'In the Family Way:'
Unacknowledged Family Dynamics Commingled in Victim Accounts of Their Workplace Bullying Communications

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Conceptualizations of Human Environments (Moos, 1973)

- Ecological dimensions (physical world)
- Organization Structure (size, staffing, salaries)
- Milieu inhabitants (age, abilities, SE status)
- Behavior settings (ecological psychology)
- Functional/reinforcing properties (psychological and social)
- Psychosocial characteristics (person/milieu interaction)
Focus of Our Current Study:

How history—particularly as it reflects family experiences from earlier life—is reflected in victim accounts of workplace bullying acts
Our Premise:

History and current context contribute to determining the occurrence and outcomes of workplace bullying.
Theoretical Foundations of our Premise
Numerous authors demonstrate that parent-child relationships can influence peer relationships outside the home, not only in childhood.

(Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Knutson et al., 2004; Mohr, 2006; Ohene et al., 2006; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001)....
but also in the workplace (Lindy & Schaefer, 2010).
We bring learned behaviors, attitudes, values, and communication styles with us to the workplace.

Individuals’ needs for affect  
--Schlett & Ziegler, 2014

Social support structures  
--AbuAlRub, 2004

Shared interpretations of workplace events  
--Brooks, 1995; Lau, 2013
Moreover, as Heidegger (2008/1962) argued, we ARE our histories.

“In its factical Being, any Dasein is as it already was, and it is 'what' it already was. It is its past, whether explicitly or not” (p. 41).

Thus, family interactions influence behavior not only in real time but over time, as published studies attest:
Brené Brown noted that parenting style is a predictor of proneness to shame and guilt.

Frone and colleagues argued that family-oriented experiences may exert significant influence over the processes that guide workplace behavior.


Anda and colleagues found strong relations between adverse childhood experiences and worker performance, mediated by interpersonal relationship problems, emotional distress, somatic symptoms, and substance abuse.

Building on the tradition of Heidegger, and in light of published study findings, we examined bullying victims’ invocation of metaphors reflecting family history in their descriptions of workplace bullying affronts.

“The discovery of tradition and the disclosure of what it 'transmits' and how this is transmitted, can be taken hold of as a task in its own right” (Heidegger, 2008/1962, p. 41).
Why do we care?
Bullying is prevalent in workplaces internationally, fueled by increasing workplace complexity.
Bullying is defined as the repeated, unreasonable actions of individuals or groups intended to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, or undermine targeted victims—it often is interpersonal and nonverbal in nature.

(Dzurec, Kennison, & Albataineh, 2014; Dzurec & Bromley, 2012)
Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik (2010) argued that “when bullying involves others beyond the bully and target, and accomplices are part of the mix, viewing bullying as a private two-person conflict oversimplifies how collective voices magnify bully-target power disparity” (p. 344).
Our focus, however, is on the interpersonal aspects of bullying, aspects that have been overlooked to the detriment of affected victims.
To ignore interpersonal aspects is to treat symptoms without addressing the underlying problem.
Even in its subtlety, “Bullying at work is claimed to be a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress put together.”

Adams & Bray, 1992, p. 16
Moreover, results of our own studies demonstrate that unacknowledged conditions significantly and clandestinely contribute to workplace bullying’s tenacity.

These unacknowledged conditions include, for example:
Absent Policy

Failure to Address the Language of Bullying

Underlying Victim Shame

Administrator Denial

Vague Definitions of Relevant Terms
We began to question whether unspoken, historical family issues motivated victim responses to their bully counterparts, as well.
RESEARCH METHOD:
Pragmatic utility—
a criterion-based meta-analytic approach for concept analysis

(Morse, 2000; Morse & Weaver, 2006; Hawkins & Morse, 2014)
Steps in the process:

-- broad review of literature

-- identification of relevant descriptions

-- development of analytical questions emerging from the first two steps of our process

-- synthesis of results through re-review of the literature.
To operationalize family-like communications and ground our literature review, we modified Moos’s Family Relationships Index (FRI) from the Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos & Moos, 1981).

