

Theory-to-Practice: Bi-Strategic Resource Control, a Core Component of Bullies' Workplace Influence and Power

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or

How an interesting insight into
social control yielded a whole new
perspective on a complex topic

With particular thanks to Lynne Tirrell
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agency extended my thinking and to
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the presentation's conceptual home

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Conflicts of Interests and Disclosures

There exist no real or perceived vested interests on the part of the investigator

Objectives

1. Define workplace bullying as engaged story-telling.
2. Identify how bullies use bi-strategic resource control within their stories.
3. Recognize victims' responses to bullies as engaged 'story-listening.'
4. Describe how story-telling in bullying impacts moral agency to enhance bullies' social control and influence.

Objectively speaking, BULLYING comprises:

repeated, unwanted, and aversive interpersonal
affronts aimed to establish personal dominance
of the bully relative to an intended target.

Noted to be escalating in places of work,
worldwide



Workplace bullying looks like this:



“... the culture of nursing in that facility was so awful... you went home every day beaten down and abused” (Wolf et al., 2018, p. 37)

“Being single with no children, I’m expected to take a holiday and mandatory shifts” (Simons & Mawn, 2010, p. 307).

“having evidence to back up his case, the participant considered the intervention of site administrators to be a better option than insisting on his innocence with the client” (the bully) (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2018, p. 135). (parenthetical phrase added)

Initial Study Goal: Examination of Bi-Strategic Control in Workplace Bullying

initiated with coding analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2012)—developing substantial codes describing, naming and classifying instances of bi-strategic resource control

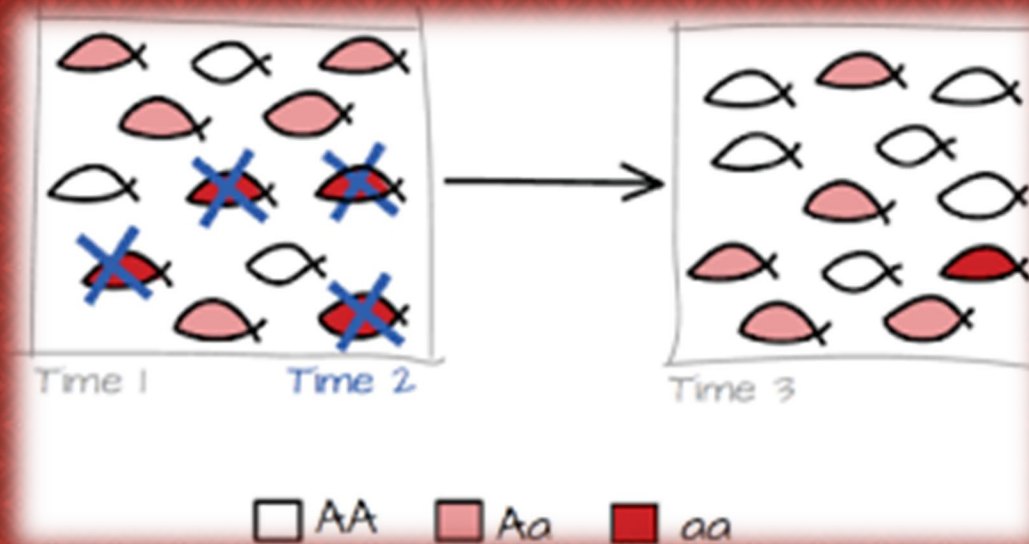
but shifted to critical hermeneutic analysis

(Phillips & Brown, 1993)

Critical Hermeneutic Process

1. *Assess* bully, target, victim (i.e. the vulnerable) and bystander *interactions* workplace-wide.
2. Identify *tacit and explicit rules and conventions* that constitute social agreements in the workplace.
3. *Integrate* interaction and social agreement data to establish a sense of the whole.

Abductive reasoning process



Building Reasonable Representations
of Experiences

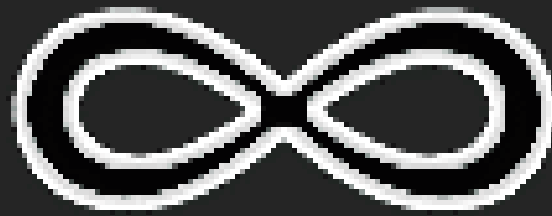
Data Source

Narrative Descriptions

bullying and victim responses in published reports and in findings of this research team

Findings

Bullying necessarily involves engaged and often uncomfortable relationships between bully perpetrators and their targeted victim(s)



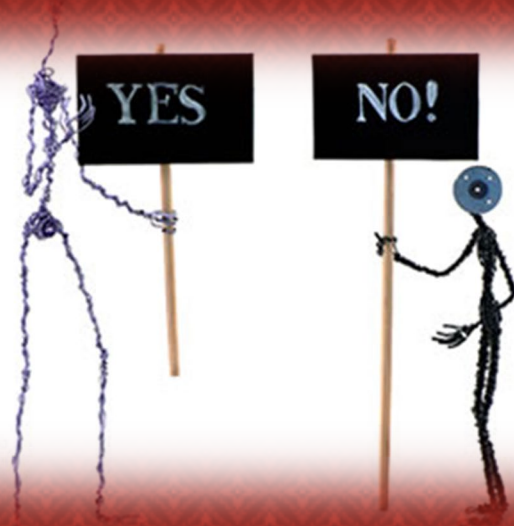
Bullies exert control through story-telling...



exploiting communicative competence
(Hyme, 1972) and narrative agency (Tye-
Williams & Krone, 2015) through engaging,
'narratively probable' (Fisher, 1985) stories
of their legitimate dominance



conveying to listeners what they think “about a set of events” (Tirrell, 1990, p. 116); “to see what sort of story (they) can tell; a sort of self-examination by self-exposure.” (p. 117) (parenthetical phrase added)



What makes bullies' stories particularly exploitive?



