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PO Box 121  
Botsford, CT 06404  
[www.nacsw.org](http://www.nacsw.org)  
888.426.4712

**ACADEMIC BULLYING IN SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENTS: THE  
SILENT EPIDEMIC**

**By: Jan C. Kircher, Ph.D.; Cath Stilwell, Ed.D.; Elizabeth Peffer Talbot,  
Ph.D.; Sandra Chesborough, Ph.D.**

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## Abstract

In the United States, workplace bullying and its' consequences are getting more public recognition. Higher education institutions are not immune from this and academic bullying is also coming to the forefront of recognition at universities internationally and in the United States. Little research has been completed to address the concerns of academic bullying by university faculty and the devastating effects of bullying to faculty, to departmental programs the students, to the university and the greater community. There is a gap in the literature regarding academic bullying and social work departments. This paper summarizes the literature on workplace and academic bullying including defining academic bullying, developing an understanding of the reasons bullies bully, and the consequences. The paper concludes by identifying solutions for academic bullying and exploring ethical considerations for social workers.

*Keywords:* Academic and workplace bullying, hostile work environment, social work

## Academic Bullying in Social Work Departments:

### The Silent Epidemic

*All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word:*

*Freedom, justice, honor, mercy, hope.*

(Sir Winston Churchill, as cited in Namie & Namie 2009)

Academic bullying is a rising phenomenon on college campuses and social work departments are not going unscathed. The consequences of bullying behaviors is the loss of harmonious and collegial relationships, the erosion of departments, increase medical and mental health expenses, loss time from classes and committee work, and possible violations of the social work code ethics. Across university campuses academic bullying is increasing (Fogg, & Piper, 2008; Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). For whatever reasons, harassment of social work faculty by colleagues is “The Silent Epidemic.”

### Definitions

A growing number of researchers have begun to explore “workplace” bullying in multiple areas of the work arena (Simpson & Cohen, 2004, p. 163). What should be noted is that many of these researchers are associated within universities settings and have given little consideration to bullying in “their own backyards” (Keashly & Neuman, 2010) and the secrecy that surrounds the topic of academic bullying. Keashly and Neuman, (2010) site four reasons for researcher oversight: (1) “stands in contrast to reliable evidence of other forms of hostile and demeaning behaviors on campus (i.e. faculty/student incivility in the classroom), (2) the quality of interpersonal relations (i.e. collegiality and retention of faculty), (3) the extensive literature on conflict and misconduct in higher education, and finally the academic environment has a number of organizational and work features that increases the likelihood of hostile impersonal behaviors” (p.49). This lack of examination into academic bullying within institutions of higher education

across the United States deserves further exploration into practices and policies of “bullying behaviors” within academic social work departments.

Compounding this lack of information on bullying on university campuses is a clear unified definition of “academic bullying” (Simpson & Cohen, 2004, p. 163). Terms such as bullying, mobbing, and harassment only make the waters murkier when attempting to define bullying behaviors. This includes setting clear boundaries on whether or not the terms stand independently on their own or is there room for cross over and integration of multiple definitions when addressing the issues of academic bullying. Using the theory of social construction adds some understanding to the multiple concepts of terms.

Social construction theory espouses that social construction is built upon the observation that many aspects of our everyday experiences are the consequences of implicit social agreement, institutional practices or collective social action. However, under this construct the premise suggest that each individual based on their life experiences, constructs their world and how one defines bullying. Some understanding of social constructionist theory offers us an opportunity to begin to see the challenges in providing one clear unified definition for “academic bullying, mobbing behaviors and/or harassment (Simpson & Cohen, 2004).

Social constructionists also suggest the process (social construction) is ongoing and dynamic and is reproduced by the people acting on their interpretations and knowledge. This process provides the possibility for change over time from one generation to another. As social beings that socially construct their world, multifarious definitions currently exist for the terms “academic bullying, mobbing behaviors, and harassment.” These definitions continue to evolve, to be rebuilt, expanded on and become more distinctive giving way for overlap, confusion and misinterpretation of terms (Simpson & Cohen, 2004).

