

DISSERTATION APPROVED BY

June 1, 2018
Date

Bill Raynovich, Ed.D.
Bill Raynovich, Ed.D., Chair

Peggy L. Hawkins, Ph.D.
Peggy Hawkins, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jennifer Moss Breen
Jennifer Moss Breen, Ph.D., Director

Gail M. Jensen
Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean

THE ROLE OF POWER PARADIGMS IN ORGANIZATIONAL BULLYING

By
KIMBERLY DOLAN

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Kimberly M. Dolan

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the lived experiences of eleven individuals, hailing from mid-level to large for-profit organizations, who experienced organizational bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership perspective. The primary data collection method utilized in this study was a single in-depth interview from a snowball sampling. The data were coded and analyzed in accordance to the research questions. Three major themes emerged out of the experiences shared by the participants: I) the greater the power distance, the more frequently supervisor-to-employee bullying occurred; II) the smaller the power distance the more frequently peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor/manager bullying occurred; III) work environments were seen as more frequently threatening or hostile when the participants perceived they had less power. The researcher analyzed the themes from the participants lived experiences through the lens of *adaptive leadership*. This study revealed that when there was an increase in perceived power distances, there was an increase in the frequency of top-down organizational bullying, and there was an increase in the frequency of peer-to-peer bullying as well as employee-to-manager bullying when there was the presence of a small perceived power distance. A conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that the more perceived power one feels they possess the more apt they are to exert their perceived power or defend the possession of their perceived power. When perceived-power-holders felt ineffectual or incompetent, they were more likely to disparage, harass, or otherwise bully their subordinate(s). Recommendations are offered for peer-to-peer, employee-to-manager, and manager-to-employee(s) relationships, and workplace cultural improvements and for further research possibilities. Because there are unique dynamics

that contribute to organizational bullying, the recommendations should be considered and applied on an individual organizational basis.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is first dedicated to my husband, Andrew. His constant support and endless words of encouragement have been remarkable throughout the past six years. I would also dedicate this to my father, Brian, who pushed me to think beyond the known and encouraged me to act courageously in times when others could not. Finally, I would also dedicate this to my grandmother, Charlotte, who continues to inspire me with her charitable work and her thirst for knowledge.

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A great deal of time was spent with my face buried in journal articles and behind a computer, which took me away from my friends and family. I wanted to thank my father and father-in-law, Brian and Andrew, for their support and thoughtful words of encouragement throughout this journey. I also wanted to thank my mother, Shirley, for her repeated words of encouragement and steadfast support.

I would like to thank the individuals who participated in this study. I am grateful for the time they took out their busy schedules to meet with me and share their personal experiences. I want them to know that their stories helped me look at leadership with a clearer lens and have made me a better group member, leader, and community member.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Organizational bullying is a problem that has started to gain traction due to recent research illustrating the adverse effects bullying has on organizational culture. As discussed by Peter Randall in *Adult bullying: Perpetrators and victims* (1997), one agreed upon definition of bullying does not exist, especially when it comes to adult bullying, which places additional limitations on organizations attempting to address this issue *via* the implementation of policies. One of the primary effects adult bullying has on organizational culture is that it creates an inverse relationship with productivity, so, as bullying increases productivity decreases. According to Stouten et al. (2010), if the expectation of pro-social behavior—behavior that is intended to benefit the greater good—is not clearly communicated the employees will become “targets of morally questionable” work environments thus increasing the chances of the work environment souring and perpetuating the bullied-bullying abuse cycle, which, in return, leads to an overall decrease in long-term productivity (p. 19).

There has been a growing body of research illustrating the relationship between power and organizational bullying. Furthermore, some, but not all, power research has suggested that the more perceived power one has (*e.g.*, one who possesses money, and/or knowledge, thus decreasing their dependence on social norms) the greater the chance of organizational bullying. Specifically, one who perceives they possess power may be more inclined to denigrate others, show aggression, and develop negative stereotypes of their perceived subordinates. For instance, Lammers, Stoker, and Stapel (2009) revealed

that people with a lot of personal power were “less inclined to spend the extra effort to individuate and make sense of others,” but rather they simply relied on automatic cognition, in particular, on stereotypes as a base for their decision making process (1544). From a cultural standpoint, Lammers, Stapel, and Galinsky (2010) proposed that because high-powered roles are culturally associated with the right to judge other people, to maintain social and moral norms, they were more likely to display moral hypocrisy when ensuring other people follow them. Given these findings, organizations are not only faced with the effect bullying has on their productivity levels, but they are faced with identifying and addressing abuses of power.

One of the more challenging aspects of the role perceived power plays in organizational bullying is that organization leaders’ generally struggle to fully identify and address covert organizational abuses of power, which are often creating a toxic work environment. With studies indicating that between 38% to 90% of workers reported that they experienced or witnessed workplace bullying within the preceding six months, Vega and Comer (2005) have surmised that the cost adult bullying has had on both society (*e.g.*, costs of mental and physical health care) and a loss of organizational profit margins is incalculably large. Moreover, according to the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) (2014), for each person driven out of the workplace due to organizational bullying, who earned a \$50,000 salary, the recruiting and replacement expenses will be approximately \$75,000 and, most often more. Moreover, organizational bullying can cost an organization lost revenues attributable to a talented target. For example, if an employee was responsible for five clients that produced \$1.4 million in revenue, the bullies could

cost the organization all five accounts if the employee were to leave the organization (WBI, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Up to 2017, research on workplace bullying has focused primarily on work-related and individual causes in relation to traditional leader and subordinate roles of power. To further illustrate the need for a better understanding of the phenomenon of organizational abuse of power, Fast, Halevy, and Galinsky's (2011) research showed that the abuse of power can occur at all levels of an organization and is often perpetrated by individuals who have perceived power as opposed to official authoritative, or formal power positions.

Furthermore, recent studies, that have assessed organizational bullying and the origins of organizational abuse of power, have uncovered that abuse of power is not specific to leaders abusing followers, but rather there is a high incidence of individuals on all levels of an organization, with high-legitimate and/or perceived power and low-status, displaying demeaning behavior towards others. In fact, Salin's (2008) research uncovered that bullying is not restricted to tyrannical types of leadership behavior, but rather it can also occur among colleagues at the same hierarchical level or even upwards (*e.g.*, subordinate bullying a manager). To be more specific, one's position within an organization is not as strong of a motivator for abuse of power as possessing legitimate power, yet many organizational leaders still approach bullying from the perspective that demeaning behavior must come from the top down.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of organizational power paradigms and their possible relationship(s) with bullying.

Open Ended Discovery Question

The overarching question for this study was: How do victims, observers, and leaders describe their lived experience of organizational bullying? The primary open-ended discovery question asked during the participant interviews was: *Please tell me a story about a time you experienced organizational bullying?* Several follow-up open-ended questions (Appendix B) were asked to help discover more about the participants lived experience of organizational bullying. By utilizing open-ended questions, this study was able to uncover the participant's experiences, make meaning of their experiences from the themes that arose from the interviews, and uncovered the possible implication of the relationship between power paradigms and organizational bullying.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to extract patterns and develop overarching themes of the role power paradigms play in the inception of organizational bullying in an effort to establish an association between the study participants lived experience of organizational bullying and current empirical data.

Methodology Overview

This study utilized a qualitative research design, transcendental phenomenology, to examine the lived experiences of eleven participants who have experienced organizational bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership standpoint. The participants derived their lived experiences from mid-sized for-profit organizations and

large for-profit organizations. The vocational makeup of the participants in this study was line manager(s), staff manager(s), executive(s), line employee(s), and staff employee(s). All participants were chosen from a snowball sampling and relied on self-reporting of their experience with organizational bullying.

Definition of Relevant Terms

Bullying: A form of negative interaction that can express itself in many ways, ranging from verbal aggression and excessive criticism and/or monitoring of work to social isolation or silent treatment (Salin, 2008).

Mobbing: Term used to describe the collective behavior of abusive ganging up on a worker (Duffy, 2009).

Perceived Power: A form of power derived from ones belief that they possess power (Fast, et al., 2011).

Legitimate Power: A form of power derived from one's ability to produce a sense of obligation on the part of the subordinate (Fast, et al., 2011).

Reward power: The result of a powerholders ability to compensate the target person for compliance (Kipnis, 1976).

Coercive power: The powerholder believes that they can control the punishment of noncompliant targets (Kipnis, 1976).

Expert power: The powerholders high skill level and knowledge command the right to prescribe behavior to subordinates (Kipnis, 1976).

Informational power: The powerholders ability to control information others need to accomplish a goal or act (Kipnis, 1976).

Referent power: the powerholder has power because they are admired and seen as worthy and/or have the right to subordinates respect (Kipnis, 1976).

Horizontalizing: When every statement is given equal value to eliminate duplicate and/or irrelevant statement in order to uncover the horizons (Moustakas, 1994).

Horizons: Textural meanings of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche: The process of suspending all judgments, usually through the process of bracketing (Moustakas, 1994)

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

This study was delimited in that a) all of the participants lived experiences were from the for-profit business sector, b) a majority of the lived experiences were comprised of participants with white-collar jobs.

Limitations

This study was limited in its findings in that a) the author was not granted access to journals, diaries, copies of organizational policies, and other potential meaning making data, c) due to concerns of a possible privacy breaches and/or organizational retribution, all of the participants were unwilling to participate in a second interview, d) some of the participants worked in the same organization(s) and may have known each other professionally, e) the researcher had professional and/or personal relationships with some of the participants, f) the researcher's prior connection with some of the participant's added the additional challenge of protecting their anonymity, g) potentially recognizable organizational anecdotes were often iterated throughout the participant's interviews, h)

possible awareness of the shared connections may have made the participants unwittingly reticent throughout the study, i) the focus of this phenomenological study was limited to the perspective of individuals hailing from mid-size (over 100 employees) to large for-profit organizations, j) the researchers personal experiences of organizational bullying from both a victim as well as a leader elicited a biased lens, which required additional bracketing prior to the interviews and prior to data analysis, k) the study was limited to only eleven research subjects, largely due to voluntary withdrawals of subjects that was due to sensitivity and perceived risks of participation of the subjects who withdrew.

Leader's Role and Responsibility in Relation to the Problem

The author applied an adaptive leadership lens throughout the entirety of this Dissertation in Practice study. By addressing the adaptive challenge of organizational bullying, this study will enable leaders to identify their capacity to adapt to bullying events by giving them a better understanding of the role power paradigms play in bullying events; specifically, the role power distance(s) play in organizational bullying. In other words, by utilizing an adaptive lens, this study provides leaders with the ability to diagnose their organizational system as issues arise.

As discussed in *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world* (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009) adaptive leaders must first identify the adaptive challenge *via* the identification of the “technical and adaptive elements” before organizational change can occur (p. 70). By identifying the quantitative technical elements in the literature review and identifying the qualitative adaptive elements from lived experiences, this study gives leaders the ability to identify

possible causes of organizational bullying, which allows them to develop courses of action to prevent bullying in their organizations.

Significance of the Study

Historically, our societal perspective of organizational bullying has been characterized as “aggressive behavior arising from the deliberate intent to cause physical and psychological distress to others” that has positional implications (Littlechild, 1997, p. 790). In other words, most organizational leaders assume that organizational bullying occurs when a person, in an official position of authority, abuses their power. However, attributing outward acts of aggression, as a primary indicator of systemic abuses, is an oversimplification of bullying. By oversimplifying an already misunderstood phenomenon, leaders are unable to foster collaboration and open lines of communication throughout their organization, as well as unable to develop effective organizational policies that can fully address internal abuses of power. By establishing a convergent baseline between power and bullying, leaders can more readily identify abuses of power among their employees and peers.

Summary

This chapter provides a brief description of this study, including an introduction, purpose, aim, and research design. Specifically, this study utilized a qualitative research design, transcendental phenomenology, to examine the lived experiences of eleven participants who have experienced organizational bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership standpoint. A list of relevant terms and their definitions was provided as well as limitations and delimitations. A brief discussion on the role of the adaptive leadership model, in relation to how it can help leaders more readily grapple with abuses of power,

among their employees, is presented. Last, a brief historical background on the oversimplification of the phenomenon of organizational bullying as well as the importance of establishing a convergent baseline between power and bullying was presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will briefly delve into the current literature that will inform this phenomenological research. The purpose of the literature review, in relation to this phenomenological research, is to provide a theoretical framework to inform the design, conceptualization and implementation of this study. For this reason, this literature review is not comprehensive in nature but rather it is explored through the lens of providing necessary knowledge of literacy to aid in the implementation of this study. This chapter is organized into categories including: a brief description of phenomenology, bullying in the context of organizations, the role perceived power plays in organizational bullying, and the role of leadership in organizational bullying. The chapter concludes with a review of complexity leadership theory and adaptive leadership. The goal of the following review of supporting scholarship is to position my dissertation in practice in a solid knowledge base, as well as provide a research background that will contribute to the organizational bullying conversation and the implications of power within organizations. Specifically, the role of power paradigms in organizations and the relationship between perceived power and organizational bullying.

Phenomenology

Historically, the term phenomenology had been used by philosophers like Kant, Descartes and Hegel, however, the application of phenomenology in research was pioneered by Edmond Husserl, who “developed a philosophic system rooted in subjective openness” as an approach to scientific inquiry (Moustakas, 1994, p. 25). Yet, it was not

until Husserl “employed phenomenology in discoveries of knowledge and in theories and applications of human science” that phenomenology transitioned from philosophical applications to a scientific application (p. 25). Husserl believed that one’s perceptions go beyond the physical aspects of an object, which is why information gained *via* the detailed description of one’s experience(s), provides a more complete understanding of the essence of their experience(s) because every experience provides meaning (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014). The methodology of transcendental phenomenology has four interconnected steps: 1) the epoche; 2) phenomenological reduction; 3) imaginative variation; and 4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014). These four interwoven steps help ensure that the wholeness of the participants’ lived experiences can be observed and heard.

