blamed for making things worse for those silently hoping that abuse will go away. Although a rare few can coopt pejorative labels, in most cases, resisters find that co-workers avoid them, upper managers discount their complaints, and abusers increase

pressure against them. Apparently, bullies are quite successful at reframing these resistant activities as antiorganization and the resisters as deviant (Keashly, 2001).

Third, resistance such as subversive (dis)obedience—well-documented, widespread resistance tactics—most likely discredit rather than empower dissenting workers. Withholding labor, working-to-rule, and withholding information can provide resisters an element of personal satisfaction but are easily reframed as production deficits and suitable grounds for punishment, up to and including firing. Recalcitrant workers most likely feel justified using these strategies, particularly when they are persistently abused. However, such actions place them in precarious positions and, as such, fail to encourage critical reflection of organizational dynamics. Thus, any form of dissent has the potential for numerous interpretations, both intended and unintended.

Nonetheless, in some cases, resistance changes the bullying situation. When targets and witnesses collectively resist, work through the formal problem-solving systems available to them, and provide decisionmakers with documented evidence of abuse, this combination, at times, moves decisionmaker to action. Using research and other published material (print or electronic) about workplace bullying also supports workers' complaints and serves as educative tools for decisionmakers. This points to the importance of published studies on the topic.

Beyond Dyadic Interactions

Much of bullying research usually frames it as an individual issue or dyadic interaction between target and bully. However, communication at work, including workplace bullying, is always social and public. Bullying and related stress reactions are not confined to targets, but often affect the entire work unit. When workers suffer at the hands of bullies, their abuse negatively impacts the entire workgroup and bullies' actions may serve as a model for others' behavior. A principal concentration on targets or bully–target dyads conceals the communal impact of bullying and makes it far easier to explain the phenomenon with individualistic assumptions such as individual pathologies, personality conflicts, or problem employees. This serves a political function by blaming the victim and discursively removing organizational responsibility to provide for worker safety. As Ryan (1976, p. 8) aptly notes, "the generic process of blaming the victim is applied to almost every American problem," and workplace bullying is no exception. Examining the impact of bullying on the broader work unit limits overly simplistic blame-casting, since bullying affects and is affected by all workplace relationships to some degree.

Co-workers play a crucial role in the development of and intervention in abusive workplace dynamics. Bullying injures, stigmatizes, and questions targets' character and performance in a way that witnesses do not experience. As a consequence, organizational authorities are less likely to respect or heed their complaints. Since witnesses are not so stigmatized, they may retain the voice and "believability" that targeted workers lose. This suggests a crucial role for co-workers. Witnessing co-workers corroborate targeted workers' perceptions, build toward collective efforts at change, bring issues to the attention of organization decisionmakers, and interrupt

abusive communication. When witnesses partner with target-witnesses to report bullying, it also reduces the likelihood of individual workers being pejoratively labeled. Of course, joining resistance efforts is not without risk. Collective efforts at resistance are more protracted than individual efforts. Thus, although witness substantiation may lead to intervention, witnessing co-workers will also spend more time dealing with bullying and less time on other more pleasant tasks and social interactions at work.

Processual Paths of Resistance

Chronological narratives made it possible to map the temporal order of resistance, and follow-up contacts provided additional longitudinal data regarding this progression. Resistance paths underscore its developmental nature and point out that it is not one act, or even cumulative multiple acts. Rather, resistance forms a motivated trajectory. Workers use one tactic, assess its effect, use another tactic, assess its affect, use another tactic, assess, and so on; they also use different strategies in combination. That is, resisting workers do not give up; they continue trying to end abuse until exiting the organization. As such, bullying may be ignored or minimized by organizational authorities, but its impact persists as workers continue to seek justice.

Although resistance paths are as unique as each individual and situation, two underlying patterns are discernable. First, resistance, for the most part, shows the following pattern: private, private, public, (punishment), private, private, public, (punishment), and so forth. It appears that the private conversations and plans prepare for the public forms of resistance. When public resistance fails to stop abuse or results in retribution, resisters "regroup" in multiple private conversations with trusted others. Second, when help from internal organizational authorities fails to end abuse (formal grievances/complaints, informal talks with upper management, HR, etc.), two types of responses commonly develop: seeking help from external authorities (e.g., legal redress, unions) or pushing resistance down into subverted, covert tactics (e.g., working-to-rule). Both responses are marked by negatively charged emotions and neither bode well for the employing organization.

