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Exploring workplace bullying from diverse perspectives: A *Journal of Applied Communication Research* forum

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is a pernicious workplace problem that harms employees and organizations alike. Targets suffer mental and physical consequences of repeated abuse. Organizations experience consequences such as diminished worker productivity and increased turnover. In some cases, even workplace violence. While these instances are thankfully rare, it is important to understand how workplace bullying manifests in organizations and what employees, bystanders, and organizations can do about it. At the invitation of the editor to convene a diverse panel of experts on workplace bullying, seven scholars responded to questions pertaining to six workplace bullying-related issues. These are conceptual definition; bystander intervention; the relationship between race, gender, and other marginalized identities and workplace bullying; interdisciplinary opportunities and constraints; developments in United States policy; and how employees, bystanders, and organizations can and should respond to workplace bullying.

Jerry Motley posted the following statement on Facebook about workplace mistreatment he experienced, 'I cried. In 2017 you can't talk to another human being like that.' Later, at a fencing company in Michigan, he arrived at work and shot two co-workers, one fatally. Motley cited years of bullying as the motive. Although rare, violence along with the other negative consequences of workplace bullying warrant attention and action. The term workplace bullying was originally coined in 1990; however, the phenomenon itself has historically been a fixture in organizations across the globe (Namie & Namie, 2009). Progressively, researchers have developed a steady proliferation of workplace bullying research in a variety of fields including but not limited to communication, management, psychology, law, and higher education. Regardless of the abundance of research developed, workplace bullying persists. In fact, the United States has seen a rise in hostile communication in multiple contexts including workplaces (Akella & Lewis, 2019). This does not bode well for employees. Workplace bullying is a treacherous experience in which

targets can develop a variety of stress-related health concerns (Hollis, 2019). It has been described as a recurring nightmare and water torture (Tracy et al., 2006). In an attempt to combat these consequences, research has brought about some positive changes, such as providing a basis for the development and introduction of the Healthy Workplace Bill in several states in the United States (Namie & Namie, 2009). However, at the writing of this forum, no states have adopted anti-workplace legislation. It is clear that more work remains to be done.

I (Tye-Williams) was invited by the editor Dr Debbie Dougherty to assemble a diverse panel of workplace bullying scholars and practitioners to respond to six questions related to workplace bullying dynamics. This forum brings together voices that cut across various fields to move us beyond our disciplinary silos to determine how to best understand and address workplace bullying.

Stacy Tye-Williams is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies in the Department of English at Iowa State University. Her research focuses on workplace bullying narratives and the power of storytelling to bring about organizational change.

Jerry Carbo is a Professor of Management in the Grove College of Business at Shippensburg University. He is also the President of the National Workplace Bullying Coalition. His research focuses on workplace bullying, employment law and socially sustainable business systems.

Premilla D'Cruz is Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India. She is the Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Handbooks of Workplace Bullying, Emotional Abuse and Harassment, Volumes 1–4* (Springer, forthcoming).

Leah P. Hollis is an Associate Professor in the Department of Advanced Studies, Leadership and Policy at Morgan State University. Her research on workplace bullying engages issues of race, gender, intersectionality and power differentials.

Loraleigh Keashly is Professor, Communication and Associate Dean, College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts at Wayne State University in Detroit. Her research interests focus on workplace bullying with most recent attention on bullying in academe and the power of bystanders/witnesses.

Catherine Mattice, SHRM-SCP, is the CEO of Civility Partners, Inc, an HR consulting firm focused specifically on resolving harassment and bullying by creating positive workplace cultures. She obtained her MA from San Diego State University.

Sarah J. Tracy is Professor and Director of The Transformation Project in The Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University-Tempe in the areas of organizational communication and qualitative methodology. Her research focuses on cultivating emotional interactions in workplaces that promote human flourishing.

Question 1: We have seen a rise in hostile, difficult situations in a variety of different contexts. How is bullying distinct from other difficult situations and/or types of workplace mistreatment? Is this distinction important?
Keashly

I think bullying is distinct from interpersonal conflict, negative performance appraisals/constructive negative criticism, 'not getting along,' different communication styles, and expression of conflicting opinions. What distinguishes bullying from these other difficult situations is the persistence of messaging that communicates a devaluing and

demeaning of the other person(s), despite efforts to challenge and to defend. I think the overall context within which these interactions occur is critical in this discernment.