Bullying in Organizations

Bullying Nomenclature

Adult bullying in organizations is a problem that has started to gain traction due to an influx of research illustrating the adverse effects bullying has on organizational culture (Vega & Comer, 2005). However, as discussed by Peter Randall in *Adult Bullying: Perpetrators and Victims* (1997), one agreed upon definition of bullying does not exist. This does not mean scholars have not tried to establish a universal definition but rather the very nature of bullying makes it difficult to delineate a set of behaviors that definitively identify organizational bullying.

From a historical perspective, bullying has been characterized as “aggressive behavior arising from the deliberate intent to cause physical and psychological distress to others,” which was broken down into three categories: (1) aggressive behavior or

intentional harm doing; (2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time; (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power (Littlechild, 1997, p. 790; Smith, 2002). Yet as medium and large organizations become more globally enterprising and complex so does the context of organizational bullying, which has led to more nomenclature confusion on the international platform.

Despite differences in the details, researchers do seem to agree that the definition of organizational bullying can be broken down into two types of bullying: (1) dispute-related bullying, which is a result of an unresolved and/ or escalating conflict; (2) predatory bullying, where the bully picks and pursues a target in an attempt to eliminate the target from their sphere of influence (Einarsen, 2000; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006; Rayner & Keashly, 2005). Scandinavian researchers have categorized organizational bullying down into six main categories: (1) slander, gossip, and rumors spread about the person; (2) giving their target too few or simple tasks; (3) social exclusion; (4) continuous criticism of the persons work; (5) threat of physical violence or actual physical violence; (6) make insinuations about the persons mental health and/ or personal failings to change the image of the bullied person in a negative way. All of which are done with the goal of manipulating the victims reputation, disrupting the victims ability to perform work tasks, altering the victims social circumstances, closing off channels of communication with co-workers, and the intent to harm the victims overall well-being (Einarsen, 2000; Finne, Knardahl, & Lau, 2011; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). With the advent of bullying awareness as well as a better understanding of the long-term harmful effects, regarding the organizations bottom line and potential disruptions to the organizations cultural dynamics, international bullying research has brought about an increased interest in

determining the frequency and risks of organizational bullying for occupational groups within the United States (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009).

Recent changes and expansions in bullying nomenclature have yet to be fully integrated into organizations within the United States, thus inhibiting leadership's ability to counteract bullying events as they arise. Furthermore, without a clear definition, organizations and workers are often left to fend for themselves and respond to organizational bullying on a case-by-case basis (Duffy, 2009). Salin (2008) suggested that in order to counteract organizational bullying the *nomenclature* surrounding workplace bullying needs to be clearly defined. Specifically, the development of anti-bullying policies, trainings, and conflict resolution programs that clearly define workplace bullying need to explicitly outline behavioral expectations of employees and clearly illustrate the deleterious vocational costs to the perpetrator. If the expectation of pro-social behavior is not clearly communicated, the employees will become targets of ethically questionable work environments, thus increasing the chances of the work environment souring and perpetuating the bullied-bullying abuse cycle, which in return leads to an overall decrease in long-term productivity and an increase in fractured team's (Stouten et al., 2010).

How Bullying Manifests in Organizations

It can be difficult for organizational leaders to identify the way in which workplace bullying is occurring due to both the ever-evolving definition of workplace bullying and recent research unveiling the role that perceived power can play in the systemic abuse of power. To that end, Salin (2008), in an attempt to analyze preventative

measures taken by Human Resource teams to reduce workplace bullying, noted that organizational bullying can present itself in several ways.

Overt Bullying

When looking into the pattern of bullying, researchers have found that both overt and covert bullying is present in organizations. Yet when it comes gaining a better understanding of the most identifiable and most publicized form of bullying, overt bullying, researchers have struggled to identify preventative applications that can be applied in organizational settings. With that having been said, researchers have begun to gain a better understanding of the many components of overt bullying. Specifically, overt organizational bullying is often displayed in public humiliation, abusive language in emails, repeatedly threatening dismissal, harassment, withholding pay/ bonuses (*e.g.*, excluding employee from overtime opportunities), open physical aggression, open verbal aggression, threatening co-worker(s) in public, changing standards to adversely affect ones job performance, hiding documents and/or equipment, and blocking employee promotion(s) (Rayner & Keashly, 2005; Vega & Comer, 2005). All of which often has the desired effect of intimidation, humiliation, to punish, and to frighten the target, thus leading to a cultural and organizational assumption that overt bullying is the most commonly used form of bullying (Leymann, 1996; Einarsen, et al., 2009; Salin, 2008).

Covert Bullying

However, as overt aggressive behaviors have become more socially unacceptable, many manifestations of aggression have transformed into covert hostility. More to the point, aggression in organizational settings has transitioned from observable behavior to subtle actions that are less detectible and traceable, which presents a new set

of challenges for organization leaders with regards to identifying bullying behaviors (Crawford, 1999; Wornham, 2003). When attempting to identify workplace bullying/mobbing, researchers have found that covert bullying can present itself as behaviors such as group manipulation (*e.g.*, gossiping, spreading rumors, seed planting), unfair task allocation (*e.g.*, giving an employee demeaning, menial tasks in addition to their work load to bog them down), withholding information necessary for task execution, creating the impression that the target is the problem (*e.g.*, when problems arise manager will identify an employee as the cause of the problems and will set the scene to redirect attention to the intended target, AKA: the red herring); all of which having the intended result of devaluation, discrediting, humiliation, degradation, and in many cases overpowering the target in an attempt to remove them from the perpetrators sphere of influence (Duffy, 2009; Sommerfeld, Krambeck, & Milinski, 2008; Vega & Comer, 2005). Moreover, two of the most commonly used covert bullying tactics is gossiping and spreading rumors (DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994; Michelson, Van Iterson, & Weddington, 2010).

It is a commonly held belief that gossip is a universal form of informal talk that often takes place in organizations to pass the time. Yet, there have been several theoretical perspectives that have found that gossip is not an innocuous part of organizational communication, happening on a micro level of intergroup relationships, with no impact on external environments (Jones, Watson, Gardner, & Gallios, 2004). Rather, gossip affects the larger organizational network with both positive and negative results. For example, Ogasawara's (1998) ethnography on Japanese *office ladies* (female clerical workers) and *salaried men* (male managers) illustrated how gossip can be used as

a means to empower and lend a voice to individuals with a limited power base.

Specifically, the ethnography illustrated how low-powered women were able to shift power away from their male managers by utilizing gossip to influence their manager's reputation, thereby influencing the male manager's future promotion opportunities.

Another possible benefit of gossip, from a managerial perspective, is that by tapping into the informal employee gossip networks, managers can "determine the early effects of new programs and practices by gauging reactions to them" *via* the office gossip trends (Michelson, Van Iterson, & Weddington, 2010, p. 376). However, the complexity of the gossip trends and the diverse contexts of the gossip networks are easily exploited.

There are a number of ways in which gossip can be used to exploit the informal networks of communication in organizations (*e.g.*, predicting a manager's behavior). One of the more common applications of gossiping is to damage a target's character with the intent of promoting self-interest and self-image, devaluating the target's reputation, and controlling the narrative of the informal social networks (Doyle, 2000; Michelson, 2010; Suls, 1977). Also, by chipping away at a target's reputation, gossipers' are essentially disabling a target's ability to engage in the process of indirect reciprocity with fellow organization members, thus shifting in-group and out-group power differentials (Kniffin & Wilson, 2010; Nowak & Sigmund, 2005; Suls, 1977). The importance of indirect reciprocity and one's reputation is that when people make the decisions to help others, they often base their decision on the potential recipient's reputation (Sommerfeld, Krambeck, & Milinski, 2008). If a recipient's reputation has been diminished, or damaged (*e.g.*, *via* gossip) then peers are less likely to support them, which makes the target less capable of defending himself or herself from bullying. In other words, bullies

will methodically use gossip to set the target up to fail, while elevating their own reputation in the process (White, 2002).

Consequences of Organizational Bullying

Consequences for the Bullied

With between 38% to 90% of workers having experienced and/or witnessed workplace bullying, Vega and Comer (2005) have surmised that the cost workplace bullying has had on both society (*e.g.*, costs of mental and physical health care) and organizational profit margins is incalculable (Glendinning, 2001). However, in an effort to quantify the adverse effects of workplace bullying, Finne, Knardahl, and Lau's (2011) longitudinal study measured the relationship between workplace bullying and mental distress and found that there was a cumulative relationship between bullying and depression as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, thus increasing a victim's chances of calling in sick and, even quitting.

Research has suggested that organizational bullying can often result in psychosomatic symptoms including headaches, gastric inflammation, hypertension, widespread somatic pain, respiratory distress, and cardiac complaints (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). Furthermore, targets of bullying often experience feelings of helplessness, an inability to sleep restfully, a loss of ability to concentrate on work, an increase in emotional liability, a loss of fluency with words, memory lapses, and aggressive behaviors, such as retaliating (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006; White, 2002). The mental health costs as well as physical health costs of organizational bullying have recently begun to garner more attention because many organizations have started to

appreciate a cumulative effect on productivity and healthcare costs as well as recruitment costs, third party costs, and expertise loss costs.

Consequences for Organizations

According to the World Bullying Institute (WBI) (2014), for each person that earned a \$50,000 annual salary, who is driven out of an organization due to bullying, the recruiting and replacement expenses would equal or exceed \$75,000. Early Scandinavian research revealed that productivity loss combined with costs regarding interventions by third parties may cost organizations between US \$30,000 and \$100,000 per year for each individual case (Leymann, 1990). A good example of this is if an employee was responsible for five clients that produced \$1.4 million in revenue, the bullies could cost the organization all five accounts if the employee were to leave the organization (WBI, 2014). What this illustrates is that bullies, if left unchecked, can cost an organization lost revenues attributable to the loss of top talent targets.

Biological and Social Correlates

With quantitative data illustrating the potential after-effects of workplace bullying on the victims, as well as the organizations bottom line, Stouten, et al. (2010) sought to illustrate how adult bullying, specifically workplace bullying, is the result of a complex and multi-causal process that incorporates individual characteristics as well as the workplace environment. When delving into possible biological characteristics of bullies, some researchers have concluded that bullies may possess innate-biologically inherited characteristics that encourage bullying behaviors (Harvey, Treadway, Heames, & Duke, 2009; Boddy, 2011; & Caponecchia, Sun, & Wyatt, 2012). Specifically, individuals with these inherited characteristics are not predisposed to bullying behaviors but rather, these

characteristics only present themselves when triggered. In other words, bullying behaviors correlate strongly with physical acts of aggression in the workplace and an individual's youthful history of aggressive antisocial behaviors, have been identified in approximately "one-third to one-half of all cases," whereas individuals who displayed nonphysical bullying in the workplace had no historical antisocial indicators (p. 31).

In Clive R. Boddy's (2011) research on bullying in the workplace and the presence of corporate psychopaths, he found that "26% of all of the incidents of individuals ever witnessing unfavorable treatment of others (bullying) at work were associated with the presence of corporate psychopaths," which implies that a large number of corporate bullies are psychopaths (people who have no conscience, inability to have feelings, have limited emotions, and lack empathy for others)(p.377). However, there is growing concern among some researchers that the use of the term *psychopath*, when behaviorally qualifying workplace bullying, implies that psychopaths are the rule when considering unacceptable workplace behavior, rather than the exception because they only make up 1% of our population (Caponecchia, Sun, & Wyatt, 2012; Rayner & Keashly, 2005). To illustrate the assertion of inappropriate applications of the term *psychopath* among workers, Caponecchia, Sun, and Wyatt (2012) gave 307 participants a survey, consisting of a behavioral checklist, used by professionals to see how likely they were to rate others as psychopaths. The study revealed that bullied participants as well as non-bullied participants were more apt to rate their coworkers as psychopaths when they did not have the behavioral criteria on hand, yet, were more conservative in their judgment when using the checklist while filling out their survey, thus illustrating how

easy it is to inadvertently assume biology is to blame and to misapply the term *psychopath* when discussing organizational bullying.

When exploring the social implications of organizational bullying, there has yet to be consensus on the social correlates. For instance, some studies have found that organizational bullying may be caused—due to possible preexisting mental health issues and/or past bullying experience(s)—by the victims' perception that their work environment is threatening, which can lead to the view that they are being treated unfairly (Neilson, Hetland, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2012). Conversely, there is a large body of research attributing organizational bullying to chaotic work environments, low organization moral standards, deficiency in organization designs, deficiency in leadership behavior, socially exposed position of the victim, and in a large number of cases, envy (Einarsen, 2000; Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). However, in much of the recent research there has been an identifiable social correlate between organizational bullying and the social structure of a power gradient, more commonly referred to as power distance.

Power

Power Distance

Power distance is often described as the way people, with varying degrees of power, relate to one another in the context of two people's use of power and influence, which is based on the perception of the least powerful of the two (Einarsen, 2000; Desai, Brief, & George, 2009; Vega & Comer, 2005). The way this plays out in organizational bullying is the greater the power-distance the more bullying the individual with less power experiences (Desai, Brief, & George, 2009). However, this is not a new concept

for researchers. A Michigan State study (cited in Sorokin & Lundin, 1959, Chapter 2) found that executives in their study would avoid close relationships with individuals they believed had less power because they would not possess anything of personal interest or that could help them acquire personal gains. Around the same time as the study, researchers like Mulder (1963) asserted that power distances were the result of humans being attracted to areas or people containing greater resources than their own and away from areas or people containing fewer resources. Whereas, another researcher, Sampson (1965), observed that powerholders are often repelled by the overt attention and flattery of the less powerful. However, it was Kipnis (1972), Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003), and Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, and Galinsky's (2008) research, on how the possession of power influences self-perception and the perception of others, which has provided empirical evidence on the disruptive nature of power distances in an organizational setting. For example, Kipnis's (1972) study revealed that subjects with power frequently viewed their subordinates as objects of manipulation and would often express the desire to maintain social distance from their subordinates. In fact, the more his subjects with power attempted to influence their workers, the less they wanted to connect with their subordinates socially.