Namie and Namie (2009) suggest that bullying is a repeated, health-harming mistreatment of a person by one or more workers that can take the form of verbal abuse, conduct or behaviors that are threatening, intimidating or humiliating; sabotage that prevents work from getting done; or some combination of the three. Bullying is “psychological violence; sub-lethal and non physical—a mix of verbal and strategic assaults to prevent the target (victim of bullying) from performing work well” (Namie & Namie, 2010, p. 3). Halbur (2005) states that “mobbing occurs when there are attacks on a person reputation; personal relations... Mobbing goes beyond the typical stress that untenured faculty may feel when others scrutinize their work. .... the difference is that those who are targeted may have physical, social and/or emotional difficulties (p. 7). Such acts of bullying most likely will keep the target from meeting the employers work requests and interests while the bully butts his/her personally agenda of controlling another individual over the needs of the employing agency. One can see there are no winners in this set-up. Keashly and Neumen, (2010) state that

Bullying at work means harassing, offending socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks.....It has to occur repeatedly and regularly (i.e. weekly) and over a period of time (i.e. at least six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts (as cited in Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, p 15).

The acts of workplace aggression are individual efforts to harm others at work and that anger and aggression are most frequently associated with perceptions of unfair or offensive treatment by others. Defining mobbing behaviors as acts that are completed by faculty against colleagues, by two or more bully faculty, along with bullying behaviors lasting more than three

months at a given target/victim assist in more clearly articulating the behaviors of bullies (Keashly & Neumen, 2010).

Simpson and Cohen (2004) note the lack of distinction of clear definitions in articulating acts of bullying, mobbing behaviors and harassment. Crawford, (1999) offers a broader yet simpler definition of “workplace bullying as an aggressive act and an aspect of violence.....subsuming that all workplace violence, harassment, and bullying under one umbrella.” (p. 164). Hearn and Parkin (2001) make a more divided distinction of the elements of harassment and bullying, seeing multiple variety of behaviors as forms of organizational violations. Simpson & Cohen, (2004) believe that such varied definitions fail to address “the complexity of the nature of bullying and the many different tactics” (p. 164) used by bullies for their own agenda.

McMahon (2000) on bullying/harassment has attempted to draw the distinction between harassment, and bullying by stating:

.....essentially bullying is an abuse of power. Bullying can, but does not always, involve physical violence. It may involve verbal intimidation, the undermining of the victims professional work and the bully taking the credit for other peoples work. Harassment, on the other hand, appears... to be oriented at some personal characteristic of the victim... i.e. based on sex, racial, and sectarian. (p. 384)

Fogg (2008) offers yet another definition of bullying that speaks to the subtleties of bullying such as: bullies may interrupt a victim who speaks at committee meetings, or roll their eyes at the victim’s ideas, thoughts or suggestions. Bullies spread rumors to undermine a colleague’s credibility or shut out a colleague from social gathering and conversation with other departmental faculty/staff. Another definition offered, defining the more aggressive bully, as

someone who has tirades in front of departmental and campus colleagues to belittle or demean a victim's professional talent, thereby, abusing the power bullies may have (Fogg, 2008). Namie and Namie (2009) state succinctly that, "bullies are workplace Politian's.....their goal is simple—to control the people they target.... and are bullies who appreciate the power of fear" (p. 27 & 51).

From a social constructionist viewpoint and reviewing the literature on academic bullying, mobbing and harassment behaviors offer multifarious understandings, concepts and behaviors that compound the confusion and distinction when addressing and naming bullying behaviors. Nonetheless, such disturbing, inappropriate and unprofessional bullying behaviors among highly educated individuals happen on university campuses on a daily and repeated basis. Compounding further the distressing behaviors of academic bullying is the concern is that of the "form or behaviors" that constitutes bullying. Bullying knows no boundaries when it comes to harmful affects to victims or social work environments. As stated previously, bullying can be emotional, financial, psychological, and physical. Bullying can be overt or covert, aggressive or subtle, directed to the victim or behind the back or unknown to the victim. Crothers, Lipinski, and Minutolo (2009) found that 14,000 respondents that took their a survey, had been bullied or harassed by managers or colleagues in the last year, with another 40% witnessing others being abused (p. 99). Such high numbers speak to the multiple side effects of the problem of bullying as it pertains to the physically, psychological, emotional, and financial realms of the victim, the agency, and to greater society.