A favorite mantra is 'behavior NEVER speaks for itself,' rather it takes on meaning and impact based on the context within which it occurs (Keashly, 2019). This mantra reminds me that as we discuss (mis)treatment in the workplace, we need to consider who does what to whom in what relational and socio-structural space (e.g. identity, organizational position, organizational and group norms). For me, the academic context has been rich with the opportunity to explore the influence of contextual factors, specifically group norms and behavioral expectations associated with faculty, staff, and students. These factors influence what is considered to be (in)appropriate behavior. For example, my impassioned critique of someone's ideas/decision may be quite acceptable if the other is an academic colleague and we are debating the merits of our ideas, i.e. norms of academic debate, which include the respect of the other's ideas. This same behavior can be experienced as attacking and demeaning if it was done outside the context of genuine debate or accompanied by refusing to hear the other's argument or directed at someone's lifestyle choice or directed at a staff member.

Diminishment and devaluing are the hallmarks of bullying. The consideration of not just behaviors but also the context within which they occur are vital in the assessment of 'what is happening here.' The assessment can identify sources of fuel for these interactions and thus, different means to address, eradicate, and restore.

Tracy

Bullying is distinct from other types of workplace mistreatment due to its intensity, persistence, and power disparity between targets and perpetrators. Bullying requires a certain frequency, repetition, and duration of negative acts (for overview of measures, see Cowie et al., 2002); these features increase the effects of abuse. Said in another way, 'Screaming occasionally does not equate with bullying. Screaming over and over at the same person, day after day, week after week, and month after month—that is workplace bullying' (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012, p. 17). Those who are bullied, themselves feel directly targeted. One of the reasons bullying is so personally destructive is because it feels intentional and unfair.

Bullying is also different than typical conflict due to the marked power disparity between the bully and the target. Over time, the bully becomes more powerful and targets have an increasingly difficult time defending themselves and oftentimes feel trapped (regardless of whether a formal power difference exists in the organizational relationship). Therefore, strategies that might work to ameliorate occasional conflict or incivility are not necessarily effective with long-term bullying.

D'Cruz

While there is literature speaking to the issue of whether workplace bullying is distinct or not from other types of mistreatment, there are two other equally important issues to consider. First, workplace bullying is not the same as workplace controls, poor or substandard physical working conditions and exploitation though all these can coexist; rather, workplace bullying is emotional abuse of a psychosocial nature which occurs against the backdrop of human interaction (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2019). This distinction is important to emphasize because some strands of the sociological and industrial relations literature consider the concepts of workplace controls, poor or substandard physical working conditions and exploitation as synonymous with workplace bullying

and use these terms interchangeably with workplace bullying to convey an identical meaning.

Second, workplace bullying is a multi-faceted rather than a unitary construct. The *varieties of workplace bullying* framework highlights *interpersonal/depersonalized/compounded bullying, internal/external/dual-locus bullying and real/cyber/hybrid bullying* (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2019, pp. 3–10). This framework is important because while the negative acts which comprise workplace bullying are similar across its different types, it is the constellation of accompanying factors such as level of analysis, location of the source of mistreatment, form of misbehavior, etiology, temporality, direction, power dynamics, etc., involved in workplace bullying which emphasize the uniqueness of each variety and bring out the complexity and nuances of the phenomenon. This has undeniable implications for how workplace bullying is studied and addressed since conceptual clarity forms the crucial basis of meaningful research and effective action.

Hollis

In comparison to the United States, other places such as France, Canada, the Scandinavia countries, harassment, bullying, and mobbing are treated the same and are strictly prohibited (Hollis, 2017). However, in the United States, bullying is distinctive because it is legal. In the states that address workplace bullying, the target has a tough task to present workplace bullying as actionable in court. In comparison, if harassment is tied to a protected class under Title VII (race, gender, religion, age, national origin, etc.) then the mistreatment is illegal. Within the Title VII context, organizations are motivated to investigate and often move to correct the problem when an employee specifically ties work abuse to a protected class status. Workplace bullying does not have such a threshold; instead, when the maltreatment is derived from the bully's insecurity, fear, jealousy, and/or incompetence the target does not have a viable charge. I typically equate the illegal harassment that occurs under Title VII with the harassment experienced in workplace bullying, except again, Title VII harassment is linked to protected classes.

