UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING AMONG STAFF IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING AMONG STAFF IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover how staff members in a division of student affairs define workplace bullying, whether or not they have experienced workplace bullying, and finally whether or not they have witnessed workplace bullying in higher education. Participants were invited to complete an open-ended online survey where they could define workplace bullying and share their personal experiences with bullying or witnessing bullying in the workplace. The study explored the lived experiences of student affairs professionals with personal and bystander experiences of bullying in the higher education workplace. Social identity theory relating to in-group and out-group formation in the workplace was used to understand the experiences of participants.

Data analysis provided details of participants’ definition of bullying in higher education in addition to their own personal and witnessed experiences. Participants defined, experienced, and witnessed bullying in the workplace the same as faculty and professionals outside of higher education. Participants’ experiences were similar to faculty and non-higher education professionals in all areas except for the reporting of bullying. Unlike faculty and non-higher education employees, student affairs staff members are more likely to report bullying experiences. Using the results and conclusions, several levels of employee training were recommended to be implemented in higher education to help prevent future bullying experiences of staff members.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The topic of workplace bullying has started to gain significant research interest (Hollis, 2012 & 2015; Lester, 2013; Sutton, 2007; Washburn, 2005). In particular, higher education has taken a special interest in researching workplace bullying, concentrating its focus on how this bullying impacts the higher education system (Hollis, 2012 & 2015). Prior research on organizational cultures and behaviors that promote workplace bullying has helped create baseline knowledge of the phenomenon (Alsever, 2008; Fox & Stallworth, 2009; Meyer, 2002; Murphy, 2003; Sweeney, 2007).

Baseline knowledge centers around the different ways office culture unknowingly creates bullies through unreasonable deadlines in addition to strict budgets while pitting colleagues against each other to create a competitive environment (Alsever, 2008; Meyer, 2002). Often individuals in career professions, such as student affairs, find that personal recognition is more important and significant than monetary rewards because of the organizational recognition structure and how the organization views them and their professional skills (Murphy, 2003). There is baseline information that indicates the overall costs to the organization when bullying is taking place. Examples such as loss of productivity, a rise in accidents and mistakes, in addition to high turnover and absenteeism all lead to a diminished organizational reputation (Fox & Stallworth, 2009; Sweeney, 2007).

A concern with the current literature is that it focuses primarily on faculty and student experiences with bullying in higher education and only occasionally covers the experiences of staff members. For example, Twale and De Luca (2008) and Taylor (2013) focus on bullying in higher education; but, their research focuses on the experiences of tenure and tenure track faculty.
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and the nuances that accompany bullying among faculty and how higher education can alleviate bullying among the faculty ranks. Hollis (2015) enhances the current literature with her study on the cost of bullying to higher education and provides recommendations for future research. Although the study completed by Hollis (2015) adds a piece of research that provides information on the workplace bullying experiences of staff in higher education, there is still a need for more research on these staff experiences.

The current literature suggests that the organizational structure, necessity, and costs associated with staff potentially influence students’ overall college experiences (Creamer, 2004; Gumport, 2000; Kezar, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, while Twale and De Luca (2008) provide insight into the bullying culture that takes place among faculty, few studies to date focus on the staff experiences of bullying in higher education. It is important to investigate the experiences staff in higher education have had with academic bullying in order to determine whether staff members also experience workplace bullying (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Simpson & Cohen, 2004), and to determine whether any such bullying is similar to the bullying Twale and De Luca (2008) found among faculty. The goal of this inquiry, then, is to discover the nature of workplace bullying in the lived experiences of staff members in higher education, specifically those staff who work in student affairs.

Background of the Problem

Academic bullying is not a new phenomenon; in fact, it has likely been around since the first higher education institution opened its doors. But what is academic bullying? What type of covert and overt actions in the workplace constitute bullying behavior? Bullying could be “acts of hostility and sarcasm, or exclusionary behavior, to subtle acts including targeting individuals based on their popularity and/or success” (Raineri, Frear and Edmonds. 2011, p. 22). We are taught early in our lives, through experiences in school, what a bully is and what a bully is not
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and we take this meaning with us into the workplace (Faucher, Cassidy, & Jackson, 2015). “The people who were bullying kids on the playground are more likely to be the bullies in the workplace” (Twale & De Luca, 2008, p. 48). Keeling, Quigley, and Roberts (2006) suggest that bullies are often unaware that they are, in fact, bullying people in the workplace and that often the person who is accused of workplace bullying is in a position of power over the person who makes the bullying complaint. Keeling et al. (2006) further found that bullies usually select the “more popular, hard-working and successful employee to single out for bullying” (p. 620). This is because the hard-working employee possesses a perceived threat to the bully in the working environment. Through their actions, academic bullies bring shame and embarrassment into the workplaces. In light of these consequences, how is bullying culture so often undetected in a profession that constantly assesses their actions and strives to provide a safe learning environment for an ever-changing student population?

Group Formation

Social identity theory (SIT) provides information on group formation and on how in-groups and out-groups function within an organization. Ramsay et al. (2011), in their article “Work-place bullying: A group processes framework,” discuss the nuances of SIT and provide an overview of how in-group and out-group perceptions impact workplace bullying. Ramsay et al. (2011) label “the social categorization process” (p. 803), where employees place themselves and their coworkers in social groups based on the differences and similarities they perceive.

Once individuals identify themselves and others as belonging in these categories, the authors continue, they place those in their category in an in-group and the others in an out-group. Placing oneself in a workplace in-group “can enhance self-esteem and act as one of the primary motivating factors in the development of social identity” (Ramsay et al., 2011, p. 803). Ramsay et al. (2011) share other researchers’ perspectives about out-groups and how out-group members
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are “less likely to receive ‘the benefit of the doubt’ or be given help in ambiguous circumstances, and are more likely to be seen as provoking aggression” (p. 804). “The greater the inter-group differentiation between work groups, the greater the likelihood of inter-group bullying, especially by the in-group towards the out-group” (Ramsay et al., 2011, p. 804). The research also suggests that “pro-social or respectful groups are less likely to experience within-group bullying” (Ramsay et al., 2011, p. 807). This evaluation of the in-group and out-groups provided Ramsay et al. (2011) with a perspective that “encapsulated important socio-psychological processes in work-place bullying from a group level perspective” (p. 809). In-groups and out-groups and a staff member’s perceived status can put them at a higher risk of experiencing workplace bullying due to a placement in the workplace out-group by colleagues or supervisors. This developmental aspect of SIT allows a baseline knowledge of how workgroups are formed and why some employees may feel that they have experienced workplace bullying while others may not have had any experiences with bullying in the workplace.

Organizational identification. Social group membership has a significant impact on a person’s ability to identify with the organization, which can lead to monetary loss within the organization. Amiot and Abuin (2013) conclude that “the insecure and glorifying forms of social identification as well as those that emphasize intergroup comparisons and competition are associated with consequences that may be detrimental to the individual or to intergroup relations” (p. 565). Intergroup comparisons and competition can lead to higher risks of employees feeling as though they have experienced bullying in the workplace because of the social group membership they have established in the workplace.

Martiny, Roth, Jelenec, Steffens, and Croizet (2012) discuss the ways that stereotype threats can cause newly created groups to focus solely on the “content of the stereotype and not the claim that stereotype threat is solely about the content of the stereotype and not about the
group’s position in the social hierarchy” (p. 65). The authors then discuss how social identity theory pertains to groups within organizations and how “highly identified group members are willing to make an effort to increase their group’s performance” (Martiny et al., 2012, p. 69). This increase in a groups’ membership supports Amiot and Abuin’s (2013) ingroup theory and leads to increased group membership. Using social identity theory, group members become highly cohesive and therefore could demonstrate bullying behavior to new group members in ways that may not fit the group norms and culture. For example, the established group in a workplace could place a new colleague in the out-group of the work environment and then use their perceived power as a cohesive workgroup to deploy bullying tactics on the new colleague who they feel is not a part of their workgroup.