MacIntosh, (2005) goes on to note that workplace bullying is broadly defined as psychological, physical, or sexual abuse or hostility within the workplace. Identifying features of such bullying are, but is not limited to, repetitious, and persistence's of bullying behaviors;

offensive, unsafe, intimidation or unwanted behaviors; abuse of power, need for control in the workplace (p. 894). Hauage, Skogstad, and Einarsen (2009), refers to a gradually evolving process where one individual is placed in an inferior position and becomes the target of systemic negative social acts by one or more perpetrators (p. 350). With repeated acts of bullying on multiple levels, the cost of bullying takes its toll, psychologically, physically, emotionally, and financially on an individual (target), department, and university campus. A critical defining characteristic of workplace bullying is that it harms the health of the targeted individual (Query & Hanley, 2010, p. 5). Repeated and unaddressed bullying leads to but not limited health related concerns of high blood pressure, digestion problems, loss of sleep, stress-related health issues such as clinical depression, general anxiety disorders, and even post-traumatic-stress disorder (Query & Hanley, 2010, p.5). MacIntosh states that psychological abuse and hostility are reported more often than physical abuse (2005, p. 894). Agervold and Gemzoe Mikkelsen (2004) noted that frequent negative acts in the form of bullying behaviors predisposes the victim to psychological and psychosomatic symptoms and mental fatigue (p. 338) that correlate to high numbers of days away from work under sick leave options.

Depression and anxiety are other rudiments that have been identified as elements of fallout of academic bullying. Past research indicates that bullying behaviors can lead to work environments that have high levels of stress and anxiety that lead to low workplace productivity, inability to attract new hires, and a dysfunctional work environment. Careers are also damaged and lost at the hands of bullies. Bullying among faculty has an impact as well, on job performance, job satisfaction, productivity and faculty turnover and a stymied new hiring process. When bullying goes unaddressed and allowed to remain within the academe, it has the potential to debilitate and erode the system. Bullying fallout comes at a high cost to the



agency/campus/university (Fogg, 2008).

Victims of bullying are impacted in multiple ways. There is a psychological cost to employees when colleagues and the system choose to look the other way while bullies are attacking individuals. Ultimately, the psychological and emotional impact of bullying can have a physical impact on the individual. Seeking health care for physical and psychological relief is costly to the individual, the employer and to greater society. The academy needs to be more forthcoming in addressing such behaviors both directly with faculty and on the campus (Fogg, 2008).

### **Why bullies bully**

To develop a better understanding of academic bullying, it is important to address the motives and reasons why bullies bully. A review of the literature shows that there are many explanations for the workplace bully. These include the organizational culture, employer responses, and the personality characteristics of the target and the perpetrator.

#### **Organizational culture**

The nature of organizations, in and of themselves, cause bullying and organizational practices that promote workplace bullying (Rhodes, Pullen, Vickers, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2010). Organizational culture and/or environments frequently support bullying by creating insecurity and uneasiness amongst workers (De Cuyper, Baillien, & De Witte, 2009; Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003). These feelings trigger the bully into lashing out at their coworkers. Conflict at work can create a hostile work environment where bullying is used as a way workers relieve tensions; Thus, creating a culture which promotes poor behavior (De Cuyper, Baillien, & De Witte, 2009; Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003).

Academic settings by their very nature create insecurity, frustration, and competition.

Student evaluations and the tenure and promotion process are sources of frustration for faculty and particularly junior faculty. Collegiality and autonomy, although valued in higher education, are not promoted and often are contradicted. “Autonomy and collegiality are critical to academic freedom and the work of the academic, yet these norms are interpreted as preventing action to address what faculty view as problematic behaviors that, in turn, create a climate of non-collegiality” (Keashly & Nueman, 2010, p. 60). Tenure provides faculty with a sense of entitlement to misbehave and use feedback of others as a means of criticism rather than support causing harm to the target. This decreases collegiality and increases academic bullying (Keashly & Nueman, 2010).

Academic freedom is also a source of conflict on many college campuses (Keashly & Nueman, 2010). Under the umbrella of academic freedom, faculty are, “entitled” to teach their own way. As a result, perpetrators use these opportunities to bully because faculty may not be willing to conform. These unique characteristics of academic settings generate cultures and environments which cultivate and support academic bullies (Keashly & Nueman, 2010; De Cuyper, Baillien, & De Witte, 2009; Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003).