Mattice

I am inclined to talk with my clients about the similarities in bullying and other behaviors, rather than differences. In academic research, clear distinctions may be important, but in the corporate world, diving too deep into these distinctions undercuts the importance of resolving all negative behaviors. Employers start segregating legal versus illegal behavior. For example, in my trainings, I show a spectrum of negative behaviors where incivility is at the low end which can escalate to bullying, which can escalate to violence. This paints a realistic picture of how these behaviors develop over time and underlines the importance of resolving incivility if a harassment and bully-free workplace is what the employer seeks. In my experience, separating harassment and bullying while educating employers is a disservice to employees. Breaking the terms down so exhaustively, rather than talking about them as working together, makes it difficult to effectively stop them.

Carbo

As to whether the distinction is important, I would have to say yes and no. My research on workplace bullying has always focused on an overall goal of assuring all workers the human right to dignity in the workplace (Carbo, 2016). All forms of abuse violate one's right to dignity and other human rights and needs. When we take a positive rights approach to the employment relationship, there is less need to delineate

specific bad behaviors or prohibited actions – instead we focus on the outcomes and anything that would violate the positive rights would be prohibited or need to be corrected. However, the reality is that in the United States, we do not operate in a positive rights environment.

As to whether bullying is different from other forms of abuse depends at least partially on how we define workplace bullying. Often in research and in practice we see narrow definitions of workplace bullying. These fail to capture the full extent of workplace bullying and often would even eliminate behaviors that are recognized on operational forms of defining bullying. In my research and my advocacy, I support a broader definition of workplace bullying that covers many of the forms of abuse in the workplace that are often separated out in the research – abusive supervision, incivility, toxic leadership as three examples. The problem with covering each of these forms separately instead of as one broad phenomenon is that for each type of abuse we might need to pass separate legislation, employers might need to implement separate policies, we would need to convince both legislators and employers of the seriousness of each. So, the best route is to include all forms of abusive, hostile, intimidating, bullying behaviors under one term.

Question 2: What can and should bystanders do in workplace bullying situations?
Mattice

I am not a fan of the word 'bystanders' because it sounds passive, as if they do not have a choice in whether they speak up or not. I prefer the word 'reinforcers' because, as I tell my training audiences, when you are aware of something bad happening and you choose not to speak up, you are an active participant in the situation. You have given permission for bullying to occur. Out of everything I cover in my trainings, using the term reinforcer has had the biggest impact on attendees as shown in my training evaluations. This little paradigm shift seems to resonate with people; they don't want to be reinforcers, they want to be allies.

That said, what bystanders *should do* and *can do* are two different things. They *should* speak up to protect each other and their work culture. Whether they *can* depends on a variety of factors, such as their relationship with the parties involved and whether they believe their organization will support them. If they have told their manager that a co-worker can be rude and dismissive, and the manager did what many do and advised the employee to let it go, the employee learned they will not be supported in speaking up. They have also learned they will not be supported when something minor happens, so speaking up when something major happens (i.e. bullying) is not likely. By not training managers to respond to these types of lower level complaints, employers are training employees not to come forward. A pattern ensues, a culture of incivility and exclusion is ignited, and speaking up becomes less and less likely. With fears of speaking up in mind, bystanders should be provided tools to speak up.

Tracy

Workplace bullying often happens in private and outside the purview of others. That said, when employees do become aware that one of their coworkers is being bullied, there are several things they might do to help. First, it is important that they listen before offering advice. Telling the target to just quit, fight back, or simply blow it off is not advice that most targets find to be helpful (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2017). In contrast, listening to the targets as they make sense of the situation feels supportive (Tracy et al., 2006). People who are bullied feel better when they can share with one another

and collectively fantasize about revenge (Tye-Williams & Krone, 2015). Although this social support may not do anything to transform the pattern, it allows them to reframe the situation and craft a preferred identity (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008).

Second, bystanders can valuably place their body in alignment with someone who is abused (Razzante et al., 2018). Even standing silently next to or behind a person who is being bullied (especially when multiple bystanders do this) constitutes a show of solidarity even if it does not immediately and may not halt the abuse. Bystanders can also conversationally pivot or *re-source* problematic behavior (Foss & Foss, 2011), described as follows:

> Resourcing is when a conversant communicates a response based upon a neutral or positive element from an otherwise aggressively framed statement. For example, if supervisor Bob says, 'Sue is such a bitch. What does she know about working with community members?', employee Karen can re-source or pivot by saying, 'Speaking of community members, we really need to include that new client, and I have an idea'. (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012, p. 31)

When bystanders are members of dominant groups or powerholding communities, they bear even more responsibility for disrupting bullying (Razzante et al., 2018). They may do this by crafting policy, sanctioning the bully, or talking with other powerholders in the organization. Or, they might distribute educational materials on the costs of bullying or schedule related informational workshops. Even though bystanders have some power to intervene, when the bully is the boss, coworkers should not be held responsible for changing the situation. The bully is oftentimes perceived to be like an abusive parent and intervening can feel like (and actually trigger) an invitation for abuse (Tracy et al., 2006).