**Lived experiences.** The nature of bullying in the workplace can be challenging to assess and differs between individuals and their lived experiences. A phenomenological approach was selected to help guide the data collection and analysis. An experience of feeling bullied is contingent on the space, body, time, and human relations that the bullied person encounters during lived experiences. Sheree Dukes (1984) states that “the task of phenomenology is to see the inherent logic of human experience and to articulate that logic or sense faithfully, without distortion” (p. 198). Researchers must bracket their own views of the experience being studied in order to provide accurate information. In the case of this study, any previous experiences, beliefs, values, or knowledge of bullying in the workplace were taken out of consideration when collecting data so that a focus could be placed on the “descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (Patton, 2015, p. 117).

**Bullying and Sexual Harassment**

**Sexual harassment/harassment defined.** Workplace bullying and physical or sexual harassment are sometimes perceived to be synonymous, but Simpson and Cohen (2004) provide
examples that demonstrate the difference between the two. “Sexual harassment is located in
gendered power and based on group characteristics and key organizational contexts, such as
(2004) suggest the following two behaviors to be sexual harassment: “touching, sexual
advances” (p. 165). Hollis (2012) suggests that harassment takes place “when the target is from a
protected class (gender, race, religion, national origin, or disability) while bullying is a class free
assault on the target” (p. 2). Additionally, harassment could be perceived from the power group
(in-group) in the office towards a colleague who has not yet been selected as part of the in-group
by the perceived leaders of the environment.

**Bullying defined.** Workplace bullying tendencies are more likely to be “located in
organizational power, are based on individual characteristics and key organizational contexts
such as restructuring and downsizing, and tend to be primarily psychological in nature”
(Simpson & Cohen, 2004, p. 165). Examples include: “work overload, unfair criticism, excessive
monitoring” (Simpson & Cohen, 2004, p. 165). However, Martin and Hine (2005) suggest that
the severity of the harassment is what makes the difference between workplace bullying and
harassment. Placement of in-group and out-group membership could play into how an employee
perceives their experiences of bullying in the workplace. An employee’s placement into an in-
group or out-group by their colleagues, or through self-selection, can have an impact on how
they define bullying in the workplace. For the purpose of this study, “bullying” was defined as:

Unreasonable behavior by a person (or group of people) that intimidates,
degrades, offends, threatens, or humiliates a worker (or group of workers).

Workplace bullying negatively affects the physical or psychological health of the
targeted employee(s). Workplace bullying generally involves repeated,
unreasonable actions, but it can also be a single, severe action. National data
suggessts that many behaviors can contribute to workplace bullying. (Williams & Ruiz, 2012, p. 4) Using the definition provided by Williams and Ruiz (2012) allows for a concrete definition of bullying through which the experiences of participants can be defined.

**Bullrassment defined.** In her book *Bully in the Ivory Tower: How Aggression & Incivility Erode American Higher Education*, Hollis (2012) provides the research field with a new term for workplace bullying: bullrassment. This term defines the bullying-harassment that people endure in the workplace regardless of Title VII status. Bullrassment is used to describe bullying between two people of the same status according to Title VII (race, gender, age, disability etc.). This term can also be used to describe the bullying experiences among in-group and out-group members when intergroup competition takes place creating an environment where employees at the same level and in the same social group are pitted against each other when attempting to move forward in the workplace.

**Rise of bullying in higher education.** Meyer (2002) and Hollis (2015) provide rationales as to why the bullying culture is becoming more prevalent in higher education. Meyer (2002) notes that higher education institutions are now accountable to more than the government and the board of trustees. Due to rising costs and budget cuts to higher education, changes in how institutions are being funded have been made. In addition to being responsible to the government (both state and federal) and board of trustees, many educational institutions are now also responsible to various “businesses, professional, and political interests” (Meyer, 2002, p. 539). In addition to the rationale provided by Meyer (2002), Hollis (2015) suggests that the bullying culture is more prevalent in higher education due to a recession that has caused “surprise layoffs, spontaneous furloughs, dwindled resources, and jaded employers” (p. 1), making higher education an insecure field. As higher education experiences these events a need has arisen to
demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of the services that are provided to students in order to justify expenditures. The need to justify has impacted social group formation through increases of competition among stakeholders for limited resources which impacts the formation of in-group and out-group membership as group membership relates to experiences and activities that are best for the institution and students with the now limited resources. Higher competition between the social groups in the work environment is leading to bullying experiences among employees.

**Functional Organizations**

Twale and De Luca (2008) provide background on why academic bullying has gone unnoticed in many organizations: “Many of the behaviors that are deemed uncivil go undetected in the academic structure because they are most commonly hidden in what looks like a functioning organizational structure” (p. 74). Hollis (2015) and Sutton (2007) both suggest that this type of operational culture can cost an institution a tremendous amount of manpower, time, and money. Fox and Stallworth (2009) discuss costs such as decreased communication, possible workplace aggression, sabotage, or uncivil environments, which they add to the costs of employee turnover and time spent by colleagues dealing bullies. These areas of distress in the organization are direct costs to the institution through more sick and vacation days used, which then leaves a heavier burden on the institution because of an increased workload on the remaining employees (Hollis, 2015; Sutton, 2007). Group membership of employees also has an impact on the perceived functioning of an organization. In-group members may feel more confident that their bullying tactics will not be reported by out-group members leading to the costs discussed by Fox and Stallworth (2009). Additionally, out-group members may feel as though there is no place to report or receive assistance for their experiences and therefore see leaving the organization as their only option of relief from the environment. This outwardly
operational organization could also find itself with more direct costs of legal liabilities due to work environment, harassment or uncivil behaviors. But why does the institution, department, or functional area continue to function in such a way that these behaviors are created and allowed to continue?

The accountability of behaviors for faculty and staff in higher education institutions is not something that is often discussed beyond the singular concerns of whether the services being provided to students are enough to retain them and whether the students are graduating on time. Along with this focus on the retention and graduation of students has come what St. John (2004) suggests is a high distribution of authority among key institutional administrators. This distribution of authority has created environments in which accountability can be displaced to another functional area or can be avoided all together allowing for the formation of powerful workgroups that are highly competitive. Low accountability within the culture of a department can be a breeding ground for bullying. In addition, according to Alsever (2008), directors can unknowingly create an environment that encourages a bullying culture. An example of this may be a director with a laissez-faire management style who gives the employees the opportunity to fill in the blanks of assignments themselves. The freedom to fill in the blanks allows employees the opportunity to create highly concentrated groups of like-minded colleagues (in-groups) that work against others in the workplace who have different thoughts and ideas about how the work environment should operate to serve the institution (out-group members). Another example of how a bullying culture can be created unknowingly is when a director does not give “authority to supervisors to reprimand workers” (Alsever, 2008, p. 2) when there are issues in the workplace. The lack of authority sometimes could be due to out-group membership of the supervisor or attributed to the supervisor’s supervisor having in-group membership with the perceived in-group and not allowing their subordinate to stop the competitiveness of the departmental level in-
group. These issues, combined with the high distribution of authority, leaves higher education open to a bullying culture.

**Statement of the Problem**

Current research covers workplace bullying experiences in the field of business, schoolyards, and among faculty in higher education (Cooper & Snell, 2003; Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Lewis, 2004; Montez, Wolverton & Gmelch, 2003; Raineri et al., 2011; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Twale & De Luca, 2008) while few studies explore the experiences of workplace bullying among staff (Hollis, 2012 & 2015). However, Keashly and Neuman (2010) and Hollis (2012, 2015) do provide initial research literature on the experiences of workplace bullying among staff members in higher education. This initial research provides a starting point for additional research on whether people are experiencing or witnessing workplace bullying among staff in their various roles within higher education.