Power in Workplace Bullying Research

Findings also suggest that power should be presented in a far more complex manner in bullying research, since current literature typically reifies organizational control. The power-as-commodity frame presents power as something bullies "have" and targeted workers do not, glosses how affected workers defend themselves and others, and, as such, overlooks circumstances in which workers resist and eventually alter organizational systems. The powerful-versus-powerless duality masks the resources of power available to workers—resources that they actually report using to defend themselves. Power is better framed as polymorphous and shifting in which all actors have access to certain rules and resources of power (Giddens, 1982), albeit at greater or lesser degrees.

Retheorizing power means looking at the nuanced push-and-pull of the resistance-control dialectic. The situations where workers "fight back" can provide clues to fruitful paths of communication for intervention in abusive workplaces. Thus, it is both naïve and short-sighted to study workplace abuse without attending to the resistance such abuse engenders. Since discovering or formulating solutions is the implicit if not explicit goal of bullying research, failing to explore the forms of resistance that contribute to organizational changes is a serious omission. A marriage of sorts between the bullying and critical communication perspectives might provide just such a multifaceted lens through which to analyze and find solutions.

Research Participation as Resistance and a Politicized Act

The findings in this study reflect a collaborative project of knowledge building between participants and researcher. Moreover, numerous participants framed the research interview as a form of "fighting back." It is imperative to recognize that, as with an anthropologist's presence in another culture, the qualitative interviewer's presence in the life of research participants alters the dynamics and trajectory of the situation. That is, researchers may record something as having happened in the field when the researcher's presence contributed to what occurred. Interpretive researchers understand the final product—the written research report—is a text that weaves together the native and researcher's subjectivities to better understand native's life experiences (Potter, 1996). Interpretive researchers are sensitive to and aware of themselves as mediating the research. Despite believing this on an epistemological level, researchers may or may not have evidence of how or when this mediation occurs.

I cannot report the subsequent responses of workers as if the interview had no intervening effect whatsoever, particularly for those still in the bullying environment. The full extent of this effect is unknown but as one woman explained in a follow-up email, "Thank you so much for offering me the support and encouragement I desperately needed. Speaking with you really helped me commit to a course of action." She spoke during the interview of her plans to file a report with HR. Evidently, she did so and so did a number of others unbeknownst to her. The bully was ultimately removed. This statement suggests that the research participation intervenes in some participants' experiences of workplace bullying.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study's limitations suggest fruitful directions for research. First, 28 of the 30 participants reported that bullies were persons with more formal authority. As such, findings have limited transferability to peer bullying. It is likely that peer resistance is considerably different than resistance to authority. What is more, authoritative bullying causes more harm to targets that peer bullying (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) and may be a different phenomenon. A closer examination would clarify whether the two should conceptually be separated, since current research frames these as the same phenomenon, albeit in different forms.

Second, although this study expands bullying research from its individual/dyadic focus to include experiences of those for whom bullying was a communal experience, organizational factors also play a key part in the triggering, developing, and enabling of bullying at work (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2005; Salin, 2003). The interview data includes some awareness of organizational pressures that might be linked to bullying dynamics and the "pressure cooker" environments that prompt verbal and nonverbal aggression. For instance, some participants reported multiple bullies and claimed that bullies seemed to "feed off of each other," or that a particular bully "learned it on his [predecessor's] knee." Without exploring how communication constitutes organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2000), it is easy to center on individual psychology or dyadic contacts (e.g., Coyne, Seigne, & Randall, 2000).

Conclusion

Resistance to abuse at work is a complex, dynamic process in which workers fight to have a voice and are often punished for their efforts. If and when organizational authorities finally intervene, many have already left the organization or suffered years of abuse. The human cost is staggering and workers' stories heartbreaking. Neither is resistance straightforward; worker dissent is easily reframed as deviant behavior by those for whom the resistance is threatening. Nonetheless, workers faced with bullying at work say they have a moral imperative to act against the injustice and in some cases actually alter their situations. Furthermore, workers often collectively organize against abusers, even in the absence of formal unions. Organizations would be well-informed to heed these voices. Resistance and the emotional communication that springs from it are warning signs that "act as signaling devices when expected appropriate norms of communication are violated" (Waldron, 2000, p.72). These should not be ignored. Organizational authorities must learn to "read the traces" of resistance to bullying, diagnose the problem early, and construct effective interventions.

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