Keashly

There are a few things we know. We know that our lives at work are very much influenced and shaped by the people around us; our coworkers, our bosses, and our clients. What they do or do not do in each moment influences what happens next and thus, influences our experiences. What we know from workplace bullying research is that others are very often present when these situations occur. The question is, what do they do? Key motivators for constructive action are (1) witnesses view it as their responsibility to do something and (2) they have ideas and some confidence about what to do.

In terms of responsibility, the very fact of our presence influences what will happen next. We cannot NOT influence. Witnesses need to recognize and embrace their power to influence and do so intentionally and thoughtfully. Once bystanders take responsibility, they need to figure out what to do. While those who witness will often say they don't know what to do, research indicates they actually undertake a number of actions both in the immediate situation and after the fact, directly and indirectly (Keashly & Neuman, 2013). I think that witnesses and others underestimate the power of small things (distracting someone, making eye contact, talking to someone afterward be that an actor or a target) and assume that the only effective actions are bold 'in your face' actions like telling an actor to stop, which are quite risky.

Tye-Williams

Bystander interventions can be difficult for the reasons others have already discussed. I echo what others have said about encouraging bystanders to adopt the mantra that even

small acts (i.e. a reassuring smile) can have a big impact on a targets ability to withstand bullying. Additionally, simply being a reassuring ear can help targets communicate more effectively about their experience and in turn then become more likely to receive managerial intervention. I think the first part of helping those who are experiencing bullying is to let them tell their story and be heard. Too often, targets are discounted and so to me one of the most important things we can do is to allow them a space to talk about their experiences so they can process it and develop strategies to address it. Clearly, given the other suggestions, there is much more to this but I encourage bystanders and loved ones to let the target tell their story without judgment.

D'Cruz

I would take a step backwards and ask whether bystanders are in a position to do what they are being trained/told/expected to do (i.e. intervene) in workplace bullying situations. Research on bystanders in workplace bullying is increasingly linked to the perspective that bystander intervention is a potentially effective means of addressing the problem. Yet, in my view, power remains the most crucial factor impacting the scope and efficacy of bystander intervention. Power is central to workplace bullying situations and, hence, I believe that bystander intervention will work only if (a) bystanders feel powerful enough to actually intervene and (b) bystanders wield sufficient power to make a difference. The few available field-based studies on bystanders attest to the significance of power, emphasizing how fear, powerlessness, and silence hinder effective bystander intervention (e.g. D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011). Though employer–employee relations embody an inherent power imbalance and can thus discourage bystanders from intervening for fear of being victimized, there are promising pathways which can aid bystander success. First, workplace leadership and culture, which combine competitive advantage with employee rights, undergirded by stakeholder approaches to governance and internal process goals, are of vital importance for bystander confidence. Second, the collective strength of employees through conventional unions and emerging alternative forms of joint mobilization and action (e.g. social movements, advocacy groups) makes a decisive difference to workforce empowerment and bystander effectiveness. Third, the state, whose anti-bullying regulation, policy, and other initiatives are backed by its demonstrated commitment to, and involvement in, implementing anti-bullying measures through administrative and financial support, signaling employee protection, plays a key role in enabling bystander efficacy.

Question 3: What is the role of race, gender, and other marginalized identities in workplace bullying?

Hollis

As workplace bullying is based on a power differential, those further away from the hegemonic power structure often are more likely to face workplace bullying. For example, on average, White women make 82 cents compared to White men; Black women make 62 cents; Latina women make 54 cents compared to men (AAUW, 2019). Given deficient economic power for these populations, the financial benchmarks also show how diverse populations of women are disenfranchised and typically do not hold powerful leadership positions. The disenfranchised position is often the deficit position in which these populations encounter more abuse at work and in other sectors of their lives.