Taking Kipnis (1972), Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson's (2003) research a step further, the psychological community has illustrated how power often directs the attention away from the humanity of a subordinate and instead to the features of a subordinate that are most relevant to the powerholders goals, in an attempt to justify their position of privilege (Overbeck & Park, 2001, 2006; Vescio, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005; Vescio et al., 2003). By adopting chain-of-command legitimizing myths, powerholders

are able to convince themselves that the subordinates, through supposed lack of effort or ability, are less deserving of resources and deserving of their disadvantaged position (Georgesesen & Harris, 2006; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). In addition to powerholder justifying

When looking beyond the adverse behaviors, that can result from large power distances, Geert Hofstede's (1980) work, on international differences in work-related values, illustrated that there were consequences when organizations had high power distance(s) as well as low power distance(s). For example, Hofstede found that organizations with a systemically larger power distance had tall organizational pyramid structures where they placed more value on white-collar jobs than blue-collar jobs, which brought about large wage differentials and led to an overabundance of supervisory personnel. Conversely, when a small power distance was present some of the consequences Hofstede's research illustrated was that the organizations were flatter, had limited vocational mobility, had smaller wage differentials, and high job requirements for all levels of the organization(s) including the lower strata positions.

The Role of Power in Organizational Bullying

Power has traditionally been treated as a single construct, which has often lead to the failure of organization leaders to notice the multifaceted characteristics of power and the role it plays in their organization(s). Moreover, there have been a number of researchers who have not only noticed the complexity of power and how it plays out in organization interactions, as well as everyday life interactions, but there has been a push within the research community to develop a more comprehensive definition of power. With that having been said, due to the lack of uniformity in approach, the research

community is still struggling to define power beyond their definition in accordance to individualized guiding questions, (*e.g.*, how is it distributed), outcome of interests (*e.g.*, emotional experiences), powerholders intentions (*e.g.*, power as social motive), and/or actions with regards to a targets response, and/or handling of power as a method of dominance (Keltner, Gruenfeld, Anderson, 2003; Winter, 1988).

In an effort to provide a clear understanding of power Kipnis (1976) (citing French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1974), described the six forms of power: 1. *Reward power*: The result of a powerholder's ability to compensate the target person for compliance; 2. *Legitimate power*: The powerholder's belief that they have the formal right to prescribe behavior and expect public and private compliance; 3. *Coercive power*: The powerholder's belief that they can control the punishment of noncompliant targets. 4. *Expert power*: The powerholder's high skill level and knowledge command the right to prescribe behavior to subordinates; 5. *Informational power*: The powerholder's ability to control information others need to accomplish a goal or act; 6. *Referent power*: the powerholder's belief in being admired and seen as worthy and/or the belief in having the right to the respect of subordinates.

Adding to French and Raven's (1959) forms of power, Lammers, Stapel, and Galinsky's (2009) research distinguished between social and personal power. Specifically, social power is when one has power over others (*e.g.*, power a manager has over an employee), whereas personal power is when one has the freedom to do and get what they want with the ability to ignore the influence of others (*e.g.*, someone who can "control one's own outcome and be personally independent" due to the possession of money and/or knowledge (p. 1543)). According to Lammers, Stoker, and Stapel (2009)

both personal power and social power correlate positively with overall use of power, however, since they are independent constructs, they do not always correlate positively with one another. A good example of this is the varying role they play in stereotyping.

Power and Stereotyping

The notion that the possession of personal power increases stereotyping has begun to gain more traction in the research community. As mentioned in the previous section, individuals who possess personal power are less dependent on others and are not compelled to subscribe to cultural social norms. The result of this is that the more personal power one possesses the less likely they are to feel the need to individuate and make sense of others thus making the personal powerholder more inclined to depend on their automatic cognition, vis à vis stereotyping (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Neuberg & Fisk, 1987). To be more specific, systemic research has found that automatic cognition leads to a reduction in empathy and less concern of the emotions, attitudes and perspectives of others, which leads the personal powerholder to the eventual objectification and dependence on stereotyping to formulate judgments of others (Galinsky, et al., 2006; Goodwin, et al., 2000; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006). Furthermore, unlike social power, which is associated with interdependence and responsibility, Lammers, et al. (2009) contends that the more personal power one has the more stereotyping will occur because it is associated with freedom and independence from others thus giving the powerholders the ability to formulate opinions, regarding their subordinates, which they construe as being fact.

However, not all research differentiates social power and personal power, and the implications of stereotyping, in the same way. For instance, Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee,

and Galinsky's (2008) research, which was inspired by the *Power Approach Theory* (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), presumed that the possession of social power will activate one's approach tendencies (*e.g.*, when a manager approaches the hiring of employees on the basis of their usefulness to satisfy an active goal) due to their focus on rewards, which will often result in an increase in stereotyping. In other words, research has revealed that individuals who possess more social power exhibit more goal oriented behavior than individuals with less social power and are more apt to stereotype others to justify their personal status as well as justify an existing state of affairs, and/or protect their social identity (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Gruenfeld, et al., 2008; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Furthermore, when approaching employees based on their usefulness, it is not uncommon for supervisors with high social power to respond in an automatic fashion when subordinates do well. Specifically, when subordinates perform well, powerholders automatic response and biases often lead them to believe that the subordinate's high performance is due to the powerholders superior supervisory skills rather than the subordinate's contribution (Georgeson & Harris, 2006; Kipnis, 1972).

Another reason some researchers are moving away from the concept that those who possess social power are less likely to stereotype, due to their interdependence on others, is that the very process of stereotyping and objectifying others involves the fragmentation of social perception. Illustrating this fragmentation, while citing Marx (1964), Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, and Galinsky (2009) discussed the splitting of social perception in relation to the goal of capitalism, in that the more we value individuals in terms of skill and productivity and other attributes that create social status, as opposed to

their kindness and morality, the more reliant those with social power will be on individuals who possess those traits. To put it more succinctly, individuals with social power stereotype based on role specific traits, which “arises not out of individual motivations but results from information processing in an ideological environment” (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p.4).

To help illustrate how social power and stereotyping are interconnected, there has been a set of studies that found that men with power, historically or at the time of the studies, would often perceive sexual interest in women’s ambiguous behavior (Abbey, 1982; Keltner, Young, Heery, Oemig, & Monarch, 1998; Simpson, Gangestad, & Nations, 1996). It is studies like these that have directed researcher’s attention towards the natural inclination for powerholders to rely heavily on their automatic cognition because the powerholders were not only less reliant on others, often due higher salary compensation, but individuals within their social circles often perceived that they had more power because our social norms dictate that the more money one has the more valuable they are, thus giving them more social status. As illustrated by Desai, Brief, and George (2009), higher compensation can often trigger a process in which individual’s (both powerholder and subordinates) perceptions of power increases and more social status is freely given. In other words, as one’s “compensation increases, so does their perceived power” (p. 319). Furthermore, one’s perceived power often increases when power determinants, such as authority (*e.g.*, a mid level manager whose power is derived from the institutional role and/or arrangement), dominance (*e.g.*, Adolf Hitler whose behavior had the goal of acquiring power), and status (*e.g.*, a prominent religious leader whose estimation of positive or negative attributions lead to the increase or decrease in

respect and prominence among community members), are present (French & Raven, 1959; Keltner, et al., 2003). Yet that does not mean that the attributes are synonymous with power. For example, one can have power without status (*e.g.*, a corrupt politician) and can have status without power (*e.g.*, a tenured professor waiting in line at the DMV). With the advent of research illustrating that one can have power, even with the absence of power determinants, researchers have begun to look at the determinants themselves; particularly the role status plays as a determinant of power as well as a standalone attribute.

Power and Status

In an effort to understand the nature of power with and without status, researchers have begun to explore the observable behaviors displayed by individuals who possess power with status, power without status, and status without power. To understand how status and power interrelate, Fast, Halevy, and Galinsky (2011) focused their research on low status and high status soldiers who had positional power over the Iraqi prisoners they were charged to watch. Specifically, Fast's, et al. (2011) research team were testing the hypothesis that having power without status will lead one to demean others due to feelings of resentment stemming from the lack of respect given by others. What their research uncovered was that the abuse of power can occur at all levels of an organization and is often perpetrated by individuals who have power without status as opposed to official positions of power with status. Furthermore, their research found that not all power corrupts but rather individuals who possess power without status are more easily corrupted.

There have been numerous hypotheses developed as to why low-status individuals are more apt to demean others, than high-status individuals. However, one of the more popular assertions is that low-status individuals demean others because they are not seen and /or received positively by others, which prompts them to put down others in an attempt to boost feelings of relative self-worth (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Kay and Jost, (2003) went so far as to suggest that low-status individuals, because they feel the world is unjust and lacks fairness, demean others to meet their need for justice. This suggestion may have merit seeing as how “high-status individuals maintain their elevated social positions by cultivating group perceptions of competence” thus implying that the high-status/ high-power individuals are more apt to subscribe to social norms to maintain their status (Kraus, et al., 2014, p. 6).

Of note, the high-power and low-status connection to demeaning behavior has been contradicted in recent studies that have assessed the role of power and the origins of systemic abuses of power through a different lens. For instance, Kraus’s, et al. (2014) findings suggested that high-status individuals were more apt to engage in expectation consistent behaviors. Specifically, if an individual was deemed an *out-group member* the high-status individuals were more likely to display off record comments and engage in aggressive direct provocation, yet, if the group expectation was for the high-status powerholder to display more affiliative behavior, to cheer the *in-group members* on, the high-status individuals would engage in such actions so long as it promoted group solidarity. In other words, Kraus’s et al. (2014) study found that individuals who possessed both power and status were more likely to display elevated levels of bullying as a coercive form of group influence, yet, without the groups blessing they were less

likely to bully, which reinforces Jost, Banaji, and Nosek's (2004) assertion that high-status group members are prone to in-group preference, whereas low-status group members tend to display out-group preference.

On the other hand, Keltner (2016) and his team at UC Berkeley have uncovered that abuse of power is not specific to leaders abusing followers but rather there is a high incidence of individuals with high-legitimate and/or perceived power and high-status displaying demeaning behavior towards others. In fact, Scheepers and Ellemers' (2005) research on the physiological response of low-status individuals and high-status individuals, in relation to the disruption of the *status quo*, revealed that low-status group members would display a physiological threat response when tasked to maintain the *status quo*, whereas the high-status group members would display a physiological threat response when there was a change in the *status quo*.

To illustrate this point Kraus's, et al. (2014) research found that an individual's ability to attain respect, admiration, and influence others' judgments not only gave them higher levels of status but they were more likely to engage in direct provocation and display off record comments than their lower status peers. In fact, Salin's (2008) research uncovered that bullying is not restricted to tyrannical types of leadership behavior, but rather it can also occur among colleagues at the same hierarchical level or even upwards (*e.g.*, subordinate bullying a manager). To be more specific, one's position within an organization is not as strong of a motivator for abuse of power as possessing legitimate power, which grants one the perception of power.

Not All Power Corrupts

In keeping with the evidence that elevated power, which is associated with an increase in freedom and an increase in potential rewards from wielding power, will activate a powerholders approach-related tendencies; one may surmise that all powerholders will approach their organization decisions from a rewards perspective and will only attend to information that confirms their expectations of the stereotypes they developed of their subordinates (Copeland, 1994; Ebenbach & Keltner, 1998; Fiske, 1993; Keltner, et al., 2003). However, there is a body of research that has found that not all power corrupts. Early research done by Sachdev and Bourhis (1985), illustrating how powerholders may revert to benevolent behavior when faced with a powerless person, revealed that when an individual was given absolute-power they were less apt to discriminate than those in high-powered groups. They hypothesized that the individuals who possessed absolute-power perceived that their power position was not in danger, which prompted them to display benevolent paternalism. Reinforcing these findings, Handgraaf, Dijik, Vermunt, Wilke, and De Dreu's (2008) study on power differences and associated expectations, found that powerholders were more pro-socially oriented towards powerless participants. In other words, the less power a participant had the more feelings of social responsibility would arise in the powerholders.

Furthermore, there has been a substantive amount of evidence that has found that when powerholders have the ability and/or the time to individuate their low-power employees as well as break free from their obligatory hierarchical relationships, that are associated with their roles, they were able to display superior judgment and fostered positive working relationships with their employees (Hamilton & Biggart, 1985;

Overbeck & Park, 2001). Hamilton and Biggart's (1985) research on power and obedience in organizations found that powerholders were often expected to comply with the behaviors associated with their role by stakeholders, fellow powerholders and subordinates. For example, "subordinates may decide not to comply with orders, because they no longer perceive the CEO's power as legitimate or meaningful" (Overbeck & Park, 2001). This evidence has not only uncovered that all organization members play a role in power paradigms but it illustrates the lack of incentives for powerholders to individuate their subordinates and diagnose organizational problems.

The Role Leadership Plays in Organizational Bullying

Over the past decade there has been a greater emphasis placed on the role organizational commitment plays in fostering or preventing bullying activity. To help illustrate this new research direction, Harvey, Treadway, Heames, and Duke (2009) found that an organization's willingness to accept bullying behaviors, *via* "limited supervision and sanctions of bullies," could play a large role in a victim's willingness to be the target of bullying activities (p. 32). These individuals will often fall victim to the cycle of learned helplessness, thus perpetuating the bullied-bullying cycle. However, the development of this cycle is contingent upon the organization's "reaction to bullying behaviors" (p. 32). Specifically, if an organization has a culture that accepts bullying behaviors then both the bullies and the victims will have a platform for their self-perpetuating cycle of abuse, similar to that of spousal abuse (p. 33). When an organization reaches a point where true abuse cycles are unfolding on all levels, there exists a dearth of moral and capable leaders. Roscigno, Lopez, and Hodson's (2009) research suggested that organizational abuse of power is most often caused by the

“absence of capable guardians in the workplace,” which was particularly concerning to their researcher team since organizational bullying is often covert in nature and relational in the organizational contexts (p. 1580). Put more succinctly, without strong leadership, organizations will be unable to rise to the challenge of preventing organizational bullying and will be stuck in the cycle of mitigating the abuse of power after the fact, which is why more research has been focused on the role of ethical leadership, the role of power, and bullying prevention.

