

Creating Healthy Work Environments VIRTUAL 2021

A Model for Interrupting Workplace Bullying Narratives' Confusing Menace: Spotting and Addressing Bullies' 'Sticky' Storytelling

Laura C. Dzurec, PhD, PMHCNS-BC, ANEF, FAAN

Connell School of Nursing, Boston College (previously), Storrs, CT, USA

Jennifer L. Embree, DNP, RN, NE-BC, CCNS, FAAN

Department of Community and Health Systems/Risk Department, Indiana University School of Nursing/Eskenazi Health, Indianapolis, IN, USA

Matthew S. Howard, DNP, RN, CEN, TCRN, CPEN, CPN

Scholarship Resources, Sigma Theta Tau International, Indianapolis, IN, USA

Monica Kennison, EdD, MSN, RN

Nursing Department, Berea College, Berea, KY, USA

Purpose:

This presentation offers a model for potentially interrupting workplace bullying's narrative menace. The model emerged from a recently-completed, dual-purpose study. The study's first purpose was to identify workplace bullying's core essence. That essence was 'sticky' (emotionally-compelling) storytelling. The second purpose was qualitative examination of bullying's influence on nurse educators' use of the science of nursing education in their teaching. Emerging from that work, the model presented today might help workplace bullying victims deal with their experiences of emotional trauma and, thus, strengthen their workplace effectiveness.

Methods:

The study yielding the model (Dzurec, 2020) was structured through integrative review (Broome, 2000), hermeneutics (Lanigan, 1988), and critical hermeneutics (Phillips & Brown, 1993), incorporating review of more than 200 papers to establish the essence of workplace bullying, and interviews with 19 nurse faculty participants who described the influence of workplace bullying on their teaching. The emergent model was abductively derived from study findings.

Results:

Bullies' persuasive power and impact actually might be incorporated into bullying's core essence, with three features prominent. First, by way of Western culture socialization, few individuals are fully self-possessed, able to walk away from others' suggestions that they are 'less-than,' or from subtle suggestions that they lack skill or ability in dealing with bullying situations. We are all needful of others' approval (Halpern, 1990). Bullying victims seek and seem to long for approval from and acceptance by their bully counterparts (Dzurec, 2020). Second, bullies' ongoing affronts foster symptoms like forgetfulness, disorganized thoughts and behaviors, and confusion for succumbing victims. As bullies repeat their typically illogical, confusing, and clandestine affronts over and over again, privately and in front of others, the affronts become stories, generating victims' chronic stress. All chronic stress dysregulates normal neurophysiology (Arnsten, 2009; Arnsten, et al., 2010; Stahl, 2013), and bullying is no exception.

Third, whether they are leveled with intent or merely through 'reckless disregard' (Parzefall & Salin, 2010), bullies' storied affronts are 'sticky' (Dzurec, 2020), rife with subtle innuendo and moral claims that bewilder intended victims. Bullying stories' inherent stickiness paradoxically enhances their psychological appeal (Acerbi, 2019), compelling ongoing victim buy-in—

especially when they capture and mirror victims' pre-existing negative self-beliefs (Dzurec, 2020).

Ensnaring victims emotionally, workplace bullying yields neurological dysregulation, altered cognition, and high level emotion, impeding not only victims' ability to think clearly but also their effective day-to-day functioning. Traditionally-employed educational interventions aimed at changing victim cognition may be minimally effective, as those interventions tap high-level centers in the brain that bullying, through its inherent 'sticky' story structure, may have disengaged (see Arnsten, 2009; Arnsten et al., 2010; Dzurec, 2020).

Conclusion:

The presented model offers an alternative to traditionally-proposed bullying interventions. It incorporates reflection aimed to interrupt the impact of bullies' sticky story narratives as it: lessens perceptions of threat to foster victims' improved sense of belonging and social engagement, encourages victim reframing of bully-derived self-perceptions, and contributes to rebuilding victims' positive self-esteem. Strengthening victim response to bullies' sticky stories, the model might serve to strengthen the overall effectiveness of bullying victims' day-to-day workplace endeavors as well.

Title:

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Keywords:

intervention, science of nursing education and workplace bullying

Abstract Summary:

Workplace bullying is common in nursing education. This presentation offers an evidence-based model of bullying as emotionally-sticky storytelling. Abductively derived from a study of workplace bullying's influence on faculty members' use of the science of nursing education, the model may support victims' strengthened teaching as it interrupts bullying's emotional impact.

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First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author

Laura C. Dzurec, PhD, PMHCNS-BC, ANEF, FAAN
 Boston College (previously)
 Connell School of Nursing
 Senior Scholar through 6/30/2020
 Storrs, Connecticut
 USA

Author Summary: Laura Dzurec just completed a 2-year term as Senior Scholar at Boston College. Previously, she served as Dean at Widener University, Kent State University, and the University of Connecticut and held various posts at Oregon Health Science University, University of Maine, The Ohio State University, Kent State University, and Case Western Reserve University. She is a Fellow in the National League for Nursing's (USA) Academy of Nursing Education and the American Academy of Nursing.

Second Secondary Presenting Author

Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author

Jennifer L. Embree, DNP, RN, NE-BC, CCNS, FAAN
 Indiana University School of Nursing/Eskenazi Health
 Department of Community and Health Systems/Risk Department
 Clinical Associate Professor, MSN Leadership in Health Systems Coordinator, Magnet Coordinator
 Indianapolis, Indiana
 USA

Author Summary: Jennifer Embree is a former NFLA Scholar and working in partnership with Indiana University School of Nursing and Eskenazi Health System as their Magnet Coordinator

Third Secondary Presenting Author

Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author

Matthew S. Howard, DNP, RN, CEN, TCRN, CPEN, CPN
 Sigma Theta Tau International
 Scholarship Resources

Director of Scholarship & Leadership Resources
Indianapolis, Indiana
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Matthew Howard currently serves as the Director of Scholarship Resources at Sigma. While also serving as faculty at Northern Kentucky University, he works as a staff nurse in the emergency department at Eskenazi Health. His nursing career has taken him from stretcher-side nursing to academia and back. His clinical background includes emergency, flight, and trauma nursing, including several leadership positions. He currently serves several nursing associations including the ANA, ENA, INDEN, NNERN, and Sigma.

Fourth Secondary Presenting Author
Corresponding Secondary Presenting Author
Monica Kennison, EdD, MSN, RN
Berea College
Nursing Department
Susan V. Clayton Nursing Chair; Professor
Berea, Kentucky
USA

Author Summary: Dr. Monica Kennison is the Susan V. Clayton Nursing Chair and Professor at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. She has 39 years experience in nursing education including twelve years in higher education administrator. Dr. Kennison is President of the Kentucky Nursing Deans and Directors Association and serves as a Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education accreditation site visitor. Her most recent publications, research and presentations relate to fostering climates of civility and combating workplace bullying.