### **Responses of employers**

Academic settings are bureaucratic structures with rigid rules and regulations. As a result, they are not designed to deal with conflict between faculty members. Universities that have unions are also not equipped to work with faculty to faculty conflict. Unions are in place to work between faculty and administration (Keashly & Nueman, 2010). In some cases, unions may protect the bully.

The bully depends on promoting on the fear of the target and the targets silence so that silence about their hostility in organizations remains and the bully remains in control a while

advancing his/her own agenda. Silence in an organization and amongst managers exacerbates the bullying. In those cases, when targets report their victimization, organizations and employers frequently do not respond and if they did respond, their responses increased the bullying for victims (Namie, 2003). Managers and supervisors are not trained to handle bullying in the workplace, and therefore, responding effectively is not easy (Lewis, 2004).

Some universities are relying more on adjunct and part-time faculty due to the economic crisis. The use of part-time help enhances the hostile work environment because adjuncts are not permanent fixtures in the department and have little or no investment to maintain a healthy and collegial work environment. They are expendable and vulnerable. Thus, they often fall prey to academic bullies by becoming the target, by witnessing the bullying, or participating in a way to save their job (Keashly & Nueman, 2010).

### **The Target**

The personality of the target has been given as a reason that bullies bully (White, 2007, Einarsen, 1999, O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, & Smith, 1998; and Field, 1996). However, there is contradicting evidence about whether a victim's personality increases the likelihood that they will be bullied. Some research suggests that bullies may perceive the victim to be aggravating or annoying and therefore, they are bullied (Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003). Other research suggests that anyone is at risk of being bullied. If an individual has less power in the workplace (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994) more often than not they become the targets of choice.

Namie and Namie (2009) report that victims of bullying are people who generally have a solid work ethic. Targets want to heal the sick, teach and develop the young, care for the elderly, work with

the addicted and abused in society. They are ripe for exploitation. While they focus on doing good and noble things and wait to be rewarded for their quality work, they expose their backs for the bully to sink her or his claws into (Namie & Namie, 2009, p. 23)

### **Characteristics of the Perpetrator**

Personality characteristics of the perpetrator are attributed to perpetuating workplace violence. Perpetrators of bullying in the workplace often have been victims themselves of bullying in the past (Edwards & O'Connell, 2007; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2009). Bullies learn early on that lashing out was a viable form of self-preservation and thus, they continue to use these tactics in workplace settings (Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2009).

Perpetrators who are in positions of power may use their power to target victims (Farmer, 1993; Edwards & O'Connell, 2007). Supervisors and managers are often workplace bullies because they have more power than workers (Ortega, Hogh, Pejtersen, & Olsen, 2007).

Bullies may also suffer from low self-esteem and use bullying as a means to increase personal worth (Cooper, 1999; Edwards & O'Connell, 2007). The workplace bully may also have decreased coping skills which puts them at risk for bullying behavior (De Cuyper, Baillien, & De Witte, 2009; Jennifer, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003). According to Namie and Namie (2009), workplace bullies are go-getters who want to get ahead and they are willing to use abuse to do so.

According to Wiedmer (2011, p. 38) and the Bully Online (para 3) report that the bully at work often

- Possess vindictiveness in private but charming in public;
- Display self-assuredness to mask insecurity;

- Portray self as wonderful but actual behaviors contradict this
- Can't distinguish between leadership and bullying behaviors
- Counter attacks and denies when asked to clarify
- Manipulates others through guilt
- Are obsessed with controlling others
- Use charm and behave appropriately when superiors are present
- Are convincing and compulsive liars in order to account for matters at hand
- Excel at deception, lack conscience, and are dysfunctional

Employees and/or employers that repeat and are persistent with these behaviors at work are deemed workplace bullies (Wiedmer, 2011).

### **Effects of Workplace Bullying Faculty, Departments, and Universities**

Workplace and academic bullying affects not only the target and perpetrator but also other faculty, departments, and the university as a whole. The assumption is that the target is the one who suffers and that workplace bullying is in an individual trend, but research shows this is simply not the case. Workplace and academic bullying is devastating to all involved including the bully (Rhodes, Pullen, Vickers, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2010).

Absence from work and turnover of faculty are the biggest consequences of workplace bullying (Keashly, & Heuman, 2010). Targets and witnesses often leave or are driven out because of the stress and torment of the bully (Rhodes, Pullen, Vickers, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2010; Halbur, 2005). According to “the Corporate Leavers Survey, 2007, two million professionals voluntarily left their jobs due solely to workplace unfairness by not addressing bullying behaviors, and costing corporate America approximately \$64 billion annually” (Query & Hanley, 2010, p. 4).