With continued research drawing definitive connections between organizational bullying and organizational culture, Bulutlar and Oz (2009) began investigating the relationship between ethical climates, supportive supervisors and organizational commitment. To be more specific, their research revealed that added supervisory support and bullying mediation not only had a positive impact on the overall ethical climate of an organization but it had a positive effect on organizational commitment. Conversely, their research also found that when the dominating climate type is competitive, employees perceive their organization as encouraging egoistic behavior thus creating a “competitive environment that reveals all negative behavior as acceptable for the bullies for achieving best results for him/her” (p. 289).

Complexity Leadership Theory

While many managers in complex organizations believe they are adaptively responding to problems as they arise, most are actually utilizing a variant of trial and error management systems that are remnants of the Industrial Era (Gunderson & Light, 2006; Manville & Ober, 2003). A primary reason for this, according to a growing number of complexity leadership theorists, is that currently predominant leadership styles

tend to focus on routine expertise in performing tasks, which does not provide enough knowledge to perform novel or dynamic tasks (Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997). Yet, in order for an organization to thrive, it must be able to respond to problems with dynamic solutions, which requires in-depth knowledge and a broader understanding of content to allow leaders to respond to unanticipated environmental changes. According to Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) the new era is based on an economy where knowledge, driven by globalization and the technological revolution, is a top commodity. Without the production of knowledge and innovation, organizations will continue to struggle to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. Complexity leadership theory asserts that adaptive leadership is needed to address the challenge of the rapidly changing world, by helping transform traditional management practices into an adaptive management regime (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007; Schultz & Fazey, 2009).

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive and flexible leadership has become increasingly important to leaders in complex organizations where the needs for adaptive and emergent outcomes are required for short and long-term problem solving. Specifically, as organizations are recovering from the recent economic crises, leaders are faced with a new a norm of perpetual organizational change. More to the point, leaders are faced with intensifying global competition, political instability, and new economic constraints, which often require leaders to initiate uncomfortable adaptive changes (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Heifetz & Linsky. 2002).

Unlike traditional leadership, grounded in bureaucratic notions of hierarchy and control and alignment of problems in crises, adaptive leadership attempts to tackle the

underlying causes of crises and develop the capability to succeed in a new reality (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Adaptive leaders embrace failure as an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the ever-changing work environments with the hopes of improving the environmental conditions of their organization(s) (Schultz & Fazez, 2009; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Summary

The theoretical literature summarized in this chapter included: bullying in organizations; consequences of organizational bullying; the role of power paradigms in organizational bullying; and the role leadership plays in organizational bullying. The section on bullying in organizations explained the bullying nomenclature, how bullying presents itself in organizations, and the biological and social correlates of bullying behavior in organizations. The section on consequences of organizational bullying provided a breakdown of the consequences for organizational bullying from both the victim and organizational perspective. The section on the role of power in organizational bullying discussed the connection between power and stereotyping, the connection between power and status, and illustrates how power does not always corrupt. Last, the section on the role that leadership plays in organizational bullying discussed the importance of supervisory support, the role complexity leadership plays in placing knowledge as a top priority in grappling with unanticipated changes, and adaptive leadership that emphasizes the need to embrace failure in order to improve work conditions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of organizational power paradigms and their possible relationship(s) with bullying. By utilizing a qualitative research design, phenomenology, to examine the lived experiences of organization members who experienced bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership standpoint within mid-level to large for-profit organizations, the researcher was able to capture the lived experience of bullying and the role perceived power played from the lens of the participants. Based on Moustakas' (1994) *Phenomenological Research Methods* guide, the researcher provides an explanation of the methodologies implemented in this study, including why phenomenology was selected, the data collection methods, the data analysis, and the study's validity, and data analysis limitations.

Research Design

Phenomenology

This study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and nature the experience of organizational bullying. Specifically, transcendental phenomenology was utilized to describe the phenomena of organizational power paradigms and the role perceived power played, if any, in the lived experiences of organizational bullying. The participants in this study, who experienced bullying from the victim, observer, or leadership standpoint, had varying experiences of a diverse behavior. The main goal in the application of phenomenology was to gain the truth from

the perception of the participant, which is also referred to as the *evidencing* (making evident of a phenomenon) (Moran & Mooney, 2002; Vagle, 2014).

The methodology of transcendental phenomenology has four interconnected steps: 1) the epoche; 2) phenomenological reduction; 3) imaginative variation; and 4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014). These four interwoven steps helped ensure that the wholeness of the participants lived experiences could be observed and heard. In other words, by using transcendental phenomenology the researcher was able to actively set aside the desire to analyze and seek explanations for the participants' experiences and was able to process the descriptions of their lived experiences.

For further clarification, the epoche, a Greek word meaning to abstain or stay away from, was described by Husserl as the independence of suppositions and prejudgments, which allows the researcher to view the participant's stories as if they were never encountered before (Moustakas, 1994). The reason the epoche is the first step is to put the researcher on high alert of personal assumptions, thus ensuring that they are aware that everyday perceptions of people and experiences are influencing the lens through which they receive information.

The second step, phenomenological reduction, requires that the researcher set aside any possible preconceived notions and bracket or bridle the focus of their research, with the goal of gaining the vantage point of an open self (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014). By bracketing (epoche) anything that does not exist, within the data collected from the participants lived experiences, the researcher can suspend their innate desire for inquiry and isolate the ego (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014). As described by Moustakas (1994) there are several steps of phenomenological reduction. First, researchers must

bracket the focal point of their research. The next step is to categorize and horizontalize their data, which includes the researcher being receptive to every statement, and to give equal value to each statement and engage in the process of reducing, through reflection. By categorizing the invariant constituents, the researcher is able to identify irrelevant or overlapping statement and remove them, which leaves only the horizons. Once the horizons present themselves, the researcher can establish themes and “organizes them into coherent textural descriptions of the phenomenon” (p. 97). Last, by developing individual textural descriptions, *via* the integration of the textural themes of individual participants, the researcher can construct a composite textural description, which consists of assimilating all of the individual textural descriptions.

Moustakas (1994) discussed how the primary goal for the third step, imaginative variation, is to seek potential meanings through varying purposes, roles, and lenses, in an effort to gain structural descriptions of an experience. In other words, once the researcher has established textural themes, acquired during the implementation of epoche and phenomenological reduction, they will implement phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation in an effort to transition from the façade of the participants’ experience(s) to the very heart (essence) of their lived experience(s) *via* the development of concrete structural meanings. By implementing the phenomenological approach, the researcher was able to develop a comprehensive understating of the subjective experience of bullying from multiple lenses. Furthermore, by utilizing transcendental phenomenology’s four interwoven steps, the researcher was able to take in the participants lived experiences.

The final step is the synthesis of meanings and essences, which is the process that pulls together textural and structural descriptions into a “unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). One of the most important considerations the researcher took in this step was to be aware of the fact that the essence of any experience can never be fully exhausted because the textural-structural synthesis embodies the essence(s) from the vantage point of the researcher at the particular place and time of the study (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Collection

Multiple methods of data collection were used throughout this study. Specifically, this qualitative study used transcendental phenomenological examination methods through one-in-depth open-ended interview, verbal organization policy reviews, verbal annual vocational reviews, and personal observational notes from the interviews. By triangulating the multiple data points, the researcher was able delineate the convergence of contextual variations across numerous data moments and data sources, which contributed to the construction the synthesis of meanings and essences (Vagle, 2014). Data encryption software, one hard-line computer, and two journals were used during the epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, synthesis processes, and transcribing of the study.

Data Collection Process

Eleven participants, seven women and four men, were interviewed in an effort to elicit the lived experiences of bullying in organizations and the role perceived power played in their experience. The participant selection process began with personal word of mouth of several already identified participants *via* a snowball sampling, also known as

referral sampling, with the intent of gaining access to a difficult to locate population. Once identified, the researcher sent out a follow-up letter to the participants. The letter included the personal introduction, the purpose of the study, a brief description of the study, a breakdown of the procedures, how the researcher would handle their data, confidentiality and possible risks and discomforts of their participation. The letter also included a P.O. Box address for future correspondence with participants who were uncomfortable using the telephone as a means to review the purpose of the study, schedule an interview date and time, discuss location preference, answer any questions, confirm their desire to participate, and discuss potential referrals. Last, the letter informed the participants of their rights and personal power and choice to decide to withdraw from the study at any time and could cancel or remove themselves from the study even after interview participation. Their personal power and choice was stressed pre and post interview as well. The researcher did not interview two of the nine individuals, who signed participatory letters of agreement, due to the concern that the interview could potentially trigger PTSD symptoms (*e.g.*, seizures).

Once the initial phone calls were made, from a phone not digitally connected to the researcher, the participants chose the interview dates, times, and locations. The locations consisted of airport private lounge(s), personal residence(s), a mega retail “big box” store, and park(s). Once the interview details were established, the researcher sent follow-up letters (Appendix A) to final participants confirming the location, date, and time of their interviews. The letter also included a copy of the open-ended interview questions. In addition, the letter included a copy of the informed consent (Appendix C) form, which included who was conducting the research and the participant’s bill of rights.

Finally, the letter stipulated that only verbal consent was needed and that they could remove themselves from the study at any time. Four participants, out of fifteen possible interview participants, exercised their right to exit the study after receiving the copy of the follow-up letter and its enclosed documents.

The researcher met the study participants at the chosen times and locations for their in-depth open-ended interviews. At the start of each interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, how their data would be secured, possible risks and benefits of their participation, and reestablished the confidential nature of the study and the role personal power and choice played throughout the whole process of their participation. All of which included the verbal review of the informed consent form and the participant bill of rights form ensuring that they understood the nature of the study as well as their rights as a participant. Once the verbal reviews were completed, each participant was asked to verbally consent that they fully understood the study.

Once the general introductory vocational and daily happenings questions were asked, which created a nonthreatening transition into the interviews, the researcher would begin the interviews. Throughout the interviews, the researcher implemented open-ended questioning (*e.g.*, tell me a story about a time you experienced organizational bullying?), unscripted prompts (*e.g.*, reassuring noises and common interjections), and floating prompts (*e.g.*, asking how?...why?... and then?) to avoid leading the participants story and to maintain a positive rapport (Leech, 2002). By utilizing open-ended questioning with both unscripted and floating prompts the interview was able to unfold in a conversational manner that was being driven by the participants and their experiences.

Seven of the interviews were recorded with an analogue recorder and four of the interviews were digitally recorded. With eleven interview participants, this study was able to reach data saturation with rich data (high quality) and thick data and distinct themes being present. Due to confidentiality concerns, the researcher transcribed the recordings herself to ensure confidentiality standards were met. Upon finishing the interviews, a time for a follow-up call, to review their transcripts to ensure they were as accurate as possible, was requested. Thank you cards were mailed to all of the participants. To avoid confusion and/or negative responses to the follow-up transcript review, the researcher reviewed the textural-structural description with the participants as a means of verifying the participant's words and lived experience (Koelsch, 2013). All data was collected and stored in fireproof *Liberty Safe* as well as on a secured non-wifi connected computer and backed up on an external hard drive. Once the synthesis of meanings and essences was complete, the researcher mailed the participants their transcripts and individual textural-structural descriptions, deleted all digital remnants of their participation, and shredded all hard copies of mail correspondence and questionnaires.

Data Analysis

To examine the data the researcher implemented Moustakas' (1994) adaptation of the Van Kaam method of analysis. First, when using a phenomenological horizontalization, keeping in mind that horizons are unlimited, the researcher listed all statements relevant to the participants lived experience while maintaining universal acceptance. Second, the researcher identified both the variant and invariant horizons, also referred to as invariant constituents, by categorizing all of the overlapping,

repetitive, vague statements. Once the researcher was left with non-overlapping and non-repetitive statements, the themes were winnowed down even further by establishing: a) if it is possible to abstract the statement and, b) if the statement contained a moment of the experience that was necessary and sufficient for understanding the phenomenon. If the statements were abstract they were eliminated, yet if it contained an experience that was necessary in understanding the phenomenon, the researcher clustered the statement.

Third, the researcher established a final identification of invariant constituents by discerning if they were expressed explicitly in the transcript and/or if they were compatible. If they were not compatible or explicitly expressed, they were deleted.

Fourth, once the researcher listed all of the final invariant constituents (non-overlapping and non-repetitive statements); they were grouped into clusters, which made up the main themes of experience. Fifth, the researcher constructed an individual textual description for every participant with the invariant constituents, including verbatim examples from the interview. Sixth, the researcher took the individual textural descriptions and imaginative variation and developed individual structural descriptions. Seventh, the researcher developed a structural description of the essences and meanings of the lived experiences *via* the incorporation of the invariant constituents and themes from the textural descriptions. Finally, the researcher developed a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences, from the individual textural-structural descriptions constructed, as a representation of the whole participant population.

Ethical Considerations

IRB Process

This study qualified for exempt status on July 7, 2017. Nine signed letters of agreement were offered as proof of participant interest in this study. Due to the nature of the study, the *Institutional Review Board* required all future informed consent forms to have verbal agreements to add another layer of protection for the identities of the participants. The *Institutional Review Board* ethical principles guided this study.

Confidentiality

By implementing an unstructured interview process with open-ended interviews, maintaining confidentiality took precedence. Many participants brought up identifiable information throughout the interview process. Specifically, they mentioned names of people, their organization, and names of friends and family members throughout their interviews. An unanticipated confidentiality issue, which arose during the transcribing portion of the research, was following the exact privacy measures as agreed upon in the confidentiality agreement. Due to the privacy concerns of most participants and the agreed upon condition that none of their data would be exposed to any possible wifi connection, including computer, recording device, and printer, the researcher had to take on the responsibility of transcribing the data personally to ensure that all privacy measures were met in accordance to the Informed Consent agreement.

