

Power, subjectivity, and context in workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment: Insights from postpositivism

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Thematic Focus of the Special Issue (SI)

Workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment affect 30% to 40% of working adults in the global workforce, at some time during their work histories (Nielsen et al, 2010). Past literature on workplace bullying, largely inspired by positivist scholarship, reifies a sovereign notion of power as a zero-sum game (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006) and downplays subjectivity through behavioural measures and clinical parameters (D'Cruz, 2015). Yet, power and subjectivity are hallmarks of the phenomenon (Einarsen et al, 2011). Indeed, affected employees' coping demonstrates considerable agency, suggesting that power is more of a dialectic tension than a fixed commodity (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Targets' interpretation of their experiences results in self-labelling (Einarsen et al, 2011) that are sometimes discounted when these diverge from objective criteria (D'Cruz, 2015), while bullies' deniability affords them effective cover (Rayner et al, 2002). More recently, dynamics involved in the contemporary neo-liberal project, specifically the practices associated with managerialism, can trigger adult bullying (Beale & Hoel, 2011). Little empirical work has aimed at ascertaining the role of context in bullying dynamics but organizational theory suggests that organizational cultures and communication climates are active factors here.

Understanding of workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment stands to gain from qualitative approaches that are amenable to the irrationality, paradoxes, and complexity of organizational life without seeking formulaic representations of the social world (Prasad, 2005), but acknowledging the inextricable entwinement of researcher cognition and emotion with the inquiry process (Dickson-Swift et al, 2009).

Call Details

In seeking submissions anchored in postpositivist traditions/sub-traditions, the special issue (SI) joins efforts at redrawing methodological boundaries in the study of workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment. While contributing to theorization about power, subjectivity, and/or context, the papers must advance qualitative approaches to workplace bullying research beyond the current positivist skew. Ideas for submission to the SI include but are not limited to the following:

- How does attention to involved parties' subjectivity recast conceptualizations of workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment? What qualitative methods best "get to" the various subjectivities?
- What are the power dynamics involved in situations of workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment? What are the different protagonists' roles, especially that of the alleged perpetrators as this area has largely been absent? How do researchers get access to various protagonists in terms of power as a dialectic?
- In what ways do capitalist underpinnings of contemporary workplaces serve as context or affect bullying, abuse and harassment situations? What are the contextual

implications for power and subjectivity? Preference will be given to research using unique qualitative approaches for accessing organizations.

- What is the shifting nature of alliances in situations of workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment? Coworkers, for example, can be perpetrator-allies, target-allies, or members of a silent audience. Membership in these appears to be fluid. What power dynamics or organizational context features impinge on alliance shifting? How does the distinctiveness of qualitative methods help to understand power, context, and alliance shifting?
- What are the experiences of any protagonist(s) in the workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment situation, namely, targets, bullies, bystanders, organizational actors (top management, leaders, supervisors, HR, employees, etc.) as well as interventionists (therapists, lawyers, unionists, etc.) and significant others.
- What are the processes involved with gaining organizational access to study workplace bullying, abuse, and harassment, a subject that reflects negatively on the organization and its public image? How do researchers negotiate entrance into organizations, given managements' unlikelihood of granting admission?

Submission Details

Deadline for submission of manuscripts is 15 October 2016. Manuscripts should be a maximum of 10,000 words in length (including tables, figures and references) and should conform to the normal submission guidelines for Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management,

http://www.emeraldinsight.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=grom

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