Just as faculty must work through the ranks of promotion with skill development in areas of research and service, professional staff members must also successfully negotiate with workplace hierarchies (in-group and out-group membership) in order to be successful in their work. As higher education has become more commercialized, researchers have created a gap in the literature on how professional staff members operate their offices. There is a focus on the product produced [students graduating] with no care for the type of culture this focus creates within higher education office environments. As a result, professional staff members could be unknowingly encouraging workplace bullying in their own department or division (Alsever, 2008). The gap in the literature about the culture and experiences of workplace bullying among professional staff can be addressed, at least in part, with the results of this study.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to learn about the lived experiences of professional staff members in regards to bullying in the workplace. Focus was given to learning more about the lived experiences of professional staff members in regards to being bullied or witnessing bullying, as well as to identifying their definition of workplace bullying.

This research used a Division of Student Affairs as a case study for identifying and defining workplace bullying among staff members. This area of higher education is defined as one that supports students with outside the classroom learning opportunities. Student Affairs staff members are generally responsible for “housing, student organizations, new student orientation, career services, leadership programming, counseling services, and student health services” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2006, p. iii). While this is not an exhaustive list of areas within a Division of Student Affairs, it does define the area of higher education in which the study was based.

Student affairs practitioners are expected to help students grow, mature, and take the next step in their development (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This study provided student affairs practitioners with an opportunity for additional professional development that helped add a greater understanding of civility to their professional toolkit. An understanding of how to create a civil work environment and treat colleagues with civility will provide student affairs practitioners with a deeper understanding of student development theory and the practical ability to implement their knowledge into relationships with their colleagues.

Research Questions

The primary research questions of this study focused on three areas of interest.

1. How do student affairs personnel define workplace bullying?
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2. What are the experiences of student affairs personnel with workplace bullying? What impacts, if any, did the experience have on job satisfaction and personal health?

3. What are the experiences of student affairs personnel with bystander bullying in the workplace?

Scope of the Study

Research on bullying in the workplace has significant data to support claims of bullying and mobbing mentality as it pertains to social identity theory, in-groups and out-groups, and corporate culture. Twale and De Luca (2008) take workplace bullying and social identity theory to the next level when they apply the concept to faculty. They even state that “learning the subtle nuances of an academic culture is daunting because some of the information is purposefully hidden from view despite indications to the contrary” (Twale & De Luca, 2012, p. 5). This research addresses the gap in the limited literature that is focused on the bullying culture in higher education as it pertains to the student affairs staff. Gumport (2000) supports these claims of outsiders by stating:

One consequence of these converging forces is that the management of public higher education intuitions faces formidable legitimacy challenges, where reconciling competing institutional logics is difficult. The inherent tensions are evident in academic restructuring dynamics on a range of campuses. (p. 69)

The public’s opinion about higher education is changing. Higher education’s perceptions and judgments have never been questioned by the public until recent years (Brown, 2000; Hollis, 2012). Based on current literature providing questions and judgements from the public, this study embraced this area of inquiry by exploring the lived experiences of professional staff members working in a division of student affairs. The data collection process of this study
provided participant experiences that were used to define bullying in the workplace. Participants also shared their lived experiences of being bullied and witnessing bullying in student affairs.

**Positionality**

The phenomenon of bullying in the workplace, specifically in student affairs, has been an interest of mine for several years. Most of my career has been spent working in academic affairs; however, for a brief time I worked in a division of student affairs helping to plan family weekend, new student orientation, and student government events. While in this position I experienced what I would consider workplace bullying from the supervisor I had at the time.

The effects of this perceived workplace bullying were many, including weight loss, frequent absenteeism from work, poor work performance, and fear of approaching my supervisor to gain answers to questions or concerns. Ultimately, this work situation drove me to seek other employment. But the effects stayed with me for several years after leaving the institution. The experience left me with a feeling that I was inadequate and unable to perform job duties that deep down inside I knew I could perform. These feelings of being bullied in the workplace have given me a perspective of what workplace bullying looks like in the division of student affairs. Because I have this lived experience, it was important to ensure that I appropriately bracketed this experience through member checking when working with interview participants.

My interest in how other people experience bullying in the workplace, and specifically in student affairs, is a direct result of my own lived experiences and beliefs regarding the subject. My direct experiences with bullying in the workplace posed a challenge when bracketing my views, beliefs, and experiences pertaining to this subject while conducting the research. There could be perceived bias due to my personal and professional experiences with this area of research. Appropriate measures were taken to help prevent my personal experience from impacting the study of this topic, such as a member checking interview transcriptions for
accuracy of the interviewee’s lived experience. While I have personal and professional
experience with the subject, it was my goal as a researcher to set aside my own experiences and
ensure that I collected the actual lived experiences of the participants without any guidance or
embellishments from my own experiences.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Culture Creation

Bullying cultures are found in many organizations. Some of these cultures are created by design and others are self-forming. Once a bullying culture is created, the organization and people within the organization begin to suffer (Hollis, 2012 & 2015; Sutton, 2007). Bullying in the workplace has long lasting effects on the people affected as well as on the organization (Hollis, 2015). Alsever (2008) discusses how a culture of bullying is created by simple actions, such as leadership that creates ambiguity in the workplace which forces employees to fill in the blanks of their duties themselves, making them unable to understand the goals and expectations of their supervisor. “Pitting workers against each other in a competitive work environment, making unreasonable demands, and setting unreasonable goals” (Alsever, 2008, p. 2) are just a few of the ways that a workplace bullying culture is created. Sweeney (2007) continues the discussion of creating a bullying culture by discussing organizational chaos and relative powerlessness among the organizational members.

Higher Education Structure

The structure of higher education is changing and, as with any change, a change in culture is created. Higher education’s culture has started to shift in a direction that appears to function as an industry and social institution (Gumport, 2000; Washburn, 2005). “The survival of higher education is dependent upon the culture’s ability to respond to the environment surrounding it, which at times can be dynamic, uncertain, and potentially threatening” (Gumport, 2000, p. 76). The consumerism culture that is prevalent in higher education assumes that the student-consumer is capable of making informed choices and paying for them, which creates a culture that shops for higher education as one would shop for a car or other consumable
products. This culture shift creates a competitive environment in higher education that, when given time, leads to bullying organizational members in order to get the student-consumer to select their institution.

**Tenure**

Tenure is another culture of higher education that has an impact on the broader culture of the institution and organization. Keashly and Neuman (2010) state that “bullying and hostility are characterized as competitive, adversarial, and highly politicized, with autocratic or authoritarian leadership that does not tolerate nonconformity” (p. 59). This type of work culture may not appear to be the norm in higher education due to academic freedom and autonomy of faculty through their tenure status. However, tenure status helps bring forward a culture of workplace bullying because there is no fear of being reprimanded. “Tenure is considered vital to ensuring that faculty remain autonomous and pursue ‘truth’ without fear of reprisal” (Keashly & Neuman, 2010, p. 59). Tenured faculty who have worked together for many years create a certain culture within their unit in the organizational structure of higher education and, as discovered by Raineri et al. (2011), the culture created by long standing tenured faculty is one of incivility and bullying towards non-tenured faculty.

Tenure in higher education can create an environment of bullying through different means. The status of tenure allows a faculty member job security and, in certain situations, can make the faculty member a target of workplace bullying or, in other situations, can turn the faculty member into a workplace bully. Taylor (2013) provides an example of how a tenured faculty member could become victim of workplace bullying. “If an organization wishes to terminate a tenured faculty member, it may be easier to convince the person to leave through bullying tactics than to end employment through official processes” (Taylor, 2013, p. 23).
Addressing Bullying Claims

A 1999 study by the University of Illinois provides data indicating that “bullying is four times more frequent than sexual harassment, yet is still not being discussed in corporate America” (Dunn, 2000, p. 28). Dunn (2000) continues her work by suggesting that departments of human resources in corporate America need to take better and more action when claims of bullying are brought to their attention. Human resources has an important responsibility to investigate claims of workplace bullying and should not shy away from them simply because the accused is a supervisor or manager. Taking accusations seriously and conducting thorough investigations will help mitigate the spiraling effects of incidents described in claims of workplace bullying in higher education (Harber, Donini, Parker, 2013). Harber et al. (2013) suggest that higher education needs to look at its structure, priorities, and values as a way for human resources to understand what is and is not bullying in higher education. “Human resource staff in higher education face the same challenges as staff in the private sector, but often do not have the same tools available to address claims or issues surrounding bullying in the workplace” (Harber et al., 2013, p. 122).