The WBI-Zogby U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey found that “72 % of perpetrators of workplace violence directly influenced the targets livelihood, and used this to influence promotions, thus causing the person to leave their jobs” (Wiedmer, 2011, p. 36). The bully impacts the target and witnesses economic future, including loss of health insurance. The workplace bully’s tentacles reach out and impact greater society (Wiedmer, 2011, p. 36).

Faculty who experience a hostile work environment put their psychological and physical functioning at risk. According to the WBI-Zogby Survey, 45% of the targets of bullying suffer stress-related health problems (Wiedmer, 2011, p. 36). Individuals experience feelings of shame, humiliation, and inferiority which can cause anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and post traumatic stress disease (Wiedmer, 2011; Fogg, 2008, Namie, 2003; Duncan, 2004). Hostile work environments also increase an individual's risk for cardiovascular disease (Olendor-Russo, 2009; Namie, 2003) lead to increased smoking, alcohol and legal/illegal drug use, and suicide (Kiesecker & Marchant, 1999). Victims can experience mild to severe symptoms varying from short to long term (Olendor-Russo, 2009, p. 75). Kiesecker and Marchant (1999) say that even the victims’ personal life can be affected.

Workplace bullying diminishes overall job performance and satisfaction of faculty (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Witnesses and victims may withdraw in the workplace to avoid the conflict. Morale decreases which may result in low productivity. These responses in dealing with academic bullying may result in increased bullying. For example, lower productivity may result in lack of scholarship which lessens chances for tenure and promotion. The university also suffers when faculty lose their investment to the workplace because it harms students and decreases faculty loyalty (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Olendor-Russo, 2009; De Cuyper, Baillien,

& De Witte, 2009). Universities lose financially when students drop out of their programs because of faculty dissent.

Other individual's are silenced because they are fearful of being targeted and fearful of being retaliated against. As a result, targeted employees may participate in the bullying just to survive, thus making the hostile workplace even more conflicted. In these environments, workplace bullying is allowed to continue, litigation and grievances can occur. These occurrences can deplete organizational assets (Olendor-Russo, 2009, Lewis, 2004; Namie, 2003). In the most extreme cases, bullying, if left to fester, can result in violence in the workplace (Lewis, 2004; Namie, 2003)

The losses for organizations and universities that foster workplace violence are substantial. These may include "litigation and organization costs from staff turnover, long-term absences, potential workers' compensation claims, early retirement costs, and counseling program costs" (Kiesecker & Marchant, 1999, p. 66).

### **Solutions and Interventions**

Social work departments are not immune to academic bullying, and many social work departments are fostering hostile work environments. There is little to no research specifically addressing workplace bullying in social work departments across college campuses. However, informal interviews with social work faculty indicate that the experiences outlined in this paper have occurred to social work faculty. Faculty have left departments, experienced mental health and medical consequences, and withdrawn from their departments as a result of bullying.

Social work students have been caught in the middle of faculty and unconsciously coerced to become a tool in the bullying. Others have become the targets and bullied by faculty. Students have opted to leave social work education programs in order to escape unhealthy and

unsafe environments that results from academic bullying. As a result, it is important that this topic continue to be researched to protect social work faculty and students in the future.

Intervention in the bullying environment is critical for the creation and maintenance of a safe, functional and productive work environment. The literature recommends the creation of a community culture that does not tolerate bullying behavior at any level (Wiedmer, 2011). Stopping and preventing the bullying of personnel is the responsibility of everyone, but enforcement lies largely with the administration. Intervention will be discussed at four levels: 1) administration, 2) supervision (Motin, 2009, p. 3; Halbur, 2005) the collegial witness of bullying, and 4) the bullied (Halbur, 2005; Jennifer; 2000, Motin, 2000).

### **Administration**

The literature overwhelmingly places the responsibility for intervening in the culture of bullying on the administration, chair, dean, or vice president of the university. It is their responsibility to make sure that there is a safe environment for all employees. It is the administration's responsibility to make the workplace an environment where faculty are able to fulfill their responsibilities to the university and to be productive in areas of teaching, research, and scholarship.