Bullies' Bi-Strategic Resource Control (Shorey & Dzurec, 2016)

Simultaneous prosocial (e.g., sharing, cooperating) and coercive (e.g., taking, threatening) strategies for resource control
(Hawley, 1999, 2003a)

A MIXED-MESSAGE??

to subtly persuade and regulate the behaviors of
listeners (Plantinga, 2018)

and

to

develop a sense of self, reflexively and relation
to others, as they develop capacity to justify
their decisions

what emerged through ongoing
analysis was unexpected and a
wonderful surprise



Bullies' stories advance their moral
agency

(Tirrell, 1990)

Moral Agency:

the ability to make judgments about right and wrong (moral judgments) and to be held accountable for related actions

(Bandura, 2002; Tirrell, 1990)

‘Storytelling is necessary for moral agency’
(Tirrell, 1990)

Through the articulation of events, motives,
and characters we become moral agents



Concomitantly

Through bullying,
victims' stories are overthrown
by bullies' one-way, controlling
communication style (Dzurec, et
al., 2014, 2017)

Lived history and complex physiology (Dzurec et al., 2014; Heidegger 2008/1962; Tirrell, 1990) direct victims to hear from the perspective of the bully (Coplan, 2004) and “through the dominant narrative” (Wolf et al., 2019, p. 35)

Victims' interpretations of bullies' meanings :

Subjective and negatively self-referential
(Ariely, 2008; Lotto, 2017; Roberge, 2011;
Sontag, 1966),

through story-listening (Brennan, et al.2012;
Willems, et al., 2015)...

For victims, “self and perspective are lost in the object of attention” (Murdoch, 1984, p. 84) and story content reigns supreme (Howells, 1891) as...

Victims' ethical relationship with themselves
is lost via a
complicated loss of moral agency and
personal control

Self-referentially, victims hold
themselves responsible for the
bully's affronts—after all, the bully
is **LEGITIMATED** by virtue of well-
told, bi-strategic story...

absolving them of personal
responsibility for the victim's
experience

(see Miller, 2015)

I Am Not
RESPONSIBLE
For What My Face Does
When You Talk.

Extending the Problem: Administrative
Dismissal or Outright Fear of the
Bully/Victim Dyad *and* the Lived,
Subjective Narrative

formal documents

laissez-faire leadership



(Dzurec, 2013; Glambek, Skogstad, & Einarsen,
2018; Westercamp, 2013)

Outcomes for Victims:

Social Isolation

Absent Belonging



Implications

Bullying is probably here to stay.

Years of research have failed to influence it (Gillen et al., 2017)

It's possible that

Individual studies of bullying have perpetuated “a focus so sharp (on apparent bullying behaviors and apparent victim responses) that everything around it blurs” (Penny, 2018, p. 8).

Generally, this study suggests that the message across studies has been:

‘Ain’t it Awful?’



Findings from this work further suggest that

“as a liminal event,...(bullying
victimization) involves entities and
conditions that slip between recognized
categories” (Miller, 2015, p. 142)

(parenthetical phrases added and focus
shifted from miscarriage)

Thus,

Victims have limited resources to help them
decipher the meanings of their experienced
losses (from Miller, 2015)

from the perspective of historically- and
socially-defined (Tirrell, 1990) lived
experience

“Discerning the moral meanings of
...(bullying) loss presents a challenge because
... (the experience) tends to exceed the extant
conceptual
resources and language we have at the ready”
(Miller, 2015, p. 142)

For Victims

Moral agency—relationship to self, to others,
and ability to take ‘honorable’ action—

suffers;

the mind cannot be in a ‘right’ state (Gert &
Gert, 2017)

To that end, our work now is addressing implications for strengthening victims' stories and for reintegration of their personal moral agency



Because “a person is essentially historical and social” (Tirrell, 1990, p. 117), interventions to remediate affronts to moral agency are necessarily individual, as simultaneous attention is paid to workplace context.

Next
Steps?



Helping victims get into a ‘right state’
through consideration of self, other,
and action in relationship—a new
story

Rebuilding victims' negative self-reactive attitudes (Miller, 2015):

guilt (about what 'I've done,' across a lifetime) and

shame (about who I AM)

So the bully NO LONGER is ‘singing
my life with *his* words’ (Fox & Gimbel,
1972)



For Researchers

Recognizing the significance of story-telling, story-listening, and moral agency as **ESSENTIAL** to understanding the bully/victim experience.



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