In the United States, discriminatory gender and race differentials are woven into the culture. Women and people of color are less likely to start a business and less likely to earn an equitable wage. Simultaneously, the same populations are more likely to occupy lower-paid service jobs, more likely to be saddled with debt, and more likely to be victims of violence (Gradín, 2019; Starrels et al., 1994). Women of color continuously are fighting injustices such as redlining, a racist practice to keep underrepresented groups from gaining mortgages in safer communities. Similarly, women of color are more likely to face predatory lending practices (Beeman et al., 2011). Banks prey on low-income populations because they wanted to purchase homes in safer neighborhoods. Banks created financial mechanisms which were a pathway to personal financial ruin.

When any group is relegated to lower-paying jobs, unsafe conditions, and institutional bias, these same groups are emotionally and psychologically overwhelmed. Not only do such groups traditionally lack the resources and mobility to circumvent workplace bullying and other injustices, but they potentially lack the emotional fortitude to fight one more battle (de la Garza, 2020). At first glance, these elements may seem disconnected and odd to consider in a discussion of workplace bullying. However, any policy or practice that weakens someone financially, emotionally, or psychologically puts them in an inferior position, which restrains their ability to resist bullying. For anyone to disrupt a bully, he or she must have the emotional fortitude and the financial resources to mount such a fight or chart an escape route. The aforementioned social economic milieu that developed along racial and gender lines relegate these populations to positions that disproportionately endure workplace bullying (Hollis, 2018).

D'Cruz

My position is that social categories and their intersectionality cannot be ignored in the workplace bullying trajectory. Whereas earlier, workplace bullying was seen as exclusively 'status-neutral'/'status-blind', contemporaneously, the coexistence of both workplace bullying and category-based harassment is increasingly acknowledged, because workplaces mirror the social setting in which they are embedded, bringing social relations, power dynamics, and micro–macro linkages into play.

While gender and ethnicity/race have long been discussed in relation to workplace bullying, there is an emerging focus on disability and chronic illness and sexual orientation. Yet, I argue that religion, caste, age, and class are also pertinent social categories in the context of workplace bullying. Moreover, focusing on intersectionality enhances validity through its capture of reality because people simultaneously belong to multiple overlapping social categories whose separate and combined levels of difference and power together hold implications for privilege and disadvantage. Banday et al. (2018), for example, emphasize age, class, and caste/tribal identity highlighting workplace bullying in the context of child labor, thereby not only altering the prevailing discourse around workplace bullying as an adult phenomenon but also evidencing the disenfranchisement that comes with poverty and marginalized identity.

Carbo

Racism, misogyny, and all forms of bigotry are alive and well in our society and the workplace is of course not immune from these. We must find more effective ways to address and end status-based abuse, harassment, and discrimination. I was honored to have served on the EEOC Select Task Force for the Study of Workplace Harassment from 2015 to 2018. As the EEOC report from Commissioners, Feldblum and Lipnic

(2016) published in part from the information gathered from committee notes, harassment (or bullying) based on race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, sexual orientation, and disability is alive and well in our society. While steps have been taken to address these forms of abuse over the past 30 years, the progress has been slow at best.

Part of the problem is that when we look to address discriminatory harassment, we focus on whether the behavior is based on one of these protected statuses. Bullies are well-informed today and tend to be clever. It is not difficult for them to hide their reasoning for bullying, even when it is based on race, color, national origin, or other protected statuses. We also know that bullies can be shielded by being equal opportunity bullies – bullying people from all different races, colors, national origin, and so on. However, the fact that they are bullying (or harassing) all different individuals does not make their behavior any less harmful. A big part of addressing harassment based on any of the protected statuses or characteristics is passing legislation that protects the right to dignity in the workplace and prohibits bullying behaviors no matter the basis for such behaviors.

Tracy

People who are marginalized due to their race, gender, age, or sexuality are more likely to face discrimination and abuse in the workplace. Research on intersectionality elucidates how various forms of inequality operate together and exacerbate each other, and how the result of various forms of hardship result in a gestalt effect that is more than the sum of its parts (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). Take, for example, the term 'Blackgirl' (one word no space) used by Boylorn (2016) to epitomize the interconnections of race and sex for Black women. She argues that 'black' and 'girl' are perceived and experienced jointly, and therefore no 'space' is needed between the two words.

Indeed, gender, ethnicity, and race are historically stigmatizing markers that may contribute the commonality of repeated microaggressions from a variety of people (de la Garza, 2020). What is more, aggressive people often prey upon the least powerful and may purposefully choose historically stigmatized people who tend to be easier targets of a variety of negative social phenomena (Allen, 2009). Bullying scholars can learn from co-cultural communication theory that identifies practices such as educating others, microaffirmations, and authentically articulating one's assumptions as specific communicative behaviors that foster support (Razzante & Orbe, 2018).