### **Policy**

A way to ensure that the environment is safe is to implement a "no tolerance" policy regarding bullying (Weidmer, 2011; Motin, 2000; Namie, 2003). Currently, there are laws against sexual harassment and racial discrimination. Bullying is considered to be a form of discrimination equal to sexual harassment and racial discrimination. The impact of bullying on the victim has been compared to the experience of being raped (Motin, 2009). As a result, some employers might simply include a non-bullying statement in existing policy along-side policy



against other forms of discrimination. However, the literature recommends that a stand-alone non-bullying policy be developed (Wiedmer, 2011). A high-quality non-bullying policy would identify all forms of bullying, including relational aggression<sup>1</sup> and sexual harassment (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009).

An anti-bullying policy and defined procedures for implementation could include disciplinary actions, additional supervision and oversight, training/counseling and relationship building activities, and in some cases legal actions (Wiedmer, 2011). Managers and supervisors must be mandated to report bullying activity, and to move quickly to protect bullied employees from any retaliation and further harm. As a measure for prevention, employers might consider conducting and making public on-going assessments of the work climate (Wiedmer, 2011).

Employee's need to be encouraged and enabled to report bullying incidents in a timely manner. They need to see that actions to intervene are quick, fair, and ethical. A code of silence, often prevalent in cases of bullying, should not be tolerated (Weidmar, 2011). Employees need access to a formal and nonjudgmental reporting procedure regarding bullying activity (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009). Faculty need to feel safe when reporting suspected incidents of bullying, and trust the report will be taken seriously (Weidmar, 2011).

When problems in a work environment are continuously being blamed on one person, the chair or supervisor needs to investigate the situation for truthfulness, and then take appropriate action to protect the victim (Halbur, 2005).

Training for faculty, staff, and other employees would include increasing people skills, communication, teambuilding, conflict resolution, and functional ways to deal with change. Other possibilities might include stress management designed to build confidence and self-

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<sup>1</sup> Previously known as indirect bullying. Relational aggression or relational victimization is the manipulation of relationships or friendships in order to inflict emotional pain on another, such as gossiping, rumor-spreading, or exclusion from a group (Crouther, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009).

esteem without the need to directly modify the work environment. Creating a transparent environment where open communication is expected is important (Jennifer, 2000).

Locating and stretching competencies is a process often used by management in business to reengineer the work environment? The literature suggests that bullies often have a lowered sense of competence and self esteem. Emphasizing and stretching competencies will enhance self-esteem among the faculty and staff, and lower the potential for an atmosphere where bullying can take place. The emphasis on strengths in the environment and in the individual is consistent with the strengths perspective and the practice of social work in any context (Rayner, 2000).

### **Respectful Work Environment**

Employers, supervisors, and administrators can create a respectful work environment where bullying is not allowed to exist. Actions that can be taken include 1) showing appreciation, 2) treating employees like insiders, and 3) demonstrating empathy for others, 4) treating one another with dignity, 5) communication that is inclusive and does not exclude or control, 6) responses that are respectful and demonstrate interest in the person, 7) acknowledgment of the thoughts and feelings of others, 8) the modeling of respectful communication, 9) providing clear and informative answers to legitimate and appropriate questions, 10) demonstrating behavior that is encouraging, supportive, and presents others in positive ways, 11) always seeking to connect and build communication in positive ways (Weidmer, 2011).

Namie (2003) notes that employee led solutions are effective. He recommends a four step process for developing and enforcing an anti-bullying policy. First the policy should be a value-driven policy. This would include provisions such as a declaration of unacceptability expressing the organizations displeasure with misconduct. There should be the development of a comprehensive, hostile workplace protection plan. This plan would extend rights to everyone,

regardless of whether or not they have a protected group status. An inescapable definition of bullying that clarifies the threshold for taking action. Offer a non-punitive separation for safety that places bullying in the health/safety domain. Documentation of the adverse impact of bullying is a way to discourage frivolous complaints or the abuse of policy, and to illuminate a perpetrators pattern and practice over time. Second, the establishment of a credible enforcement processes. This process would provide a third party investigation and adjudication process. It would foster employee trust, and remove the influence of personal relationships. Provide a listing of progressive disciplinary actions rather than a zero tolerance policy, in order to allow for change in conduct. Establish a clear statement against retaliation, and a plan to count offenses of retaliation separately for the purpose of stopping the cycle of violence (Namie, 2003).