The way an organization is coupled can impact bullying in the workplace. Loose coupling steers “managerial and theoretical imaginations into dichotomous channels” (Meyer, 2002, p. 536). Meyer (2002) also provides information indicating that loose coupling gives employees no direction on how to align organizational culture with organizational structures and invites a “static view of the organization” (p. 536). This loose coupling is seen in higher education work environments through the silos created by the vast structure of colleges and universities, where departments follow their own mission statements and guidelines which, at times, may not align with the college or university mission.
Academic Bullying

**Background.** There is a spotlight on the growing costs of higher education, which are creating a large amount of student debt. Due to this growing attention, higher education is becoming a competitive field in terms of research and job opportunities (Hollis, 2015). Bok (2000) suggests that the commercialization of higher education began in the 1970’s and is due to reductions in funding from government agencies; a phenomenon that has continued according to current research literature from Hollis (2012, 2015).

Simpson and Cohen (2004) conducted a research study that investigated the “nature and experience of bullying within the higher education sector” (p. 168). Additionally, the study explored the “differences by gender” (Simpson & Cohen, 2004, p. 168). The Association of University Teachers consented to the research and provided Simpson and Cohen (2004) with access to over one thousand faculty and staff members at a single institution in the United Kingdom. Simpson and Cohen (2004) found two-thirds of the responses to the survey were from women, and the data indicated that “just over a quarter of the sample had experienced bullying” (p. 170), with one third of the responses indicating they had witnessed bullying in the workplace. In another study, “sixty-two percent of respondents confirmed that they had been bullied or had witnessed bullying in their higher education positions within 18 months prior to the study” (Hollis, 2015, p. 5). Both studies indicate that employees working in higher education feel like they are getting bullied in the workplace.

**Student affairs professionals and bullying.** Roberts (2005) studied the “skill level among new professionals, mid managers, and senior student affairs officers in NASPA Region III” (p. 170). The instrument that Roberts (2005) used for the study “contained 72 skill statements organized into 10 categories” (p. 170). It is important for student affairs professionals to have an understanding of student development theory and be able to apply theory to practice
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when working with students. The identification of skill development, as it is discussed by Roberts (2005), helps expose the competitive nature that is in higher education administration, and Murphy (2003) contributes to this exposure by providing detail on how student affairs professionals are bullied due to patterns of skill development.

Murphy (2003) states that “job structure and personal recognition often are more important to career professionals than pay because the monetary significance of pay is secondary to the organizational recognition it provides” (p. 88). It is suggested by Murphy (2003) that “the leader must create a sense of shared experiences to form the core of the bond that he or she and the group members forge to move from vision or concept to action and goal” (p. 89). The creation of these shared experiences is part of the skill development that Roberts (2005) explores and discusses in her research. Meyer (2002) provides details that support Murphy’s (2003) portrayal of movements from vision to goals by detailing that new managers in education create “tighter relations between central administration and university departments through performance reviews” (p. 541). Robert’s (2005) research on skill development provides information about the expectations of skill level for new professionals in student affairs which, when viewed using Meyer’s (2002) research, demonstrates how a student affairs professional's skill level impacts the relations between central administration and university departments and how the culture of bullying is created in higher education staff divisions.

**Bullying in higher education.** Twale and De Luca (2008) and Hollis (2012) provide information and data about the nature of bullying in higher education. Twale and De Luca (2008) state that “learning the subtle nuances of an academic culture is daunting because some of the information is purposefully hidden from view despite indications to the contrary” (p. 4). Additionally, Twale and De Luca (2008) suggest that “autonomy and decentralization produced more cosmopolitan perspectives on academic specialties, while centralization produced more
orientation to the institution” (p. 70). The literature supports the hypothesis that the centralization and specialization of faculty and staff in higher education has shifted the working environment from a community of scholars to a community of incivility.

**Commercialization of Higher Education**

*Foundation of commercialization.* Jennifer Washburn (2005) suggests in her book *University Inc: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education* that colleges and universities are operating like corporations. This literature indicates a culture shift for the operations of higher education to one that is more in line with best business practices and that helps establish a culture of commercialization that leads to workplace bullying. Several issues are suggested in the literature that help establish the foundation of commercialization in colleges and universities. The first and foremost of the issues highlighted by the literature is the cutting of government agency budgets (Bok, 2000; Hollis, 2015; Washburn, 2005). Due to these budget cuts, higher education has had to find another way to sustain itself in a competitive market. The literature suggests that, to create a new form of cash-flow for the institution, faculty members have had to become more business savvy. Washburn (2005) suggests that “being more business-friendly and catering to industry’s needs has had a number of direct payoffs for the university sector” (p. 139). Washburn (2005) continues by stating that “although industry supplies roughly 7 percent of academic research funding nationally, at individual schools the percentages are far higher” (p. 139).

The passing of the Bayh-Dole Act in 1980 revolutionized the relationship between institutions and industry. There are suggestions that the passing of the Bayh-Dole Act weakened the nation’s innovation and guided intuitional research away from the needs of the public and towards the needs of industry. Washburn (2005) states:
Before Bayh-Dole the federal government required universities operating under an Institutional Patent Agreement – the precursor to Bayh-Dole – to make good-faith efforts to license their taxpayer-financed research nonexclusively on a “royalty-free or reasonable royalty basis,” precisely in an effort to protect open competition and discourage monopolistic control and pricing (p. 149).

Language was changed when creating the Bayh-Dole Act so that the previous cautionary language used in the Institutional Patent Agreement was removed, thereby granting universities the ability to license their research by any agreement they deemed fit, with little government oversight. The Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM) has provided data that has assisted in convincing members of Congress and state legislatures that forcing institutions to be more entrepreneurial and commercially savvy increases institutional revenue and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs, in addition to significantly contributing to the nation’s tax revenues at all levels.

**Supply and demand of higher education.** In *Restructuring: Organizational Change and Institutional Imperatives*, Gumport (2000) shares information on how supply and demand are impacting higher education and states that “teaching and research are variously supplied and priced to correspond to laws of supply and demand” (p. 71). In addition, Gumport (2000) goes on to describe academic management, including the ways managers can and do adapt and the ways in which organizational survival depends on adaptability to environmental changes.

Gumport’s (2000) statements support Washburn’s (2005) literature in claiming that higher education is beginning to focus on the market model instead of on teaching and research. According to Gumport (2000), the trend in higher education is toward the student-consumer model, in which students now shop for their institutions just as buyers shop for cars and other goods. This notion of students as consumers, in conjunction with high revenue streams from
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patents, puts higher education institutions in the position of selling rather than educating. How can institutions protect their legacies and strength without diluting themselves for short-term market demands?

**Credential inflation.** Lindholm (2004) states that “society has placed its trust in colleges and universities unquestionably and allowed members of the academy considerable freedom to pursue their individual work, needs, and interests” (p. 604). However, because of the commercialization of higher education and the new student-consumer model there are students and parents who are “voicing more loudly the claim that faculty have a social responsibility to contribute more to the wellbeing of their institutions and the larger community” (Lindholm, 2004, p. 604). The lack of trust and the call from the public for more social responsibility has brought forward literature on how higher education is engaging in credential inflation. Collins (2011) discusses how, at one time, attending college was part of the social status of certain elite people in the United States. Additionally, Collins (2011) suggests that “it was the US which originated the model of mass higher education as characteristic of modern society, the model which other societies have emulated” (p. 230). The mass production of higher education in the United States and across the globe supports the corporate and market culture that Washburn (2005) pleads higher education to leave behind. Just as a company might mass-produce a product and streamline its consumption in order to maximize profits, higher education has created credential inflation by expanding the number of people with college degrees and, in doing so, has created an oversaturated market in which future employers and the government must make more products and create more jobs for the increasing educated workforce.