Informed Consent

The participants expressed a desire for confidentiality to be assured before and after participation. All efforts to maintain confidentiality were presented both prior to scheduling the interviews as well as before the interview itself. The researcher reviewed

their rights to leave the study at any time throughout the duration of the study and reiterated that the researcher could not guarantee confidentiality but assured them that great measures would be taken to ensure the terms of the confidentiality agreement were met, which often required a review of how the researcher would handle their information. The researcher would then reaffirm their informed consent before moving forward.

Harm

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the possible emotional intensity, the researcher actively looked for any possible signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This included physical symptoms such as irritability, jumpiness, high startle response, deadening of expressions, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, sweaty hands, dizziness, abnormal amount of sighing and yawning. None of the interview participants exhibited symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. To ensure that the researcher maintained her vigilance and did not burn out as a researcher, she obtained the help of a professional, bound by confidentiality, to guide me through the process of self-care and address possible triggers. Once possible triggers were identified, the researcher wrote them down in her bracketing journal.

Dual Role

Having a background in behavioral science and counseling, the researcher was vigilant to maintain her role as a researcher by bracketing her training of *owning the chair* before and after each interview. In doing so, the researcher was able to prevent her years of training, to make meaning of the participant(s) experience and therapize the participant(s), from surfacing.

Validity and Dependability

Due to the lack of tests and measures, this phenomenological study's credibility was dependent on member validation. Member validation occurred during participant's follow-up calls, which consisted of a full transcript review during which the participants provided feedback on the accuracy of their reported story. Each participant was given the option of gaining full access to his or her interview transcripts as well as a copy of the individual structural description prior to our follow-up call to ensure that the participants did not feel as though the call was primarily transactional (Koelsch, 2013). The researcher had full participant agreement on her analysis of their individual structural descriptions and interview transcript reviews. The researcher did have several provide further clarification to their story; however, she still had full participant agreement on the overarching themes pulled from their story.

By describing an experience through the lens of the participants and uncovering the essence(s) of a phenomenon, with the essence of an experience never completely being exhausted, replication of an essence would not be possible (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, the primary goal of the dependability check was to illustrate that the findings were consistent because replicating the research in the ever-evolving milieu of organizational bullying would not be feasible. It is for this reason that member checks were used to increase dependability and ensure the reliability of this study. With that having been said, this study was presented with high quality data that was detailed, layered and nuanced, which aided in the dependability of this study.

Data Analysis Limitations

The purpose of this study and the research procedures were fully disclosed to the participants prior to their participation. Some of the participants worked in the same organization(s) and may have known each other professionally. Additionally, the researcher had professional and/or personal relationships with some of the participants. The researcher's prior connection with some of the participant's added the additional challenge of protecting their anonymity. Potentially recognizable organizational anecdotes were often iterated throughout the participant's interviews. Possible awareness of the shared connections may have made the participants unwittingly reticent throughout the study. The focus of this phenomenological study was limited to the perspective of individuals hailing from mid-size (over 100 employees) to large for-profit organizations. Last, the researcher's personal experiences of organizational bullying from both a victim as well as a leader gave me a biased lens, which required additional bracketing prior to the interviews and data analysis. Specifically, being aware of biases, and how they placed limitations on the analysis of the data, the researcher implemented all known tactics to set her biases aside.

Summary

In summation, this chapter presents a detailed explanation of this study's research methodology. A qualitative research design was used to observe the lived experiences of individuals who experienced organizational bullying, within mid-size and large for-profit organizations, from a victim, observer, or leadership perspective. The Participant sample was made up of eleven individuals selected through a snowball sampling. Data collection was done through personal interviews. Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam

method was the primary method of analysis. Member checks were the primary method used to account for validity and dependability. Limitations incorporated the biases the researcher brought to the study as well as possible familiarity issues among the participants and possible challenges of maintaining anonymity.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL BULLYING

Introduction

This transcendental phenomenological study presents the lived experiences of line managers, staff managers, line employees, and staff employees who experienced bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership perspective. By utilizing phenomenology, the participants were provided the chance to share their experiences and shine a light on the complex nature of organizational bullying. This segment provides a range of experiences and backgrounds to aid in a better understanding of who the participants were and their lived experiences. To ensure confidentiality was maintained, all names and identifying information was altered. Finally, quotations were implemented to provide multiple perspectives as well as to express the participant's stories authentically.

Chapter four presents the significant findings obtained from the eleven in-depth interviews. The results of the study enhance the understanding of the role perceived power plays in organizational bullying in three ways by illustrating that: (a) the greater the power distance in an organization the more top down bullying occurred; (b) the smaller the power distance the more peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying occurred; and (c) work environments were seen as more threatening and/or hostile when the participants perceived they had less power. These three major findings will be discussed in this chapter and the will have conclusions and proposed recommendations in chapter five. This chapter will be concluded with a summary of the findings.

This study had the participation of one line executive, one staff executive, two mid-level line managers, one assistant line manager, four high-skilled line workers, and

two mid-skill line workers. The years the participants worked in the organization(s) in which they encountered the bullying experience(s) were between one to nineteen years. After the bullying experience, one participant was pushed out with poor performance evaluations, one participant was almost pushed out *via* forced schedule changes that conflicted with childcare hours, one participant was pushed out and left the field completely, after filing a complaint, through increased workload and unrecognized contributions during quarterly performance evaluations, one manager is trying to leave the organization, one manager stayed but was always looking for transfer options, two of the four high-skilled workers transferred to competing companies after manager(s) gave upward mobility to less qualified candidate(s), one executive felt pressure to toe the company line during a time where their company was downsizing, one executive kept quiet to ensure the company did not incur any legal liability if actions were to be taken by the employee(s) involved. The subsequent thematic descriptions provide more details on the participants lived experiences and other demographic information. Following is a brief description of the participants. All names and possible identifying information has been altered to ensure confidentiality.

Kiko was a finance executive (director) at a large (over 70,000 employees) for-profit technology and cloud computing company. She transferred into the position from a smaller technology company for upward mobility. Kiko was in her position for five years and had nine managers directly reporting to her. She holds a bachelor's degree in accounting.

Dean is a software development executive (director) at a large (over 100,000 employees worldwide) for-profit technology company. He transferred to the company as

a senior manager and worked his way into his position after working for the company for eight years, leading 13 different teams throughout the world, and moving to four different campuses. Dean holds a bachelor's degree in engineering.

Madu is a mid-level manager at a large (over 20,000 employees) for-profit financial company. She transferred to the company as an entry-level manager. She has been in her current position for the past five years and has hired a recruiter to find her an executive position now that she has recently finished her master's in business administration, which she acquired while in her current position.

Yuki was a mid-level manager at a mid-size (over 2,000 employees) for-profit human services company. She transferred into her position from a smaller company, which is where her final management position was held. She worked in her mid-level management position for over ten years, leading over nine teams, and moving to two different offices. Yuki held a degree in accounting.

Jennifer was a manager-in-training at a mid-size (over 4,500 employees) for-profit chain dining company. She transferred to her position after working in the medical industry for over fifteen years. She moved three times and worked at three separate locations in under a year. No degree information was provided.

Kevin is a high-skilled software developer at a large (over 300,000 employees) for-profit cloud computing company. He has worked in his position for over nineteen years and is considered a subject-matter expert in his company. He has worked on five different campuses and worked with multiple teams, nationally and internationally, at one time. He has a doctorate in software engineering.

Tanya is a high-skilled software developer intern at a larger (over 300,000 employees) for-profit cloud computing company. She provided no specific timeline regarding her years in her position or at her company. She works with multiple teams on her campus. No degree information was provided.

Sam was a high-skilled systems consultant at a large (over 30,000 employees) for-profit telecommunications company. He worked at the company for over four years, which is where he interned while working on a certificate in project management. He has a bachelor's degree in philosophy.

Ling was a high-skilled technical support operator at a large (over 100,000 employees) for-profit telecommunications company. She worked at the company for less than three years. No educational background was provided.

Sarah is a mid-skilled security specialist at a mid-size (over 100 employees) for-profit security company. She has worked at the company for six years and has been part of two security teams. She studied philosophy in college and has attained continuing education certificates as it pertains to her job.

Ben was a mid-skilled health and human services support staff at a mid-size (over 200 employees) company. He worked at the company for over seventeen years and was part of six treatment teams. He has a high school diploma and has attained continuing education certificates as it pertains to his job.

After analyzing the data three major themes emerged. The emergent themes provided a stronger understanding of the lived experience of the participants as well as added a better understanding of the contextual layers of the role perceived power plays in organizational bullying. The first theme was the greater the perceived power distance in

an organization the more top-down bullying occurred. The second theme was the smaller the power distance the more peer-to-peer and employee-to-manager bullying occurred. The third theme was work environments were perceived as more threatening and/or hostile when the participant(s) perceived they had less power.

Top-Down Bullying

The first emergent theme was that top-down bullying experiences increased when greater perceived power distances were present within organizations. Three subthemes emerged related to the increased power distance and top-down bullying. The first subtheme that arose was that fear from perceived powerholders arose when the inability to demonstrate competence and/or feelings of insecurity were present. The second subtheme was the higher the participants position the more their direct supervisor distanced themselves from the participant. The third subtheme that emerged was the more an organization experienced change (*e.g.*, reorganizing or restructuring organization) the more supervisors clung to the power structure and distanced themselves from their subordinates.

The open-ended interview questions implemented (Appendix B) were intended to start a dialogue as well help the participants provide a multilayered expression of their lived experiences of organizational bullying. Participants were asked to tell a story about a time they experienced organizational bullying and their perception of the role power played in their lived experience. All of the top-down bullying experiencers described a large power gap between the powerholder and the victim. One participant described:

We never saw our manager unless he was looking for someone to fall on the sword for his [expletive] numbers. No guidance, no job well done, no 'hey,

how's it goin?' Nothing. It's like we were supposed to be mind readers and just know how to do the job. The only thing he did was try to dig up dirt on me for future use. I guess I asked too many questions so it was the block for me.

Additionally, a second top-down bullying experiencer mentioned:

When my current manager started, he was like a freshly minted coin...giving me a detailed breakdown of his expectations, the company's expectations, and we developed a personalized list of goals for my annual review. Three years on, he couldn't care less about my success. He spends most of his time in the palace with his manager cronies. It sucks because am a high producer, but my last two reviews don't reflect that. He gives me just enough for me to keep my job but not enough to transfer to another program. My options are either I leave the company, or I stay where I'm at.

All participants expressed a personal desire to be better at their job but were surrounded by habitual complainers. Specifically, participants perceived that the more distance management placed between themselves and the employees the more the employee teams would complain, with the observation that the more employees complained the more chances their concerns would be heard. One participant noted,

It's a 60/40 ratio. Only 60% will listen and maybe respond, and 40% of managers and supervisors could care less. If lucky, 40% of the 60% of complaints may be seen as a valid concern.

Many participants perceived that opportunities for mentor/ mentee relationships were lacking on every level of their organization due to their supervisor distancing themselves from their teams. While providing detailed and interwoven narratives and

descriptions of their lived experiences many of the participants spoke of the need for guidance and mentorship during times of constant change. This expressed need, in connection with the subtheme of organizational change and increased supervisor power distancing, for top-down guidance was emphasized among the managers as well as the line and staff employees. One participant reflected the need for mentorship and regular guidance, during a recent company restructuring, when they declared, “not enough companies provide executives with menteeing opportunities. We need it just as much as everyone else, maybe more because our decisions carry more weight and can cause more damage.” It is with comments such as this that illustrate how the participants shared a common desire for guidance and opportunity to be better at their jobs and to make sound business decisions. One manager described:

Asking for help is seen as a weakness in management. During the last two reorgs, that’s right two, I learned that asking questions only gives colleagues ammunition. As a manager we are a failure if we ask questions and failure is weakness. It’s like the art of war on steroids...the top execs keep scratching their heads. They would rather spend the money restructuring the company than let us fail small and figure out where we’re going wrong.

Strengthening the perceived need for mentoring and need for guidance on all levels, this participant shared how their organization handles managers who seek advice:

Managers are stuck in a state of paralysis...they’re afraid to make any decisions unless it’s a sure success. Seeking out advisement only happens if they are forced to make a decision that isn’t a sure success. If they ask too many questions the

manager is labeled incompetent and the company usually finds a way to manage them out by giving them impossible targets.

Furthermore, a majority of the participant's perceived that bullying increased when legitimate power and/or expert power was threatened. Reinforcing this subtheme, one participant stated, "I think she chose me precisely because I have more education and understanding of the job. She just seemed to revel in putting me in my place, reminding me that she could control me and was more powerful."

The perception that incompetent direct supervisors were targeting participants who possessed expert power was shared by most of the top-down bullying experiencers. This perception was strengthened when the bullying experiencer possessed more education and/or vocational experience than their supervisor. One participant reflected on their experience of how their supervisor handled a subject-matter expert on their team:

They both came from the military, so he chose [name of victim] as the common enemy. Two bird's one stone. Choosing a common enemy is a quick way to gain company trust. It's a fast way to ingratiate in an unfamiliar environment...it's an officer thing. He was a manager and had more military experience, but [name of victim] had more industry experience. It didn't help that [name of victim] could run the programs better than him. Instead of asking for help to catch up, he chose to get rid of the best guy on the team. The team took a big hit, but my manager was mister popular, mister manager of managers...nobody questioned him.

Another top-down bullying experiencer observed:

My manager had no issues when she hired her. She thought [name of victim] education and work experience was going to be a great addition to the company.