(FRI used and modified with permission of R. Moos)
FES (Moos & Moos, 1981) Items, with modifications, are:

1. Family (Faculty) members really help and support one another.

2. Family (Faculty) members often keep their feelings to themselves.

3. We fight a lot in our family (faculty).

4. We often seem to be killing time at home (work).

5. We say anything we want to around the home (at work).
6. Family (Faculty) members rarely become openly angry.

7. We put a lot of energy into what we do at home (work).

8. It is hard to ‘blow off steam’ at home (work) without upsetting somebody.

9. Family (Faculty) members sometimes get so angry they throw things.

10. There is a feeling of togetherness in our family (faculty)

11. We tell each other about our personal problems.

12. Family (Faculty) members hardly ever lose their tempers.
Findings

Behaviors and descriptions characterizing historical family dynamics frequently figured

-in published, targeted bully victims’ descriptions of the communications of their workplace bullying counterparts

-in theoretical descriptions underpinning bullying research.
“Several described feeling ‘scolded,’ ‘shrinking,’ and ‘small’ when bullied.”

“I felt like a little girl and (the bully) was up higher, she was working on a step ladder.”

“This guy reminds me so much of my old man, it starts dragging up crap from when I was a kid, and I’m sitting there going, ‘I’ve got to feel like 10 years old again.’”

(Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006, pp. 163-164)
“Respondents described actions such as deans or directors throwing paper across the room, banging hands on the table in meetings, shouting, loudly criticizing faculty in front of their colleagues, and looking at others dismissively ‘down their noses’”

(Goldberg, Beitz, Wieland, & Levine, 2013, p. 193).
“I feel I don’t measure up to their expectations…Somehow I wasn’t good enough there either…I had nobody to ask when I grew up. Dad was out of the game and mum didn’t know much. I copied classmates that I knew came from good families.”

“…constant bickering about petty issues”

(Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007, p. 337)
“Seven subthemes clustered under the following themes: feelings of self-doubt related to ability, feelings of fear or intimidation related to future interactions with instigator, feeling belittled as though being treated like a child, perceiving a lack of mentorship, sensing a power struggle within the department of nursing, sensing that senior faculty feel threatened by novice faculty, and feeling disbelief at the lack of professionalism”

Bullies sometimes relied on conceptualizations of victims’ family backgrounds to intimidate their victims:
“You were brought up with a silver spoon shoved up your ass.”

(Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006, p. 413)
In addition to specific quotes, we found many conceptual references to links between quality of dynamics in family of origin and victim vulnerability to workplace bullying:
Sperry and Duffy (2009) asserted that family dynamics influence victim responses to and recovery from mobbing (defined similarly to bullying).
Childhood neglect leads to development of violence (Bolger et al., 2001)

Stress emerges as personal and professional values diverge (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007)

“Old baggage” (p. 289) characterizes workplace difficulties (Lindy & Schaefer, 2010)

Childhood experiences and subsequent vulnerability are linked (Tracey & Alberts, 2006)
“Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that ‘expecting loyalty in exchange for nurture at work’ relates positively with the experience of bullying. In contrast, findings indicated a negative association between leadership involving ‘behaving like a senior family member at work’ and bullying” (p. 217).

--Soylu, 2011
“Bullying is akin to domestic violence where the abuser is on the payroll.”

www.workplacebullying.org/2013/.../bullying-is-workplace-violence/
Results and Implications

For some bullying victims, family-oriented metaphors became a reference point for interpreting the gist of bullying affronts.

For some bullies, family-oriented metaphors became a reference point for rationalizing their bullying behaviors.
Published victim quotes describing bully affronts incorporated family-oriented metaphors, even though the literature generally addressed bullying acts only in present tense, not in terms of victims’ past experiences.

Numerous researchers have examined and found links between experiences in family of origin and subsequent degree of vulnerability to workplace bullying acts.
As experiences from early family interactions serve as metaphors and outcome predictors for workplace bullying victims, understanding victim perceptions of how those same kinds of interactions play out in workplace bullying situations is in order.
Future Research

Quantitative analysis of the modified FES using Item Response Theory

Correlation of modified FES items with items from Clark’s (2013) Faculty-to-Faculty Incivility survey to examine relevant associations
References

available on request