The competition for funding and students that is created by the commercialization of higher education fosters a culture prone to workplace bullying as a means to an end for higher patent revenue streams and higher student enrollments. Competition in the field works against
the development of civil relationships in the workplace because the competition for limited resources drives faculty and staff to focus on their needs instead of the collective needs of the department.

**Impacts and Outcomes of Workplace Bullying in Higher Education**

**Impacts.** Sutton (2007) and Hollis (2012, 2015) provide guides that allow for the cost calculation of bullying in the workplace. A manager’s time spent dealing with complaints about a bully or the extra work and cost of having to hire a new employee when one leaves due to workplace bullying has a significant impact on the organization and the members within. According to the literature the cost of workplace bullying to the institution is significant. The weekly and annual cost to the institution is high due to the many hours wasted by workplace bullying according to Hollis (2015). The literature by Sutton (2007) and Hollis (2012, 2015) provide clarity on the actual monetary cost to the institution when workplace bullying is permitted to take place.

**Causes.** Raineri et al. (2011) suggests that low productivity is caused by a culture of bullying and cites the perceived fear of being bullied for high absenteeism relating back to low productivity. Low productivity impacts the functioning of the organization through work hours wasted avoiding workplace bullying. Additionally, organizations that experience high turnover due to workplace bullying have both tangible and intangible additional costs. Costs include items such as the stress of coworkers having to take on extra work due to high absenteeism or to temporary vacancies resulting from quitting employees, as well as monetary costs to the organization because of lower productivity by employees. Raineri et al. (2011) also discuss through their research the impact that gender has on bullying in the workplace and states that their results indicate that “gender has an impact on bullying, as bullies are observed more often to be male” (p. 29). Additionally, Raineri et al. (2011) found that “if females bully at all they
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tend to engage in same-sex bullying” (p. 29). The study also discovered that “rank also has an impact on bullying, as administrators and senior faculty are more often seen as bullies, compared to non-administrative staff and junior faculty” (Raineri et al., 2011, p. 29). Finally, Raineri et al. (2011) share that “faculty members are no more often the bully of administrators than administrators are the bully of faculty” (p. 29).

Montez et al. (2003) discuss the changing role of deans and the impact this changing role is having on higher education. Specifically, the discussion on the challenges of university deans focuses on how the challenges of managing “fiscal, administration, curriculum, faculty, technology, personal balance, and diversity” (p. 250). Keashly and Neuman (2010) support the work of Montez et al. (2003) with their discussion of the vulnerability of higher education and how the tenure system has helped create a setting for “persistent aggression as the result of tenure, which has faculty and some staff in very long-term relationships with on another” (p. 53). The status [job title] of a frontline staff member [administrative assistant or secretary] makes that person “1.5 times more likely to be bullied by a single perpetrator.” (Keashley & Neuman, 2010, p. 53). Twale and De Luca (2008) discuss the impact on higher education when “we merge micromanagement common to ineffective administrators in some universities with the fact that the university faculty members are ego centered” (p. 87) that the behaviors create the perfect environment for workplace bullying in higher education.

Outcomes. Raineri et al. (2011) describes the negative outcomes that individuals encounter from bullying in the workplace which include “physical and psychological health issues: headache, nausea, stress, panic attacks, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, resigned attitude, irritability, and insomnia” (p. 24). When bullying takes place in the workplace coworkers too can suffer effects such as feeling guilty when they “observe bullying behavior” (Raineri et al, 2011, p. 24). Raineri et al. (2011) suggest that coworkers feel this guilt because
they “do not always have the knowledge to solve the problem or the courage to expose the problem” (p. 24). Raineri et al. (2011) and Hollis (2012) suggest that additional outcomes from workplace bullying consist of low productivity due to fear or absenteeism, as well as high job turnover costs from the victim or observer resigning from their roles in the organization. In their study, Raineri et al. (2011) found that “faculty results indicate that the single most frequent type of bullying behavior observed is discounting accomplishments” (p. 26). Faculty bullies are more likely to provide constant scrutiny and discount accomplishments as well as offer public criticism to victims.

Through their research, Keashly and Neuman (2010) found “the behaviors most frequently cited in academia involve threats to professional status and isolating and obstructional behavior” (p. 53). An example provided of this outcome is “thwarting the target’s ability to obtain important objectives” (Keashly & Neuman, 2010, p. 53).

**Higher education workplace outcomes.** Simpson and Cohen (2004) found in their research that the most common outcomes faculty experienced from bullying in the workplace “were the loss of confidence, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem” (p. 170). Their results provided data indicating that “men were more likely than women to experience loss of confidence, nausea or sickness, depression, or loss of appetite” (Simpson & Cohen, 2004, p. 171) when experiencing bullying in the workplace while “women were more likely to have headaches, suffer anxiety and experience memory loss” (Simpson & Cohen, 2004, p.171). Data provided by Hollis (2012) suggests that all targets of workplace bullying tend to suffer “hypertension, weight gain, sleep issues, elevated stress” (p. 33). In severe cases of workplace bullying “post-traumatic stress and hypertension also can occur” (Hollis, 2012, p. 33). Although Simpson and Cohen (2004) state that the gender differences were not significant in their findings, their results show how men and women handle the stress of workplace bullying in higher education when they are members of
the faculty. The literature reports that upper administration will state there is a need for strong managerial control, which then conceals bullying under a guise of needing strong management. However, strong management does not equate to the creation of clearly defined roles for employees. There can still be ambiguity of what a position does when there is strong management. Simpson and Cohen (2004) stated in their study that “men tended to see bullying within a wider organizational context or to label it as part of a particular management technique” (p. 179); which can be related to the implementation of strong management styles in the workplace.

Social Identity Theory

**Culture development.** Social identity theory provides information about group formation and how in-groups and out-groups function within an organization. Ramsay et al. (2011) discuss the nuances of social identity theory and of how in-group and out-group perceptions impact workplace bullying. According to Ramsay et al. (2011), people place themselves and others [coworkers] in social groups by viewing the perceived things they have in common and the things they do not have in common. Ramsay et al. (2011) go on to state that once individuals place themselves and others into categories, they choose to place themselves in an in-group and the others in an out-group. New individuals in a department at a college or university could use the placement strategy described by the researchers when first starting their new role in the department. Placing ourselves into an in-group in the workplace can “enhance self-esteem and act as one of the primary motivating factors in the development of social identity” (Ramsay et al., 2011, p. 803). Within their discussion of social identity development in workgroups, Ramsay et al. (2011) share other researchers’ perspectives about out-groups and how out-group members are “less likely to receive ‘the benefit of the doubt’ or be given help in ambiguous circumstances, and are more likely to be seen as provoking aggression” (p. 804). This
example of out-groups can be linked to social identity development in higher education by Twale and DeLuca’s (2008) research of faculty bullying. The authors suggest that inter-group bullying in the workplace happens on a more frequent basis due to greater levels of inter-group distrust. Therefore, Ramsay et al. (2011) suggest that “the greater the inter-group differentiation between work groups, the greater the likelihood of inter-group bullying, especially by the in-group towards the out-group” (p. 804). It is also suggested by the research that “pro-social or respect groups will be less likely to experience within-group bullying” (Ramsay et al., 2011, p. 807). Evaluating the in-group and out-groups provided Ramsay et al. (2011) with the perspective to “encapsulate important socio-psychological processes in work-place bullying from a group level perspective” (p. 809).