She gave the best panel interview I'd ever seen. After some corporate muckety mucks came to the office they took notice of a project [name of victim] was working on. I guess they liked it because after that day my manager closed the line of communication between our branch and corporate. Everything had to go through her. That went against everything the company stood for. The lines of communication were free flowing before then. [Name of victim] was railroaded out and she was blocked from transferring to a subsidiary company. Making matters worse, a little birdie told me none of our ideas or goals met had been passed on to corporate. When [name of victim] left, my manager openly said she would never hire someone with a college degree again.

Although many of the top-down bullying experiencers attempted to transfer teams or observed others trying to transfer teams within their organization(s), when faced with managers who were perceived to be threatened, many shared the perception that they were forced to stay on the team or quit because the manager still needed the high producers to meet company goals. Furthermore, all the top-down bullying experiencers, with supposed insecure supervisors, shared the perception that credit for their work often went to the supervisor. Specifically, the top-down bullying experiencers noticed that managers often diminished their role on team successes but would give the team full credit for failures. One top-down bullying experiencer openly shared:

I've had three managers in the past two years. It's like hitting the reset button. Accomplishments under one manager go unrecognized by the next manager. Reset. I don't play lotto but that's what it feels like. You hope the next manager won't be too wrapped up in sirs or ma'am's. Many of the managers are bent on

instant respect but *I'm* the expert. I don't care who you are; you've got to earn the sirs and the ma'am's. Managers have a bad habit of forgetting that respect is something that's got to be earned. Your title doesn't make you entitled and the work doesn't get done without experts like me. Instead of admitting they need me they remind me I'm replaceable, then they take credit for my work. Clearly, my work is good enough to put their name to; just shows how replaceable *they* are.

Like most employees and managers, the participants expressed a desire for successful careers that followed a natural progression to bigger and better things. All of the top-down bullying experiencers perceived that their accomplishments were going unnoticed because the upper managers were distancing themselves from the day-to-day interactions of employees and their managers. As one participant noted:

Once I moved up in management I assumed guidance would be given freely. Perplexingly, I received many directives but limited direction on how to handle my teams and reach my production goals. Compounding my confusion was the limited accessibility; the only time I saw my manager was at all-hands meetings and corporate functions. It wasn't for lack of trying. Whenever one-on-one meetings were made, my manager would cancel last minute or shorten the meeting so nothing substantive could be discussed.

The top-down bullying experiencers who were leaders in some capacity alleged that they were involved in molding and crafting the career trajectories of their direct reports whereas their direct supervisors expressed less interest in their long-term career success. As demonstrated in the following statement, this participant's experience coincides with the bullying experiencer's perceptions and subtheme that the higher the

position the greater the power distance, “The higher the manager is on the company ladder the less we see them. They can’t even grace us with their presence during web-x meetings...a listen-in would be welcome.”

Participants were cognizant of the elevated level of responsibility among the higher management echelons, however, the perceptions were that even with the increase in responsibilities the higher-level managers spent most their time managing up rather than managing their people. One participant, representative of many others, speculated:

The system’s the problem. Managers cannot move up the ladder without playing the game. They can, however, miss deadlines, overspend budgets, take unearned credit, and still move to a better position...politics. A skills-based system is an urban legend in management. If you can manipulate people, convince them you’re trustworthy, and toe the company line, you’ve got the job.

Several top-down bullying experiencers recognized the role their company culture played in the increased power distance between the upper managers, executives and the lower and midlevel employees. Phrases such as “no fraternization,” “generation gap,” “class separation,” and “natural order” were peppered throughout many of the participants’ interviews when describing their perceptions of their company cultures. One participant’s personal impression of how their company culture fostered an increase in power distance among upper management was:

There is an undertone of fear among managers, including myself. Every year the workers are getting younger, smarter, and hungrier. They have resumes that are almost unbelievable. I have seen some resumes where the applicants started nonprofits in high school. Full disclosure, my current resume pales in comparison

to many of our entry level applicants. Most managers assume the applicants are liars, but I don't think so. It's intimidation really. I think most managers are intimidated by the newcomers. I know I am which is why I keep my distance...to keep my job.

Peer-to-Peer and Employee-to-Supervisor Bullying

The second identifiable emerging theme was that the participants, who experienced peer-to-peer bullying or employee-to-supervisor bullying, perceived that a small power distance existed between the victim and the bully. Three subthemes emerged concerning the connection with this theme. These include, a) the perception of reduced opportunity, due to a perceived organizational shift from a pyramid structure to flatter structure, led to an increase in peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying, b) the perception that time and service and new talent carry equal power led to increased peer-to-peer bullying, and c) the perception of increased social power outside of the organization led to increased peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying.

When asked about their lived experience of organizational bullying from the victim, observer, or leadership lens many peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying experiencers spoke of limited opportunities to move up within their organization. Coinciding with the perception of limited opportunities within organizations one participant shared, "it's like the execs have decided they'll be the last. My company doesn't have a lot management slots now, they make senior employees do it." A majority of the peer-to-peer bullying experiencers perceived that their organizations did not have a merit-based promotion system, which contributed to aggressive and unfair competition. One participant described:

It's pretty cutthroat these days. And not just at my company. Between software and project-based incentive plans, my company figured layered management's a waste. The thought is teams can make decisions faster without all the bureaucracy and decision by committee [expletive]. I thought it would force meritocracy but it just pitted us against ourselves. Team members still take credit for stuff they didn't do or swoop in on projects at the last minute. It's [expletive]. Going project to project's a joke. Without upward mobility or a reward-based system, what's the point? Employees want opportunity not work parties or happy hours. I can't feed my family or buy a house with party balloons.

Coinciding with the perception that organizations were not rewarding individuals based on their output was the perception among peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying experiencers that the shifting of additional responsibilities and power to the employees combined with a reduction in opportunities created an increasingly competitive environment. One participant noted: "I used to get along with everyone. Lately, I find myself thinking of ways to secure my position at work, even if it's at the expense of others." Many of the participants perceived that their organizations were not addressing this newfound competition, which in some cases created a generational divide. Phrases such as "oldie but goodie" and "out with the old and in with the new" were used while describing the perceptions of the recently established competitive work environments. One participant's recollection of their peer-to-peer bullying experience aptly illustrates the perception of the connection between increases in vocational competition and the widening of the generation gap:

The Boomers and X'ers are obsessed with their status as wisest of them all. No offense intended but you're not tech natives. I can't count how many times I've had to help the *wiser* generations fix problems that are part of their regular job. I didn't stop the bullying because I kinda agreed with it. They shouldn't get more money or level-up just because they've been at the company longer. If bonuses are based on team productivity, just showing up is not enough.

Numerous participants acknowledged that the increase in stress-induced in-group fighting and peer-to-peer bullying was perceived to be connected to old vs. new ideologies. One participant expressed frustration with being on the receiving end of their team's fault finding, "I was bullied because I was older, had a family and had to maintain a work-life balance. Just because I can't pull 70-hour work weeks doesn't mean the quality of my work is less than the newbie's." Conversely, another participant expressed feelings of displeasure with the perception that the younger workers in their organization were forced to bully non-producing coworkers due to their organizations inclination to cater to time-and-service policies while pushing unattainable production goals:

Managers are faced with the impossible task of distributing work equally. If I miss my quarterly goals I'm out of a job. So yeah, I delegate more to the younger workers because they have youth on their side. That's why I don't say anything when they get on the older workers. They're doing what I can't. It's not fair. I've been at this company for years...the older workers didn't have to work as hard as the kids do now. They think they did but didn't. Business used to come to us, now we've got to compete for it. Even the process of getting business is more complicated.

Several participants shared how they felt pressure to spend more time at work for fear that they would be labeled lazy, incompetent or old. One participant reported, “In this industry forty is over the hill. I am knowledgeable and confident in my abilities, but I can’t keep up with the crazy hours.” Participants who had families found themselves in situations where they perceived their younger coworkers were intentionally working long hours to eliminate them as competition. One participant expressed their perception of the challenges of keeping up with the new employees, “I used to be the young guy pushing the old guys out, now I’m an older millennial and am constantly being reminded that I can’t keep up. I dread packing up to go home because I worry about what the team will say when I’m gone.”

Several peer-to-peer experiencers found that they were feeling “overloaded” and “on edge” while at work. One participant commented, “I dread going to work. It’s like everyone is waiting for me to screw up.” With an increase in faultfinding, among peer-to-peer bullying experiencers, many of the participants perceived that admitting fault would harm their career trajectory. As mentioned by one participant:

Our leadership likes to hype up the importance of integrity and transparency but whenever mistakes are made the guillotine comes out. Pointing the finger at someone else is easier. Admitting fault is career suicide these days. My coworkers are like a bunch of vultures waiting for the weakest link to drop. It’s like the weakest links hungrily fault finding to cover up their own failings. I wish I could help but I’ve got to keep my head down. I can’t lose this job.

In addition to the challenge of time and service verses new talent, a reduction in advancement opportunities, and fault finding, most of employee-to-supervisor bullying

experiencers perceived that increased social power inside and outside of the organization led to the perception of smaller power distance between employees and supervisors. As one employee-to-supervisor bullying experiencer noted:

My old manager had to close her LinkedIn and Facebook accounts because one of my coworker's data mined her. She went to a better university and had more skills listed on her LinkedIn account than my manager. I think she thought she was more qualified for her job. In team meetings she would try to seed doubt and point out [manager] mistakes. I didn't do anything about it because she creeped me out. Data mining to find dirt is sociopathic. I didn't want to be on her bad side.

Along with social media being used to establish rank among employees and supervisors, most of the peer-to-peer and the employee-to-supervisor bullying experiencers perceived that higher social wealth outside of the organization minimized the power distance within the organization and increased covert bullying. One employee-to-supervisor experiencer described the effects of external social wealth, "The minute they realize they have more money, more external connections, or more political clout, managing them is almost impossible." A peer-to-peer experiencer stammered, "He thought he could con everyone into believing he was an expert because he had some fancy title back in the day. Not this guy. I'm not so easily fooled."

Phrases like "rich," "family money," "fancy title," "ivy leaguer," "connected," and "schmoozer" were used to describe the individuals who the participants perceived to have a prominent level of social status and/or social wealth. One participant

acknowledged the challenge of dealing with a socially wealthy colleague who covertly abused power:

He was an unreliable narrator. Nice guy but he talked as if he had access to more information than we mortals. It wasn't like he was rude or aggressive. Quite the contrary, he was fun to be around and had some cool stories about his time in DC, but I started noticing a shift in his personality. When he told me a BS story about a buddy of mine he knew I wasn't buying it. To force the issue, he hinted that he "knew" people. Even went so far as to suggest that he "may" have buddies in FBI. Why would he and his connections be talking about my buddy? My guess is either this guy had a real [expletive] for my buddy or he was character assassinating him to eliminate competition. Whatever it was, he was a good liar. He mixed just enough truth to make it believable. Ever since that day he has been nothing but smiles to my face but has tried to plant seeds of doubt about my honesty and integrity to my colleagues. Preventative measures would be my guess. Discredit me just in case I told people about our awkward exchange.

A majority of the peer-to-peer and the employee-to-supervisor bullying experiencers believed that the poor economy played a role in their lived experiences. The increase in daily requirements, required overtime, and intense scrutiny were perceived to be likely catalyst of their bullying experiences. Finally, all the participants' peer-to-peer lived experiences were covert in nature.

Threatening and Hostile Work Environments

The third emergent theme was that work environments were perceived as more threatening and hostile when the participants perceived they had less power. The

subthemes that emerged were a) participants perceived that they had less power when their benefits and salaries were reduced, b) participants perceived they had less power the more companies asked them to delve into the ethical grey, and c) participants perceived they had less power when they had high manager turnover.

Numerous supervisor-to-employee, peer-to-peer, and employee-to-supervisor experiencers perceived that they had less power as a team member as well as within their organizations, resulting in feelings of powerlessness over their career trajectories. Many of the participants correlated their feelings of powerlessness with a hostile work environment. As noted by one participant,

The less they involved me in the decision-making process the more I worried about being demoted or worse, being pushed out. When the edicts trickle down from the top, we jump.

Another participant noted:

Even more upsetting than worrying about losing my job is my team being at each other's throats. My dad keeps talking about company loyalty. How can I be loyal to a company that isn't loyal to me? The company only cares about quarterly gains and the next set of layoffs.

Many participants perceived that they had less power after losing an organizational benefit. Phrases like, "lost tuition reimbursement," "increased health premiums," and "reduced vacation time," were used to describe most of the participant's perceptions of lost benefits. Many of the participants spoke about the importance and preference of regular benefits over potential increases in bonuses, especially when the

participants perceived their careers were in a phase of stagnation. One person reflected on the importance of dependable benefits:

I remember a time when getting pensions was a given but those days are long gone. Now I'm tracking my 401K, while worrying about another match decrease...or worse...another crash. I'm supposed to retire in ten years but I don't know if I'll have enough. All I do is worry.

As the participants described their perception that their benefits packages will continue to decrease, the younger participants often spoke emphatically about how unfair the work environment is for the Millennial's and generation Y. As one Millennial noted, "my generation is not entitled, we just want what the generations before us got." Another participant mirrored the sentiment of the younger participant's perception(s) that organizations give fewer benefits and lower starting salaries to younger employees when they exclaimed:

Unfortunately, the boomers think they have us fooled. They're constantly reminding me of their 'low starting salary'. Either they don't know how to do math or they purposefully ignore inflation rates. Let's say they made \$20,000 thirty years ago, that's like a \$75,000 starting salary. And I'm the spoiled one? I wish they'd retire already.

Many of the interviewees described a cultural shift throughout their organizations, particularly a reduction in ethical behavior. Participants perceived that their organizations priorities were focused on financial gain. "It's like our ethics have gone out the window...whatever is best for our quarterly gains," said one participant who, like many participants, felt pressure to put their integrity aside to give the impression of

perfection. Reinforcing the perceived pressure to implement unethical behaviors to give the impression of team perfection, this participant shared a specific type of expected unethical behavior:

Even more upsetting was the situations my manager put me in. Any slacking off was seen as a direct affront to the company. And once my boss decided someone was a threat he expected me to find a way to push them out. No training. No verbal warnings. Just...find a way. Who doesn't slack off occasionally?