Third, the establishment of interventions designed to restore at-risk teams and individuals. This would include such provisions as coaching for identified perpetrators with employment-contingent change contracts. Arrange for interviews with affected work-teams to identify those most harmed. Provide counseling for those harmed by bullies. Fourth, provide general and specialized education for administrators and employees on bullying, the consequences, intervention, and prevention. This would provide an executive orientation on the subject and require a commitment from management to pursue and uphold the policy. Training activity should also include Human Resource personnel, Anti-discrimination Officers, and Risk Managers. Fifth, provide training for all employees and obtain a commitment for the implementation of the policy (Namie, 2003).

### **Supervision**

It is important for supervisors and other managers to assure their employee that the place of employment is one where respect and civility prevail. They are responsible for building and

maintaining a healthy bully-free culture. Supervisors need to be diligent in the identification of bullies, the protection of the bullied, and making interventions to stop bullying, take quick action to show that such behavior will not be tolerated, and enforce a clear plan for action (Wiedmer, 2011). United efforts to define and implement clearly developed policies, establish model practices, and supporting the courage to stand up to bullies, will move the culture closer to stopping bullying activities (Wiedmer, 2011). Employer led voluntary solutions are considered to be the most likely solutions to succeed (Namie, 2003). Remember, all employees need to “feel physically, emotionally, and socially safe and to believe they are valued and belong” (Wiedmer, 2011, p. 37).

### **Colleagues Who Witness Bullying**

Bullying seldom occurs in isolation. Often bullies will befriend and seek out other individuals who are prone to bully. It is important for employees to feel safe and free to speak up as a witness for someone who is being bullied (Wiedmer, 2011). Making note of what happened, and documenting for day, date, and time are helpful.

### **Targets of Bullies**

There are limited but important things that can be done by an individual who is the recipient of bullying behavior. It is important to stay focused on work, maintain a calm and professional demeanor, and plan ahead to deescalate a situation before it occurs (Wiedmer, 2011). An important decision is to decide if you are going to leave, or stay and fight (Motin, 2009). Motin (2009) lists three important steps for the victim. 1.) Know and believe that you did not do anything to deserve this treatment. 2.) Begin keeping detailed notes of when bullying or mobbing occurs, and a list of witnesses to what was said and done. If there were witnesses, you need to ask them to write down what they saw and heard. Although, over time, witnesses tend to

retreat in fear that they will be drawn into dissension or become the next target of the bully. 3) Tell your family and close friends what is happening. However, you might need to be prepared to educate your friends and family on bullying, as the initial tendency is to ask the victim what they had done to bring this upon themselves.

### **Bullying and the Values and Ethics of Social Workers**

The values and ethics of the social work profession can serve as a guide for our profession in dealing with bullying. The values of our profession include:

**Service-** to help other people in need and address social problems,

**Social Justice-**challenging social injustice,

**Dignity and worth of the person--**to respect the inherent dignity and worth of all persons,

**The importance of human relationships-**the recognition that our relationships are of critical importance,

**Integrity--**behaving in a trustworthy manner and

**Competence--**practicing in areas of competence and developing our professional expertise (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008).

The ethical standards of the social work profession are described as a way of guiding our actions. They include our responsibilities not only to our clients, but to our colleagues, our practice setting (including our workplace), as professionals, to our profession and to broader society. As social workers, we have a broad scope of responsibility to our profession. In turn, the values outlined in the code of ethics, requires all social workers to behave responsibly. The values and responsibilities for ethical behavior supports the intervention of social workers who experience and observe workplace bullying.

## **Implications of our values and ethics**

In examining workplace bullying in light of our professional commitment to *service*, it is ironic that as professionals we often work with clients who are experiencing bullying and may simultaneously be experiencing bullying ourselves. One might ask if we are we really *competent* to help others under these circumstances. At the very least, we have strong obligations to develop our understanding of bullying to adhere to this value and behave with *integrity*, another value of our profession.

To address the value of social justice, our professional code of ethics suggests that we need to challenge *social injustice*. Can we do this if we are the victim of bullying in our own workplaces? And, how do we begin this challenging endeavor? One way is to explore the literature to find out how others professions have addressed bullying in the workplace. Our profession asks us to *respect the dignity and worth of all persons* and emphasized the *importance of human relationships*. How do we do this when bullying eats away at the dignity and worth of those being bullied and makes positive human relationships difficult?