Mattice

My forum colleagues have already discussed the connection between membership in a marginalized group and bullying, so I will offer a different scenario. Recently one of my consultants received a bullying grievance from our client's employee. In speaking to the Executive Director, my consultant learned that the alleged perpetrator had been accused of bullying three times prior. All four complaints about the manager had been made by white women and as a woman of color herself, the Executive Director was sensitive to how race and inequity might come into play. The alleged perpetrator stated that this all boiled down to white women expecting her to communicate the way they do, rather than in ways that are in-line with her own race and culture. She insisted she was not a bully, and while we know people who bully lack insight on the impact of their behavior, we have to work through the observation that in this very diverse workplace it was indeed only white women who complained.

This example demonstrates the many layers we have yet to uncover when it comes to marginalized groups and bullying. When and how do we draw a line between cultural

differences and bullying behavior? How can we discern between bullying and communication style related to one's race? When employers set expectations for behavior how can they possibly factor in cultural communication, particularly as we move toward more and more diversity in the workplace? How can all parties feel validated in these situations, and find ways to work together? How do such topics as muted group theory, white fragility and implicit bias intersect with bullying? Researchers and practitioners need to move quickly on finding the answers to these types of questions.

Tye-Williams

Issues of diversity and inclusion rose to the fore of conversations in our national organization, the National Communication Association, this year in online forums such as Communication Scholars for Transformation and #communicationsowhite. I would argue that this heightened discussion mirrors changes happening among bullying scholars. Originally, workplace bullying was long discussed as a status blind phenomenon. There was an idea that racism, sexism, ageism, and all the other –isms were covered by other organizational policies and as such were largely not addressed in workplace bullying scholarship. More recent scholarship is incorporating issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other marginalized identities to give us a clearer picture of the ways these elements coalesce and how the experience of bullying differs depending upon one's identity. While we recognize that much of the discussion in this forum centers on policy and research in the United States, we do hope that it helps move conversations about bullying dynamics and race, gender, and other marginalized identities forward.

Question 4: Workplace bullying is largely an interdisciplinary field. What challenges and opportunities does this present?

Tracy

Like many pragmatic topics studied in organizational communication (e.g. sexual harassment, emotional labor, identity), research on workplace bullying is largely an interdisciplinary endeavor. As such, researchers have a rich variety of disciplinary viewpoints to pull from, such as management, education, law, trauma, psychology, and communication.

The communication discipline has been especially helpful for showing how people frame workplace bullying through metaphors, which then guides their action (Tracy et al., 2006), the communicative forms and features of bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), how employees can resist, advise, intervene on behalf, and support one another (Razzante et al., 2018; Tye-Williams & Krone, 2017), and how bullying might be addressed through micro, meso, and macro communicative interventions (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012) such as human resource personnel response (Cowan, 2012).

Keashly

The biggest challenge to me is a pragmatic one based on disciplinary silos and venues for communication. It is challenging to find the writings and research, often complicated by the use of different terms and publishing in disciplinary-specific media. This makes it very difficult to discern the landscape of what we know, what we don't know, and thus, what we don't know that we don't know. I have often felt that by not talking across our disciplines, we continually reinvent the wheel, which slows down our progress in addressing bullying and other forms of workplace mistreatment. I take as a given that bullying is a systemically developed and maintained phenomenon that is manifested/enacted at

personal, interpersonal and group level. As Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) note, we need to attend to the macro, meso, and micro influences and manifestations and their intersection in order to be able to address bullying. Interdisciplinary work is what will permit this analysis.

Question 5: What can the US learn from more employee friendly international workplace bullying policies and laws? What strategies can lead the US to adopt similar policies?

Carbo

We could learn a tremendous amount from countries that have taken steps to eliminate workplace bullying. We would learn that there is no 'business case' for preventing meaningful legislation to be passed. We would learn that while there might be an initial bottleneck due to the current lack of a path to address workplace bullying, that after this bottleneck is cleared, we would not be overly burdened by frivolous lawsuits. We might even learn that mandates to eliminate workplace bullying would create better managers and make our society healthier as a whole. Unfortunately, it seems that more and more, US employers and legislators are less and less willing to learn from their counterparts across the globe.