Another participant noted:

Everyone understood the unspoken rules. When problems popped up, I made sure I wasn't the messenger. Shooting the messenger isn't new but I'm just one person who's trying to stay in the game long enough to retire. [As a result] I don't feel good about it but I'm going to do what it takes to survive, even if it means letting good guys go down in flames.

As the participants provided description and anecdotes of their experiences, they frequently spoke about employee turnover, specifically manager turnover. One participant reflected the perception of many others, regarding high manager turnover, when they exclaimed, "Three managers! In one year!" Comments such as this illustrate the connection between the participants perception of threat in relation to their feelings of reduced power. Specifically, many participants perceived that the lack of supervisor mentorship and availability lead to an unknown career trajectory, which brought out feelings of powerlessness. As noted by one participant:

I enjoy the challenges of team building and bonding but the new train of thought is that leaders can lead any team. That may be true, but I can't speak to it because I haven't been given the time to find out.

A second participant observed:

We're told if we work hard and show initiative it will be reflected in our AR's [annual reviews]. That's not happening. If I have a new manager every year and the only metrics available are team metrics, how would the new manager know my personal worth? Feeling powerless over my career is the worst feeling in the world. I can't just get a new job that pays the same as I make now.

Participants in this study recognized that their personal feelings may have influenced their perception of threatening or hostile work environments. Most of the participants also acknowledged that their perceptions may not be representative of an actual threatening or hostile work environment, but rather that their feelings of reduced power—perceived to be caused by a loss of benefits, limited access to supervisor mentoring, and being forced to delve into the ethical grey—could be the result of personal reflections.

Summary

Eleven individuals who experienced organizational bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership perspective were interviewed for this study. The data were coded to determine themes. Three emergent themes were present, each with multiple subthemes. The three interconnected themes and subthemes that presented, as a result of the interviews, gave me a better understanding of the complex nature of the lived

experiences of organizational bullying from the victims, observers, or leaders viewpoint.

The primary themes were:

1. Participants perceived that the greater the power distance in an organization the more top down bullying occurred. The subthemes that emerged were a) fear from perceived powerholders arose when the inability to demonstrate competence and/or feelings of insecurity were present, b) the higher the participants position the more their direct supervisor distance themselves from the participant, and c) the more an organization experienced change (*e.g.*, reorganizing or restructuring organization) the more supervisors clung to the power structure and distanced themselves from their subordinates.
2. Participants perceived that the smaller the power distance the more peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying occurred. The subthemes that emerged were a) the perception of reduced opportunity, due to a perceived organizational shift from a pyramid structure to flatter structure, led to an increase in peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying, b) the perception that time and service and new talent carry equal power led to increased peer-to-peer bullying, and c) the perception of increased social power outside of the organization led to increased peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying.
3. Participants perceived that work environments were more threatening and hostile when the participant(s) perceived they had less power. The subthemes that emerged were a) participants perceived that they had less power when their benefits and salaries were reduced, b) participants perceived they had less power

the more companies asked them to delve into the ethical grey, and c) participants perceived they had less power when they had high manager turnover.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the research and then discusses the proposed conclusions, which resulted from interviewing eleven participants who experienced organizational bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership perspective, with the researchers proposed suggestions and/or solutions. The conclusion and proposed suggestions and solutions are categorized by the three major thematic findings: (1) greater perceived power distances led to increased top-down bullying and the application of an adaptive leadership diagnostic framework; (2) peer-to-peer and employee-to-manager bullying increased with smaller perceived power distances; (3) less perceived power made work environments appear more threatening. This chapter will finish with recommendations for future research and a brief summary.

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed to examine the lived experiences of eleven individuals, hailing from mid-size to large for-profit organizations, who experienced organizational bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership standpoint. A qualitative method was used to develop a better understanding of the role power paradigms play in the inception of organizational bullying. Phenomenological inquiry was implemented through the use of a bracketing journal, memos-to-self, and in-depth interviews (see Appendix B) to understand the lived experiences of eleven organizational bullying experiencers, seven women and four men. Through the use of a qualitative methodology and Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis, this study found important implications in the participants lived experiences

that provided a better understanding of the connection between perceived power paradigms and organizational bullying.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of organizational power paradigms and their possible relationship(s) with bullying.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to extract patterns and develop overarching theme(s) of the role power paradigms play in the inception of organizational bullying in an effort to establish an association between the study participants lived experience of organizational bullying and current empirical data.

Top-Down Bullying

Following is a discussion of the conclusions to be drawn from the key finding in this study, connecting greater power distances in organizations to an increase in top-down bullying. This discussion is followed by proposed solutions to the issues presented in the key findings. Last, the researcher will present an applicable adaptive leadership model to illustrate the researcher's recommendations.

Conclusion One

The first major finding of this research was that participants perceived that the greater the power distance in an organization the more top-down bullying occurred. A possible conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that the more perceived power one feels they possess the more apt they are to exert their perceived power and/or defend the possession of their perceived power. When perceived-power-holders felt ineffectual or incompetent,

they were more likely to disparage those of whom they believed to be their subordinate(s).

Another possible conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that the participants who experienced top-down bullying were or are part of an organization that has traditional notions of leadership (*e.g.*, administrative leadership). On one hand, organizations that adhere to a traditional hierarchical structure, such as the military, are necessary if one needs unquestioned authority or have to make decisions that must be absolute (*i.e.*, life and death decisions). On the other hand, organizations that need to cultivate emergent change, as opposed to adhering to traditional notions of leadership, can tailor their objectives to emerging economic, political, culture, and behavioral challenges more efficiently. In this consideration, it can be concluded that organization leaders whom do not adhere to traditional hierarchical leadership structure would be more apt to spot the emergent behavioral changes of bullying throughout their organization(s).

Another possible conclusion to be drawn is that top-down organizational bullying, caused by increased power distances, is the result of the disempowerment of midlevel managers. Managers on all levels feel pressure to find immediate resolutions to problems, which poses a multilayered challenge for midlevel managers. The primary issue being that midlevel managers are unable to provide solutions to their teams without consulting their management. This decision by committee process may diffuse the responsibility of middle managers but it also widens the power gap between employees and decision capable managers. In this regard, it can be concluded that midlevel managers need adaptive tools to not only diagnose their micro-environmental troubles but

also to successfully develop adaptive teams that mobilize all members to generate solutions.

Shrinking Power-Distance(s) with Adaptive Leadership

When trying to find applicable resolutions, which address the connection between the perception of increased power-distance and the increase in organizational bullying, the natural inclination of an organization will be to find a quick and expedient solution; a solution that will be the least painful to the company as well as the powerholders implementing the solution(s). Furthermore, most powerholders in mid-sized to large for-profit organizations are pressured to solve problems with short-term resolutions that are cost efficient and draw upon familiar expertise. Unfortunately, this inclination to depend on the proverbial crutch of familiar resolutions rarely encourages flexible problem solving, which is often required to provide lasting solutions to the organization and microenvironments. Instead, the short-term solutions are just that, they tend to eradicate the symptoms of the problem but rarely address the underlining dysfunction.

The current western organizational dependence on executive teams finding solutions to problems that may not have permeated their semi-permeable barrier is not only unreliable but it is not feasible in mid-sized to large organizations. Yet, when it comes to organizational bullying, there is an expectation that a top-down sweeping new initiative or organizational policy change will resolve the issue(s). It is for this reason the researcher contends that organizations need to allow for the application of micro-adaptation(s) within each layer of an organization. In doing so, an organization is not only acknowledging that every member of the organization is interdependent on one-another but it also empowers leaders, whether they have an official title or not, to develop

solutions, thus making them less dependent upon large sweeping changes at the top to resolve environmental problems that may only be present in their micro-environment.

By empowering organization members to focus on micro-adaptations, to resolve potentially individualized environmental problems, leaders will be able to spend more time with their teams, rather than distancing themselves from their teams due to lack of remedies and/or solutions from the executives. Understandably, executives and senior managers will be hesitant to relinquish some of their authority and ownership associated with their title. However, if supervisors, on every level of an organization, consistently utilized an adaptive leadership framework, the power distances between supervisors and employees would grow smaller thus leading to a reduction in organizational bullying caused by large power distances.

Concerning how an adaptive leadership framework leads to smaller power distances, between supervisors and employees, the application of an adaptive leadership framework requires consistent hands-on observations and diagnostics, as opposed to sitting in an office crunching numbers. More to the point, the application of an adaptive leadership framework allows leaders to transition from a transactional orientation with employees to a strategic partnership with employees. It is through this partnership that leaders can think more clearly and effect more micro-environmental change within their organizations.

Adaptive Leadership Technique

Technical changes can be solved with familiar technologies and expertise (*i.e.*, re-orgs and popular changes of the day), however adaptive changes, such as organizational bullying, often require uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and paradigm shifting changes in

values, behaviors, and attitudes. With these unfamiliar changes there is a creation of risk and fear, which is why many leaders struggle to shift out of a state of personal homeostasis. In order to push through the initial pain (*e.g.*, fear of unknown outcome) of acting outside ones comfort zone and thinking beyond organizational policies, leaders must reflect upon their personal, deep rooted, values and discern which ones need to be upended to get beyond the pull of homeostasis (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Recommendation

To help leaders strengthen their capacity for change Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) developed a practical system to help leaders address challenges that require adaptive changes. The researcher's recommendation is based on the premise that every organization is capable of change. More to the point, the researcher asserts that the idea an organization is broken, is false. The reality is that organizations are encountering issues such as bullying because of *all* the people in the system, not just the leaders of the system.

The researchers recommended solution to reducing organizational bullying, due to increased power distance, is to empower first line and middle management and team members through the implementation of a modified version of the Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) adaptive leadership tools and tactics. Since there are no technical solutions for organizational bullying, which can be caused by increased power distances, the adaptive leadership framework, being a hands-on approach for problem solving, is a viable solution that should be explored.

Adaptive Leadership Tools Modification

Following is a modified adaptive leadership framework (ALF), based on Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) adaptive leadership tools and tactics, to be observed as a recommended solution to this study's finding that the perception of greater power distances led to an increase in organizational bullying. Below is the researcher's breakdown of the ALF modified steps that could be implemented in organizations to enable problem solving behavior, beyond the executive echelon, deep within their organization(s).

- **Diagnosis**

When faced with the non-technical adaptive challenge of closing power distances and reducing the incidence of organizationally bullying, the most important skill organization leaders should have is the capacity to diagnose their microenvironment. The process of diagnosing includes, a) getting distance from the events occurring on the ground, b) collecting data from the observations made from a distance and on the ground, and c) identifying adaptive challenges.

In order to diagnose oneself or a microenvironment, leaders need to develop the ability to shift their focus from on the ground occurrences, commonly referred to as the dance floor, to observing their teams from a distance, which is commonly referred to as getting on the balcony. By assessing their teams from both the proverbial dance floor and the balcony, leaders can gain a better vantage point of the group dynamics, as well as collect data that illustrates the deeper systemic issues that are

affecting their microenvironment. Finally, the more a leader moves back and forth between the two vantage points the easier it is to identify patterns of wider environmental problems, such as power distances preceding organizational bullying, as well as identify adaptive challenges over the proverbial horizon, which allows for corrective midcourse action(s).

- **Create a Holding Environment**

To do adaptive teamwork, leaders must create an environment that provides both structure and feelings of safety for the employees. This is especially true when leaders begin to guide their teams through the challenges of positive conflicts, resulting from diagnostic system perturbation. The process of guiding teams through positive conflicts is often referred to as cooking the conflict.

In order to successfully cook micro-environmental conflicts, leaders will need to designate an off-site holding environment or designate a workspace within the work environment that will allow employees to establish a wider social space as well prepare leaders for a different role; that of a listener, observer, and, in many cases, a subordinate. By establishing a holding environment, leaders can use conflict positively, maintain disciplined attention, and give back the work and empower employees. In addition, by safely and successfully guiding employees through conflict, leaders can regulate the heat generated by larger organizational processes that are beyond their control.

- **Protect the Voices of Leadership from Below**

To gain the willingness of employees to experiment, learn, and trust leaders and fellow team members, leaders must ensure that every member's voice is heard. This includes when employees bring to light possible micro-environmental contradictions and/or organizational contradictions. By protecting the voices of leadership from below, leaders will create an environment of safety and inclusivity, which will increase multidirectional information flows.

The increase in multidirectional information flows allows all employees to engage in the diagnosis process. With employees being involved in the diagnosing process, leaders and their teams can engage in the experimental mindset required to solve the adaptive challenge of organizational bullying. Finally, the more leaders involve their teams in the diagnosing and resolution process the less inclined they will be to create a large power distance between themselves and their employees due to a lack of answers or disconnection.

Peer-to-Peer and Employee-to-Supervisor Bullying

Following is a discussion of the conclusions to be drawn from the second key finding in this study; participants perceived that the smaller the power distance the more peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying occurred. This discussion is followed by proposed recommendations for the issues presented in this key finding.

Conclusion Two

This study's second major finding was that participants perceived that the smaller the power distance the more peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying occurred. The subthemes relating to this were a) the perception of reduced opportunity, due to a perceived organizational shift from a pyramid structure to flatter structure, led to an increase in peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying, b) the perception that time and service and new talent carry equal power led to increased peer-to-peer bullying, and c) the perception of increased social power outside of the organization led to increased peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying. A conclusion to be drawn from this perception and the subsequent subthemes is that employees are struggling with the newfound limited boundary career trajectories that are resulting from the emergences of organizations shifting their long-term goals and/or transitioning to flatter organizational structures. Specifically, as organizations change (*e.g.*, transitioning to a flatter, non-linear structure, to help reduce bureaucracy and expedite various organizational processes) employees are finding new boundaries to penetrate in an effort to guide what they perceive to be their new non-linear multidirectional career trajectories.