Though literature in the field of workplace bullying is exploding, little has been found in the literature that addresses bullying as an issue for social workers. Thus far, the majority of the articles on ethical issues related to bullying can be found in the literature on business ethics. JThe literature on business ethics provides insight into the parameters of bullying, and insight for social workers in departments where bullying occurs, and the impact it may be having on the profession.

Rhodes et al., (2010) explores what the organizations' responsibilities are in these settings. "Bullying is a deliberate act of violence that aims to hurt another person." (Rhodes et

al., 2010, p. 97). LaVan and Martin (2008) say that it is not remarkable that bullying in the workplace is commonly regarded as unethical behavior. Little research has been found on the ethical aspects of bullying (Wornham, 2003). Legally “while organizations cannot be held responsible for individual acts of violence, they are to be held responsible for a form of self-critique that leads to an ongoing vigilance in seeking to address and minimize the presence of such acts and the relationships in which they occur.” (Rhodes et al., 2010, p. 97)

The literature supports five helpful insights into bullying. 1) Often, bullying is not an individual or interpersonal issue, and the role of the organization in which it occurs should not be underplayed (Rhodes, et. al., 2008). 2) Bulling is unethical because it is deliberately harmful. 3) Bullying is an ethical issue located in the *relationship* between people, representing irresponsibility in one’s relationships with others. It is a form of violence, and present in every forms of bullying (Levinas, 1969, 1999). 4) Bullying can be divided into two categories, subjective violence, carried out by an individual, and objective violence, carried out by institutions (Rhodes 2008). Rhodes (2008) argues that objective violence is much less accounted for in society. 5) Objective violence may enable and perpetuate subjective bullying relationships. At best organizations allow bullying to occur within the work environment, and at worst they encourage subjective acts bullying.

The literature does not offer any direct solutions to the problems of work place bullying, and is more silent on the manifestation of academic bullying. Most sources regarding bullying agreed that the responsibility and solution would lay with the organizations willingness to embrace the issue and assume responsibility for “vigilant eradication” (Rhodes, 2010, p. 110) of subjective bullying, but also the organizational conditions that enabled subjective bullying to take place.

Placing responsibility with the administration of the organization and seeking vigilantly for eradication of bullying behaviors is consistent with the values and ethics of the profession of social work. The social work code of ethics is a standard that should guide our efforts to combat all forms of bullying.

As social workers, we value *service* to others, which includes addressing social problems such as bullying within our workplace. We are obligated to advocate for *social justice* and to challenge social injustice which is inherent in bullying. We are asked to respect the *dignity and worth of all persons* which cannot be achieved if bullying is occurring in our workplace. We are asked to recognize the *importance of human relationships* when bullying occurs.

We are asked to demonstrate *integrity* by behaving in a trustworthy manner which is challenging to achieve if bullying is occurring among our colleagues or within our workplace. Finally, we are asked to demonstrate *competence* which includes developing professional knowledge in dealing with bullying when it occurs in our workplace.

These values must be applied when we encounter bullying, when we work with clients, in our relationships with colleagues in the workplace, and when we interact with other professionals. These contacts include those contacts within our profession and those within the broader society. The consideration and application of the Social Work code of ethics will move us forward in our attempts to understand and address workplace bullying as it occurs in academic environments.

### **Conclusion**

Academic bullying is becoming more commonplace in university settings. Social work is not immune to this phenomenon that has emerged across academic campuses. As professional social workers, it is our responsibility to address these issues. Because of the ethical



commitment to social justice, social workers are in the best position to talk about and address this issue. If we, as professional social workers, cannot talk about bullying, and if we cannot do something to intervene on behalf of ourselves and our colleagues, then who will?

Solutions must be developed to create safe collegial work environments for social work faculty that align with the professions code of ethics. Academic bullying should be addressed at all levels, and faculty should use their practice training to create solutions for alleviating academic bullying, including but not limited to: admitting the problem exist, developing solutions directed toward eliminating bullying in the academic environment, and advocacy that supports addressing the underlying issues that foster unrest and the emergence of bullying behaviors. It is imperative that creative problem solving take place in university social work departments and university campuses to prevent and stop academic bullying.

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