**Group interactions.** Amiot, Sansfacon, Louis, and Yelle (2012) also conducted research on in-group and out-group interactions and norms, but their focus was on the interactions the group members encouraged among each other. The authors suggest that in-group members are similar and that this phenomenon happens because they [in-group members] are acting for self-determined motives. Amiot et al. (2012) state,

> when group members behave congruently and in line with their ingroup norms, they should hence do so for self-determined motives. This is because belonging to a social group promotes the assimilation and endorsement of the norms and behaviors that are prototypical of the ingroup and leads group members to apply these norms to their own sense of self (p. 67).

It is also stated that although the social norms created by group belonging can be both positive and negative, a person who belongs to the group is associated with having higher self-esteem than out-group members (Amiot et al., 2012; Tyler & Blader, 2001). The information provided in the study by Amiot et al. (2012) supports the in-group feelings that Amiot and Hornsey (2009)
discuss in their article where they state “social identity theory argues that group memberships have value connotations, and that these value connotations have implications for the self-concept” (p. 64). Amiot and Hornsey (2009) continue to discuss that “to maintain a healthy self-concept, people are motivated to hold their groups in positive regard” (p. 64), which is supported by Coull, Yzerbyt, Castano, Paola-Paladino, and Leemans (2001) whose study reports that “highly identified group members would be motivated to invest a sizable amount of cognitive resources when confronted with a deviant member of the group” (p. 335). This group member would be perceived to be threatening the positive regard of their in-group and therefore would be worth investing their cognitive resources to expel the group member who is not sharing the group norms. This finding supports the later research of Amiot et al. (2012) concerning the implications of in-group membership having both positive and negative impacts on out-groups.

**Self-concept development.** Amiot and Sansfacon (2011) discuss social identity theory, including information on how belonging to a group is part of a person’s self-concept and their emotional significance for the in-group to which they identify. Positive social identity is achieved by group membership, which fulfills the need for differentiation from the out-group (Amiot & Bourhis, 2005, Amiot & Sansfacon, 2011). Also discussed is the notion that “in-group bias can lead to significant harm on the part of both the victim of ingroup bias and the perpetrator” (Amiot & Sansfacon, 2011, p. 106). It is only when the in-group begins to have inter-group conflict or conflict with out-group members that negative workplace implications form (Amiot & Bourhis, 2005; Ramsay et al., 2011).

Certain behaviors garner the attention of the individual to consider the group to which they want to belong. Tyler and Blader (2001) discuss the impact the feelings of pride and respect have on selecting and staying in a social group. They describe pride as an area of influence over group-level behavior such as norms and values of the group, and they describe respect as the
influence that motivates people to work harder. Respect is connected to the social self and is based on the individual level attitudes, while pride is more concerned with group-level attitudes (Tyler & Blader, 2001). Jackson and Smith (1999) researched the correlation between in-group pride and feelings of collective and individual self-esteem. Their research found that in-group pride was significantly correlated with the individual measures and was the only factor that accounted for unique variations pertaining to the measurement of social identity and in-group norms.

Summary. The changing status of higher education has impacted the field in many different ways. As a field, moving towards the commercialization and competition of resources has impacted management styles and group formation. Group formation happens through culture development which is directly impacted by the leadership style within the field. Higher education is working with less resources and is still expected to provide the same, and sometimes better, services and student experiences. The competition for limited resources has impacted in-group and out-group formation within the field and changed the culture through which employees experience working in higher education. This new commercialized culture in higher education has created immense competition that fosters the development of bullies in the workplace in order to be successful and get the appropriate resources. Bullies are thriving in the commercialized culture that has taken over higher education.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Combining the elements of previous chapters, a methodology was created for the purposes of implementing this study. The following text discusses the methods, analysis, participants, and ethical considerations inherent to the study.

Research Design

Understanding the lived experiences of workplace bullying is a complicated analysis with myriad layers and complexities. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate as it allowed participants of the inquiry to share their perceptions and experiences of workplace bullying (Patton, 2015). Additionally, the approach allowed the participants to share their lived experiences using their own construction of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013). The approach was also consistent with approaches used by other researchers trying to understand the bullying culture in higher education (Hollis, 2012 & 2015).

Sample

The study was completed using a division of student affairs at a medium size private institution in the South. The sample population included, 210 full and part-time student affairs staff members that were invited to provide their definition of workplace bullying, their lived experiences with workplace bullying, and any instances in which they witnessed workplace bullying. Of the invited participants, sixty (29%) responded to the invitation to participate that was sent from the division of student affairs. Table 1 provides the range of demographic data collected from survey participants. The mean years of service in higher education for participants was 11.08 years (Table 2).
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Table 1

Demographic Information for Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Higher Education</th>
<th>n (N=60)</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>n (N=60)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation for Years of Service in Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey participants were provided the option to share their definitions of and lived experiences with workplace bullying through an in-person interview. The in-person interview sample included 13 (22%) participants who also completed the survey. The research study did not collect demographic information during in-person interviews because the interview participants were also survey participants.
Institution

A medium sized private institution was selected for this study. The institution has a robust Division of Student Affairs, with full and part-time staff members. The institution’s Division of Student Affairs meets the definition of a division of student affairs as described by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2006). The institution is located in the South central region of the United States in an urban metropolitan area with a county population over 1.9 million residents (United States Census Bureau, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought and received for this study. Pseudonyms were created, and used, for all in-person interview participants as well as the name of the institution. In-person interview participants who did not respond to member checking requests were withdrawn from the study and transcriptions destroyed.

All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2010) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Potential risks to participants at each level were considered minimal.

Procedure

Initial participation was requested through electronic communication. The Vice President for Student Affairs was contacted and made aware of the study and it was explained that results of the study would not be made available to the Vice President or the institution. The Vice President sent a communication to the Division of Student Affairs making them aware of the study and informing staff that participation was voluntary (Appendix D). The senior
UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING

administrative assistant in the Vice President’s Office sent the invitation to participate as well as all reminder communication to participate (Appendix A). Invited participants were told it was their choice to participate and that they could withdraw their participation at any time throughout the duration of the study.

Data collection took place over the course of two months. An open ended electronic survey was used to collect information from participants (Appendix B). An interview protocol was used for participants who selected to participate in an in-person interview (Appendix C).

Data Collection

Data were collected through open-ended survey questions (Appendix B) that were constructed in electronic survey software. Appendix B provides an example of the questions participants were asked to answer regarding their experiences. The questions were designed to allow for lived experiences that have influenced or affected individual perceptions, or consciousness, of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Special attention was given to each question to allow the respondent to provide textual and structural descriptions of their experiences that ultimately provided understanding about the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Skip logic was incorporated into the open-ended survey instrument to allow participants who had not experienced bullying personally, or bystander bullying, in the workplace to move forward to the demographic data collection element of the survey after completion of their definition of workplace bullying.

An interview protocol (Appendix C) was used with respondents who elected to participate in the in-person interview process. A focus on the importance of understanding the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomena guided the creation of the questions asked on the interview protocol (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Additionally, the understanding of the subjectivity of group membership as described by Schutz (1970) and social identity theory was
used to craft questions that helped identify the subjective meaning group membership has for the interviewee.

**Analyses**

Participant responses were categorized and separated based on each question and subquestion created (Appendix B, Appendix C). Each question answered by participants was matched to align with one of the three research questions used for the study. Participant responses were reviewed line by line prior to the creation of any codes. After reviewing, codes were created based on key terms used by participants. Key terms were defined as any word or statement mentioned by participants two or more times when responding to each question. Participant statements were then assigned to codes using NVivo Software. Created codes were then assessed for similar meaning and combined into a singular code. For example, the codes “target” and “singled out” were combined for the purposes of this study into a single code of “targeting” since both “target” and “singled out” represent similar lived experiences. Codes were then reviewed and grouped into emergent themes. As an example, the theme lingual emerged during data analysis and represents codes of “threatening” and “verbal abuse” as described by participants. The grouping of codes to support emergent themes allowed for a deeper insight and understanding of participant experiences through the emergent themes and supporting codes.