Another conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that employees, in their quest to find opportunities for career development and career mobility, are struggling to transition from the traditional long-term, set advancement, career base to a dynamic and fluid transactional career base. Culturally speaking, the United States perpetuates the concept that work should not only be self-fulfilling and provide a sense of purpose but that successful career trajectories are vertical and linear in progression. With organizations rapidly transitioning to flatter structures and limited cultural context to

back their decisions, employees are left with contrasting career processes to follow and limited vision on what constitutes success.

A final conclusion to be drawn from this is that as career trajectories become more multidirectional, employee's measures of self-worth will no longer follow traditional external measures of vocational rank and income. Rather, employees will pull upon internal measures of social status, relationships (*i.e.*, knowing the right people), personal values, and personal identity, which could pose a conflict with the traditional organizational cultural context.

Recommendations

- Leaders should adopt an inter-organizational adaptive leadership model (see modification of the Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky adaptive leadership tools) to cook the conflicts, among employees and supervisors, that may arise from organization changes.
- Rather than decrease the number of direct line managers during an organization restructuring, organizations should reduce the number of executives. This will allow employees to have a progressive career as well as expedite the decision making process throughout the organization and make employees less inclined to drive out perceived competition.
- To ensure that line managers feel as though they have a progressive career, after reducing the number of executive opportunities, organizations should incentivize their managers with graduated bonus pay (*e.g.*, bonus for every project a managers team completes).

- Leaders should develop career plans with each employee to help ease any misgivings about organizational changes and to illustrate that they have a progressive career trajectory and a future at the company. In doing so, leaders can reduce peer-to-peer and employee-to-supervisor bullying by illustrating that there are clear paths to success by being a team player as opposed to being the proverbial last man standing *via* eliminating the competition.

Threatening and Hostile Work Environments

Conclusions that may be drawn from the third key finding in this study; participants perceived that work environments were more threatening and hostile when the participant(s) perceived they had less power. This discussion is followed by recommendations for the issues presented in this key finding.

Conclusion Three

This study's third major finding was that participants perceived that work environments were more threatening and hostile when the participant(s) perceived they had less power. The subthemes relating to this were a) participants perceived that they had less power when their benefits and salaries were reduced, b) participants perceived they had less power the more companies asked them to delve into the ethical grey, and c) participants perceived they had less power when they had high manager turnover. A conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the removal of benefits is seen as a removal of income thereby a reduction in power. As discussed by Boyce, Wood, Banks, Clark, and Brown (2013), employees find income losses more aversive than income gains. By reducing benefits, which are considered a part of an employee's regular salary,

organizations are reducing employee's perceived independence from the organization by reducing their economic mobility. A reduction in economic mobility may give employees the impression that their organization is creating a mercenary work environment by limiting their income prospects to collective project based bonuses.

Another conclusion to be drawn is that as organizations experience change and struggle to adapt to the changes, on the micro-environmental level, the more they may expect employees to perform tasks and/or give the impression that organizational health, *via* the implementation of change initiatives, are more successful than they actual are.

A final conclusion to be drawn is that employees experience feelings of isolation and disconnection when there is no continuity of leadership. With each change in leadership, employees are faced with a new set of directives and/or the same set of directives but with a different method of execution, which creates confusion and reduces the employee's ability to understand their role in the organization. Without a full understanding of one's role in an organization, employees are unable to define a clear progressive path to their success within the organization. Also, employees are aware that relationships are the path to success; being forced to reestablish new connections with each manager may lead to feelings of futility, frustration, and expressions of anger towards others.

Recommendations

- Organizations should adopt an inter-organizational adaptive leadership model (see modification of the Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky adaptive leadership tools) to establish new connections and expedite relationship building between new managers and their employees.

- Organizations need to encourage more fixed compensations (*e.g.*, benefits, pensions, etc) that foster collective success, as opposed project-based incentives, which foster mercenary behaviors, where people may feel pressure to seek unethical and unsustainable solutions to problems (*e.g.*, lying about meeting budget goals, cooking the books, etc.).

Significance of Study

While this study adds to the growing body of organizational bullying research, it also adds to the understanding of the causal relationship between power paradigms and organizational bullying. This investigation also offers a closer glimpse of the role power distances, greater and smaller, play in organizational bullying and may challenge past notions that organizational bullying originates primarily from the top.

This study's findings may also challenge the notion that perpetrators of bullying are primarily comprised of sociopaths rather than organization members behaving in accordance to normal survival patterns due to feelings of loss, feelings of threat to career success and survivability, feelings of inability to grapple with organizational change/chaos, and feelings of inability to maintain their livelihood.

This study's findings may also challenge the notion that organizationally bullying is a direct manifestation of interpersonal challenges among team members as opposed to being correlated with organizational health. Specifically, this study's findings offered a better glimpse into the connection between poor organizational health and its causal relationship with organizational bullying.

Finally, this study's findings may challenge the notion that organizational bullying presents itself as overt aggression. Rather, this investigation illustrated that organizational bullying can present itself *via* covert aggression (*e.g.*, managing employees out). By illustrating the covert nature of organizational bullying this study provides leaders with a more accurate understanding of how day-to-day bullying may manifest in organizational settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

To expand the scope of this study, additional research is recommended. Organizational members need strategies to spot, cope, and prevent organizational bullying. Due to this study's small convenience sample size, its limited scope, and the limitation of the use of the methodology phenomenology, the researcher is recommending the following research to gain a deeper understanding of perceived power and power distances in organizations and their causal relationship with organizational bullying.

1. Leadership comes in many forms. The researcher believes it would be instrumental for researchers to develop a better understanding of the impact ethical leadership could have on power distances as well as preventing organizational bullying.
2. To get at the crux of the issue, of organizational bullying, a longitudinal study involving the participation of nonprofit and for-profit organizations would be instrumental in developing a comprehensive understanding of organizational bullying and would provide a better baseline for the development of preventative solutions.

3. Due to the limited number of participants, this study was not able to determine the effect of status on perceived power paradigms. Understanding the role of status in relation to power paradigms may help develop a deeper understanding of organizational bullying.
4. The limited number of participants restricted this study's ability to explore the role fear may or may not have played in the perceptions that work environments were more threatening and hostile when the participants perceived they had less power. Understanding the role fear may play in triggering survival instincts (*i.e.*, focusing on personal success thereby eroding team cohesion) may help researchers develop a better understanding of the role fear plays in organizational bullying.
5. The thematic descriptions in this study did not provide a deeper understanding of the role stereotyping plays in organizational bullying. Developing a deeper understanding of the connection between stereotyping and power may help researchers develop a more cohesive understanding of causal relationship between the perception of power and organizational bullying.
6. Since this study is limited in its focus to eleven participants who experienced bullying from a victim, observer, or leadership perspective, this study, with the same parameters, could not be replicated but could be expounded upon with a larger number of participants to get a more in depth perspective of the role power distances play in organizational bullying.

Summary of the Study

In discovering the essence and overarching themes of *what* the participants experienced and *how* they experienced the phenomenon of organizational bullying and its connection to perceived power, leaders, in line management and staff management positions (*e.g.*, Program Manager, Executive Director, Human Resource Director), are provided a better understanding of the bullying experience from multiple perspectives. This study will let leaders compare their view of what bullying looks like with the lived experiences of the participants who experienced organizational bullying from the victim, observer, or leadership perspective. Furthermore, this study provides a more concrete understanding of the role power paradigms play in organizational bullying as well as give leaders the tools to design effective adaptive interventions for their organizations. This new knowledge will allow leaders to both adapt their policies, provide human resource departments the necessary data to develop anti-bullying trainings, and will provide leaders the tools to develop their teams within their microenvironments thus reducing power distances among their team members and reducing the occurrence of organizational bullying.

In summary, this study's examination, of the lived experiences of organizational bullying experiencers, identified rich and detailed data from the victim, observer, or leadership perspective. It also delineated the role of power paradigms in organizational bullying. Specifically, the role of power distances preceding bullying events. By establishing a common set of themes connecting the role of power paradigms and organizational bullying, the results of this study identified a convergent baseline between

perceived power and bullying whereby the knowledge can be used by leaders to identify and potentially prevent bullying within their organizations.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Follow-up Letter

Appendix B: Participant Interview Protocol

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Appendix D: Participant Bill of Rights

APPENDIX A**FOLLOW UP LETTER**

August, 2017

Participant
Creighton University
Omaha, Nebraska

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study to examine the lived experiences of organizational bullying. I am confirming (location) on (date) at (time), as the location, date and time that we agreed upon to conduct the interview. Please review the copy of the possible open-ended interview questions prior to the interview so as to acclimate yourself to the questions. If you prefer to have prepared notes prior to our interview, please do not hesitate to do so. Also, if you need to change the date, time, and/or location of our interview please feel free to call me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or send me a letter with your preferred date, time, and/or location. I have included a return envelope and a list of my dates of availability. If none of these dates and times work for you please inform me of your preferred interview time(s) and I will do my best to accommodate. This interview is at your leisure and will be done in accordance to your comfort level. At our meeting on (date) I will review the informed consent form with you, answer any questions you may have, and ask you to give verbal consent to participate in the study. You will be provided a copy of the informed consent form for your records.

Thank you,

Kimberly M. Dolan

Enclosure:

Consent Form
Copy of Open Ended Interview Questions
List of Alternate Interview Times
Return Envelope

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- 1) Please tell me a story about a time you experienced organizational bullying?
(Open ended question probing for overarching theme of experience and exposure to organizational bullying)
- 2) What is your perception of organizational bullying? (Probing question to understand the participants perception of bullying)
- 3) What was and/or is your role in the organization? (Open ended question to initiate divulgence of voluntary demographic background (*e.g.*, educational background, time in position, how they came to be in position, etc))
- 4) If you were King/ Queen for a day how would you have liked to see this incident unfold? (Probing question to understand the participants perception of an ideal solution)
- 5) If no one could ever trace or know where the response came from, what would you tell me about your organizational leadership/ organizational membership?
(Probing question for personal perspective influences on perception of experience)
- 6) What has been the influence of power in your experience with organizational bullying? (Probing question for perception of power and role on experience)
- 7) Can you recall a time when your organization handled a similar situation effectively? (General probe question)
- 8) Take me to a time when you generally pleased with organizational leadership/ organizational membership. (Probe for ideal outcome of experience)

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Study: The Role of Power Paradigms in Organizational Bullying

Principal Investigator: Kimberly Dolan, Creighton University.

Faculty Advisor: Bill Raynovich, Ph.D, Peggy Hawkins, Ph.D

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

I invite you to be part of a research study which will delve into the causal relationship between organizational power paradigms and organizational bullying. Specifically, the potential effects perceived power has a potential correlate of systemic organizational bullying. This study is funded by Kimberly Dolan and is part of her Dissertation in Practice study.

Description of Your Involvement

If you agree to be part of my research study, you will be asked to participate in an in person interview. The interview will be between 30 and 45 minutes long and will begin with the participant being asked: *Please tell me a story about a time you experienced organizational bullying?* You will have access to all notes and transcripts regarding the interviews and may opt out of the interview and research process at any time.

Benefits of Participation

The information you provide will help the principle researcher potentially develop an evidence-based solution to reduce bullying within organizations.

Risks and Discomforts of Participation

There may be some risk or discomfort from your participation in this research as the interview questions are of a personal nature. These questions could bring up traumatic or stressful memories from your past, which may cause distress. As mentioned earlier, the interview can be ended if it brings up stressful feelings. All data collected in this research will be recorded utilizing an analogue recording device that does not have any connection to the cloud. The data will be transcribed and stored on a device that has no wifi capability. All recordings and transcripts will be given back to the interviewee once the data analysis and textural descriptions of the transcripts have been completed. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants to ensure anonymity. If a data breach occurs you will be informed immediately of the extent of the breach and any impact you may experience.

Compensation for Participation

For your participation in this Dissertation in Practice Study interview, you will receive a \$25 gift card of your choosing.

Confidentiality

It is my intention to publish the final results of this Dissertation in Practice. I will not include any information that would identify you. Your privacy will be protected and your research records, including individual textural descriptions, will be discarded upon my Dissertation in Practice study submittal.

At present, Creighton University is the only organization that will be consulted to ensure that the research is being done in accordance with IRB standards. However, if another agency needs to be consulted, I will inform you in writing immediately.

Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed we may report that information to the appropriate agencies such as Adult Protective Services.

Storage and Future Use of Data

I will store your data only for the duration of the transcription process, which will be used for the *textural-structural description* development portion of my Dissertation in Practice study. Your name and any other identifying information will remain anonymous and will not be stored with the remaining research data at Creighton University. Only I will have access to your research files and data. Research data will not be shared with other investigators and will never contain any information that could identify you.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time, this includes after the interview has been completed but before official submission. You do not have to answer a question you do not want to answer. Just tell me and I will go to the next question. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, your data will not be used and will be given back to you.

Contact Information for the Study Team

If you have any questions and/or concerns about this research process, including questions about scheduling or your compensation for participating, you may contact Kimberly Dolan at _____ (or) XXX.XXX.XXXX or Dr. Bill Raynovich at _____ or Dr. Peggy Hawkins at _____.

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the:

Creighton University IRB Office

Location: Criss I, Room 104

Phone: 402.280.2126

Fax: 402.280.4766

Email: IRB@creighton.edu

Consent

By verbally agreeing to this document, you are agreeing to participate in the study. I will give you a copy of this document for your records. I will keep one copy with the study records, signifying your verbal consent. You will be given an identical copy for your records. Be sure that I have answered any questions you have about the study and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

APPENDIX D**Bill of Rights for Research Participants**

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.
2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.
3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.
4. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.
5. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.
6. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.
7. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.
8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research subject.
9. If the study involves treatment or therapy:
 - a. To be told about the other non-research treatment choices you have.
 - b. To be told where treatment is available should you have a research-related injury, and who will pay for research-related treatment.