In terms of addressing workplace bullying, I believe that the only way we will see workplace bullying eliminated in a meaningful way is via mandate – both through legislation and through collective bargaining agreements. While some employers will take on the issue voluntarily, our own lessons around workplace harassment show us that even where there is a law, if the law is not strong enough, employers will not take the steps necessary. When I started looking at workplace bullying 15–20 years ago, employers were often times excused for failing to address the problem because the research was in its infancy, we still had much to learn about the problem. Now the research has existed for decades. Yet employers are not effectively eliminating workplace bullying.

The question becomes 'How do we get to a place where effectively preventing, detecting, remedying and eliminating workplace bullying is mandated?' I believe that we can once again learn from communities across the globe. Laws in other countries (France, Quebec, Belgium, and Sweden as examples) addressing workplace bullying also utilize a much broader definition of bullying than what is often applied the bullying research (Hoel & Einarsen, 2010; Hoel & Einarsen, 2010). Second, as we have seen with other employment laws – from the Fair Labor Standards Act (the eight-hour work day, child labor limitations, overtime), to the Civil Rights Act, to worker's compensation to unemployment compensation and even the Family Medical Leave Act – the labor movement has played a big part in these protections being passed for American workers and they will have to play a big part if we are to see effective measures to address workplace bullying. Third, addressing workplace bullying and especially passing anti-workplace bullying legislation will require a movement. With every protection that is proposed for American workers, we see an immediate and concerted reaction by business interests and their associations in opposition. There will need to be a movement that is stronger than this opposition. For the first time in my career, I can honestly say that I believe that over the next several years we are going to see a true movement that will emerge and that the momentum that such a movement builds will lead to the types of legislation we need to effectively address workplace bullying.

Tracy

The United States has largely been a disaster in terms of creating laws that prevent workplace abuse. And, the current political climate of name-calling, slander, and mocking has done even more to suggest that such behavior is acceptable, even for our most powerful and revered leaders. Until people in the United States choose for themselves political leaders who are committed to justice and kindness, it may be naive to believe that laws may be created to punish those who engage in bullying behavior. That said, organizations themselves can choose otherwise.

The United States can learn from more employee friendly nations about the power of anti-bullying laws (Namie et al., 2010). Certainly, laws will not disappear workplace abuse. That said, laws are integral for transforming ambiguous ideas (e.g. bullying or harassment) into constructs marked by denotative conformity where people crystalize and galvanize a shared understanding of a construct's definition (Clair, 1993). Laws stamp a name on amorphous phenomenon and transform them into issues to which organizations pay close attention.

Keashly

Ellen Cobb (2017) has written a terrific book on this. What I think will help the United States to adopt constructive policies is to consistently demonstrate through rigorous research (empirical and labor analysis) the prevalence, nature, and impact of bullying behaviors, particularly that it negatively affects the bottom line in terms of productivity, legal costs, training, reputation, and talent recruitment. Broader systemic analyses showing how workplace treatment and constructive climate connect to GDP and other broad economic indicators would also be useful. Further, rigorous research and organizational stories that demonstrate what organizational features, particularly regarding valuing and treatment of workers does for productivity and creativity. The HR literature in the past few years has been focusing increased attention on this and thus, can be a useful resource. Most broadly, comparative work benchmarking the United States against other countries on these metrics can also be very useful.

Hollis

While attending the international conference on workplace bullying and harassment in Milan, Italy, I had the opportunity to speak with Canadian colleagues from Quebec and British Columbia who managed offices which dealt directly with harassment and bullying behaviors. I asked how their organizations adjusted when their Canadian provinces officially prohibited workplace bullying. After the initial passage of anti-bullying legislation, they experienced a flood of complaints. Both of the officers fielding complaints and those submitting complaints were in a mutual learning curve on how to recognize and address it.

For the first two years, all parties grappled with the intensity of a bullying scenario, reconsidered workplace bullying definitions, and reflected upon the escalating abuse that qualifies as workplace bullying. Individual employees needed to understand workplace bullying and how their respective behaviors may be violations. The lessons for the United States are that legislation is needed to protect everyone, not just those from Title VII protected classes. Further, just like any policy or law, the implementation will include testing the policy and teaching compliance within the workplace environment. During this learning curve, all organizational community members will eventually establish normalcy regarding the prohibition of bullying behaviors.

Question 6: How, if at all, can bully-free workplaces be established?

Keashly

First and foremost, we have to believe that bullying is not a legitimate way of working with people and of responding to disagreement and challenge. To achieve this, there needs to be articulation of and direct challenge to narratives that frame bullying as acceptable and inevitable given the nature of work and workers. As Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) note, extant discourses that frame bullying as 'strategic leadership' or 'means of motivating low performing employees' or 'as part of the job' undergird the view that bullying is legitimate. These discourses need to be challenged by research and shown that bullying is not inherent in nor required for business, that it is hurtful and damaging, unnecessary, inappropriate, and thus, unacceptable.