It was important for the study to gain the participants’ lived experience with as little possible bias from the researcher. As a method to help mitigate bias from the researcher, interview participants were asked to complete member checking of their interview. Member checking allowed participants the opportunity to edit the transcription of their interview to ensure the researcher was analyzing statements that captured their lived experiences. Participants who did not respond to member checking were withdrawn from the study to help reduce any bias.
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Some participant responses accounted for a singular experience that was coded during data analysis. Therefore, some codes are supported by only one participant who met the key term criteria as defined by the study and were used to support emergent themes as identified. Single participant experiences that resulted in a key term or statement code were reviewed again during final analysis to check if the single participant response could be combined with any other coded responses. Single key coded terms or statements by participants that were considered highly individualized were left as single participant supported codes to maintain the integrity and diversity of participant lived experiences.

Limitations

The target population of this study posed a limitation during the research process. Participants who have had bullying experiences were more likely to participate than those who had not experienced bullying in the workplace. Groves, Presser, and Dipko (2004) found that participants are forty percent (40%) more likely to respond to surveys that are of interest to them. Therefore, participants who experienced personal or bystander bullying experiences were more likely to respond to the initial survey while participants who have not had personal or bystander experiences were less likely to participate.

The researcher’s ability to appropriately bracket his knowledge about workplace bullying could be viewed as a limitation of the study. Intersubjectivity from the researcher could also have been a limitation to the outcome of the study. However, according to Schutz (1970), intersubjectivity is only a limitation when it is not treated as a “fundamental ontological category of human existence” (p. 31).

The academic community’s ability to generalize the study to their campus population is a limitation of the study. The phenomenological approach to the research study only provides the lived experiences of the staff members who participated in the study at a specific institution. The
subjectivity and personal experiences expressed in the study by the participants do not generalize
to the entire population of employees working in higher education, specifically in student affairs.
However, the value of the study is that it provides starting points for future research that will enhance the field of literature.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study explored the lived experiences of student affairs full and part-time professional staff with defining, experiencing, and observing workplace bullying, and is based on their perspectives on conflicts and incidents. The following chapter presents the results from a data analysis of survey and interview data.

Research Question One

How do student affairs personnel define workplace bullying?

The survey and interview process provided participants with an opportunity to use their lived experiences and their unique lenses to share their definitions of workplace bullying in higher education. Some participant perspectives and examples of workplace bullying could also be interpreted as examples of a supervisor merely providing instruction to their employee, or explained by the need for the participant to gain a better understanding of a work hierarchy; however, this study focuses on the lived experiences and feelings of the employees as they relate to their personal interpretations of the incidences and conflicts they shared.

Central themes were created after grouping the coded survey and participant responses where the perceived actions are similar and relate to the emergent theme. Power exertion, targeting, and intentional unkindness were identified as central themes relating to participant definitions of bullying based on coded interview and survey data. Table 3 provides a list of all the codes used to define bullying by participants that influenced the creation of the central themes.
UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING

Table 3

_Terms Referenced Defining Workplace Bullying_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>n (n=134)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exerting Power</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demeaning</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabotage</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional Unkindness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposefully Left Out</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossip</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Power**

Participants used several terms and phrases that surround the use and abuse of power to define what workplace bullying is to them. Terms and phrases such as, “exerting power, force, physical abuse, pressure, and making people uncomfortable” were all used by participants to define what bullying in student affairs is to them through their own unique lens. The terms and phrases were used to create codes to group participants’ statements provided to define workplace bullying. Social Identity Theory, as it relates to the actions of in-group and out-group members, aligns with participant responses defining the power actions that out-group members perceive in-group members to use as a way to dominate an organizational culture.

**Power exertion.** Simply explained by one participant, workplace bullying is “the exertion of power over an individual at their place of work.” However, the exertion of power differs depending on the lens through which the participant uses; especially if the participant
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perceives themselves to be part of the out-group in the workplace. Responses related to power exertion focused around getting someone to do something that they would not normally do inside, or sometimes, outside the office. “Any influential power to change the course of one’s beliefs and/or actions in their work” is an example provided by a survey participant to define workplace bullying as it relates to the exertion of power. An interview participant used the following example to define workplace bullying as it relates to power exertion:

“I would define bullying as something pressure related to get someone to do something outside their comfort zone or using your leverage of a higher position to get someone to do something that falls under your job description, but getting them to do it for you.”

Both survey and interview participants centered their definition of bullying and the exertion of power around the organizational structure of the department/university and the ability of coworkers to use the structure to their advantage. The use of organizational structures to influence the work environment is consistent with the actions of in-group members when trying to change the out-group perspective of the current work environment.

**Force.** The idea of making someone do something without their consent or against their will is how participants, both survey and interview, defined the use of force when defining bullying in student affairs. An interview participant described the use of force as it relates to power as “domineering in the sense of, I’m not even structurally above you in the organization chart but I need to push my agenda onto you.” Participant examples centered around “being made” to do something or “having someone cover your duties” as a way to define workplace bullying as the examples relate to the overarching theme of power in the workplace. In-group members sometimes use their power as a perceived member of the in-group to “force” someone to align with their beliefs and actions within the in-group towards perceived out-group members.
Physical abuse. Participant responses regarding physical abuse and how it influences their definition of bullying centered around specific actions. Actions such as “touching with or without harm” and “physically forcing” were examples provided by participants that defined physical abuse and bullying in the workplace. One survey participant gave the specific example of “wearing provocative clothing to maximize ‘accidental’ malfunction while flirting, using sexual innuendos, and teasing; especially with delivery persons or temporary workers” to define physical abuse in the workplace when defining bullying. Participants citing physical abuse as part of their definition agreed that physical abuse comes from anyone and that it does not specifically come only from people higher in the organizational chart. The idea that bullying can come from anyone in the organization is consistent with in-group and out-group dynamics as defined by Social Identity Theory. Thoughts of inter-group bullying could be used to describe some participant experiences when they are perceived to be part of the in-group by some members of the organization but still feel as though they have experienced bullying in the workplace.

Pressure. In-group members pressure outgroup and fellow in-group members to align with the group or cultural norms of the environment. An example of pressure as it relates to power was provided by a survey participant who stated: “bullying is to be pressured to act or perform in a certain way in order to not feel other repercussions in areas of your job.” Pressure is not to be confused with intimidation. Intimidation is more targeted and threatening to members of the out-group where pressure is more often used in quid pro quo situations to get out-group members to believe they have no other options but to comply in a nonthreatening manner.

Making people uncomfortable. Defining uncomfortable is challenging because what makes one feel uncomfortable could not phase another. During data analysis, six different participants cited “making people uncomfortable” as a way to define bullying based on their
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experiences which represents ten percent (10%) of the interview and survey population. One participant provided the following statement to define bullying: “being made to feel uncomfortable with coworkers who have superior attitudes and are demanding, argumentative, and threatening.” Another participant stated, “bullying is intentional efforts by one person to make another feel uncomfortable about behaving authentically.” Both examples are consistent with in-group pressure experienced by out-group members who want to become members of the in-group, but feel they must compromise themselves in order to make the move into the in-group. This feeling of being uncomfortable as a definition of bullying by participants aligns with the central theme of power as there is a perceived in-group that controls the environment/culture and in order to be part of that group one must “compromise” their “authentic self” to align with the group in power leading to uncomfortable feelings.

**Targeting**

Terms such as “targeting, sabotage, demeaning, intimidation, and psychological” were used by participants to define bullying. The terms used by participants align with the literature in regards to “actions” that define bullying in the workplace. Literature suggests that bully’s target more “successful” or “popular” employees which can help to understand participant responses and feelings of targeting to define bullying in student affairs.