Tracy

I think it is difficult to create bully-free workplaces. However, I do think it is worth our while to consider how we might create 'bullying-free' workplaces. I say this because I view employee identity as constantly shifting and changing, rather than essentialized (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). From this vantage, no one person is fully a bully (or a target or an ally for that matter). So, what can be done to ameliorate bullying in the workplace? An important move is to incorporate specific anti-bullying language into workplace policies (Cowan, 2012) and coupling policy change with behavior modifications. Human resources professionals and managers, for instance, could create rewards for treating others with respect. Managers need to continually pay attention and intervene early before it escalates into a regimented pattern. Any policies or structures that encourage employee competition, a focus on results with ignoring unjust process, or managers promoted above their ability will engender the possibility for bullying.

What is more, powerholders in organizations are wise to go beyond a focus on preventing bullying, but instead work toward creating especially compassionate and meaningful work climates. Empirical research suggests that the most important factors of meaningful work are that it

> (1) enables a sense of agency, (2) enhances belonging or relationships, (3) creates opportunities for influence, (4) permits one to use and develop one's talents, (5) offers a sense of making a contribution to a greater good, and (6) provides income adequate for a decent living. (Cheney et al., 2008, p. 150).

As such, employers should spend their energy cultivating these factors as much or more as they work toward trying to rid their workplace of bad behavior caused by bullies.

Hollis

I doubt that workplace bullying can be eradicated from the workplace. As long as there are power differentials, insecurity, jealousy, and organizational apathy, workplace bullying will exist. Similarly, I doubt that we can eradicate sexism, racism, and other xenophobic behaviors. The 1963 Equal Pay legislation and updated 2009 Lilly Ledbetter Equal Pay legislation did not halt gender-based pay inequity practices. The 1964 Civil Rights laws did not irradiate American racism. The Whistleblower Enhancement Act (2012) did not halt the incredible push our country has witnessed to unmask whistle-blowers.

The 2018 #MeToo movement did not halt misogynist behaviors. Yet, what is common with all of these legislations and movements is that they bring national attention to a problem. With such attention, the public can begin to ponder the gravity of these injustices. Consequently, we should still advocate for anti-bullying legislation.

D'Cruz

Addressing the institutionalized nature of workplace bullying is key. Available literature from across the globe shows that most instances of workplace bullying are institutionalized. Workplace bullying is therefore not an individual, private problem but a systemic, public issue and needs to be addressed as such. So, what is crucial to establishing bully-free workplaces is engaging 'institutional reflexivity' underpinned with 'ethical vitality' (Rhodes et al., 2010) at micro, meso, and macro levels, including individuals, groups, families, communities, workplaces and other organizations, societies, and the global community, with a view to dispassionately review, constructively critique, and effectively eliminate all structures, processes, and practices which trigger, support, perpetuate, and normalize bullying. I consider this to be a worthwhile challenge – and one that, I believe, is eminently attainable – for humankind, which echoes Harrington et al.'s (2015) call that 'nothing short of a revolution' is needed to prevent workplace bullying.

Summary

Tye-Williams

Despite several decades of research on bullying, we have made only moderate progress in lessening its occurrence, creating effective intervention strategies, and developing and passing policies at the state and federal levels in the United States. Clearly, this forum discussion signals that more work remains to be done. I would like to close with a recent anecdote to highlight the real importance of a continued emphasis on applied workplace bullying scholarship.

Someone recently reached out to me because his wife was being bullied by her boss and he wanted to know what he could do to help her. Near tears he described the helplessness he felt. 'This has been happening for months!' He exclaimed. 'Each week I watch her go dimmer and dimmer. She can't quit her job but she can't continue on like this either! Please help us.' I was able to provide him some strategies he could use to help and support his wife and some insight into how they might address it at the organizational level. He sent me an email a month later saying that things were slowly getting better and the helplessness was gone. He thanked me for talking with him because he said he felt he had nowhere to turn. Although, as we have noted, more work remains to be done, the point of sharing this anecdote is that workplace bullying scholars and practitioners can truly make a difference in the lives of targets, their loved ones, organizations, and the broader society. My hope is that this forum helps move research forward while also providing insights into how it can be ameliorated.

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