Several examples were provided by participants to define bullying through the theme targeting. One example, “they [the bully] make snide comments or roll their eyes when you speak” was used to define the verbal and non-verbal cues that define bullying for them in the workplace that makes them feel as though they are being targeted. Another participant used the followings statement to define bullying through targeting, “behavior that favors one person over another, inequity in treatment of individuals that causes harm.” Literature suggests that bullies target specific employees who they “believe” to be a “threat” to their workplace success. Social
identity theory as it relates to in-group and out-group relationships helps explain that employees can feel targeted as members of an in-group or an out-group. Members of an in-group who feel targeted are part of the inter-group competition for success in the workplace as discussed in discussions around social identity theory and inter-group relations.

**Sabotage.** Employees sometimes feel like someone is out to get them in the workplace. Several participants provided examples of actions that they feel sabotage an employee and define bullying in the workplace. One example provided was, “I define workplace bullying as any intentional action(s) made against a coworker that inhibits them from doing their job.” Social identity theory does suggest that in-group members may perform certain actions that prevent out-group members from transitioning into the in-group. The literature also suggests that bullies may sabotage colleagues in order to gain personal success. An interview participant noted: “I think that bullying could also mean keeping information away from someone and having them fail because of that lack of information so it intentionally creates an environment where instead of being helpful you’re purposefully creating obstacles for others.” A survey participant used a similar statement to define bullying in the workplace as it relates to the created code of sabotage. The participant stated, “[bullying is] any purposeful act that causes another person emotional stress or intentionally prevents them from doing their job.” The definition of what constitutes sabotaging is varied based on experiences, but for the purposes of this study the idea of sabotaging based on participant responses aligns best with the theme of targeting that emerged during data analysis. Sabotaging is a form of targeting in that the bully selects a colleague and targets them through sabotaging activities in the workplace.

**Demeaning.** Participant responses that referenced demeaning centered around public or private verbal conversations or actions. Survey participants mentioned the disrespectful or demeaning treatment of colleagues 16 unique times (27% of total survey responses) when asked
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how they define workplace bullying. An example provided to illustrate this definition was, “publically or privately demeaning a colleague for the purposes of showing superiority and advancing an agenda.” Another term used by participants to describe demeaning behavior was belittling. One participant stated: “When an individual feels threatened, intimidated and/or belittled by another person in the work environment who does not show respect and any sense of justice for that individual, their thoughts or feelings—more than once.” Participant responses align with various literature reviewed for this study that emphasis the type of behavior bullies have in the work environment in reference to how they [bullies] treat colleagues.

**Intimidation.** Intimidation is a form of targeting often used by bullies as a method for advancing themselves in the workplace. Responses for this code centered around actions such as “verbal, physical, and emotional” forms of intimidation used in the workplace to define their view of bullying. One participant suggested that intimidation can be a “sin of omission as well as commission” when discussing how intimidation takes part in the formulation of their bullying definition. The idea was shared by participants that “powerlessness” is a key factor for intimidation in the workplace to succeed. This idea from participants is consistent with the literature in regards to the bullied employee feels powerless in their situation and begins to look for a way to remove themselves from the environment/culture. One participant sums up intimidation with the following statement: “the installation of fear from one colleague to another.” This statement, in addition to feelings of powerlessness, were the defining characteristics used by participants to define bullying in the workplace and are central to the emergent theme of targeting by bullies.

**Intentional Unkindness**

The final emergent theme to define workplace bullying was intentional unkindness. Intentional unkindness was not only an emergent theme, but also a code used during data
analysis. Participant responses varied on how unkindness was defined, but centered responses around the following terms: “atmosphere”, “gossip”, “verbal”, “emotional”, and “left out.” Each term relates to the theme of intentional unkindness that emerged during data analysis through their similar actions that participants used to define each term. Participants used terms such as “rude” or “unfair” treatment in a “conscious or unconscious” form to define intentional unkindness as it relates to their definition of bullying in the workplace. One survey participant explained intentional unkindness with the following statement, “verbal, written, photographic, and spatial interaction that is unwanted, disrespectful, unkind, or hurtful physically or emotionally.” Another participant suggested that intentional unkindness was the “…driving force behind you, the ethos behind you is negative harm.” Unkindness, whether conscious or unconscious, is challenging to define as each person will use their own personal lens to determine actions or statements that they believe to be unkind. A participant could have perceived an unkind action and used it to explain bullying because they feel as though they are part of the out-group and any time they attempt to transition into the in-group, it is thwarted by “intentional unkindness” which may not be seen as unkindness by other colleagues.

**Atmosphere.** The idea that the atmosphere of the institution impacts bullying was used by four (31%) of the interview participants. The term “institutional bullying” was used to define an atmosphere or culture that encourages bullying throughout the university. Responses from participants centered around the culture of the institution and that the culture could be one of bullying. This definition by participants is consistent with current literature that suggests a bullying culture can be created when bullies are rewarded for their behavior through promotion or tenure. One participant used the following statement to define a bullying atmosphere: “An atmosphere of ‘institutional bullying,’ which is more about the culture of a group in which there are policies, written or unwritten, spoken or unspoken, which function to pressure people to not
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behave authentically.” The idea that the “culture” of an institution plays a factor into how people treat each other in the workplace was a common expression used by participants to describe the atmosphere and how it [the atmosphere] plays into their definition of workplace bullying. Suggestions by participants that the leadership of the institution create the “atmosphere” where bullies can be successful aligns with the literature and provides examples of how this “culture” of bullying is created. One example suggested that, “bullying [is] just an atmosphere that is not conducive to the institution” while another example provided stated:

it [bullying] can also be a kind of institutional bullying that may not necessarily be solely based on individual intentions but may be accounted for by the culture of an institution in which there’s a kind of negligence that the institution as a whole is not willing to look at and take steps to remedy.

The culture of the institution was a central concern used by participants to define bullying in regards to the type of atmosphere they perceived to support bullies and perpetuate bullying experiences. Social identity theory suggests that there are in-groups and out-groups at each level of an organization. Participant responses surrounding a culture that supports bullying could be an example of a higher level in-group placing their agenda or beliefs onto the out-group as defined by the organizational structure of the institution.

Gossip. A person can interpret gossip to be many different verbal statements. The idea of “talking behind someone’s back” was the central idea by participants relating to defining bullying and gossip. Only two (3%) survey participants cited gossip to define workplace bullying, but gossip is important to note because it relates to a form of intentional unkindness experienced by participants that helped form their definition of bullying in the workplace. Gossip is a common perceived form of communication by out-group members when in the presence of the culture’s in-group members.
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**Verbal.** Verbal bullying can be both direct and indirect. An example of direct verbal bullying provided by a participant was, “it [bullying] is the action and the words that you portray to people in their role and in their interactions with you” while another participant used the following statement to provide an example of indirect verbal bullying:

When you’re in a staff meeting and hearing someone who is in a position higher than you talk about how they’re always bring work home at night. Always staying late and always coming in early is in some form an example of bullying [indirect] to say you need to be doing this too.

Verbal forms of bullying could be a “simple joke” or a “sly remark” that comes off as offensive to colleagues. One survey participant defined verbal bullying as, “consistent, mean-spirited haranguing of someone who does not invite or participate in the activity no matter what terms it is couched in.” Verbal bullying could be interpreted as a form of intimidation; however, participants provided examples of verbal bullying that align more closely with the theme of intentional unkindness as examples were more general to encompass the entire office more than the idea of targeting a specific individual.

**Emotional.** Two participants referenced emotional bullying when defining bullying in the workplace. The example provided by one participant was, “verbal, written, photographic, and spatial interaction that is unwanted, disrespectful, unkind, or hurtful physically or emotionally.” Since the participant specifically referenced the feeling of emotions in his or her definition, the participant’s response was coded to reflect their feeling of emotional bullying in the workplace as it did not meet the criteria set forth for combination with other codes as they relate to the emergent theme. The other participant who cited emotional experiences to define bullying stated that bullying is “physical or psychological intimidation used to exercise control over other
peers.” This participant’s response was coded as an emotional definition of bullying because of the psychological aspect presented in the definition.

**Left out.** Not feeling part of the workgroup is a common experience by employees who feel they are part of the out-group. Participants provided statements and feelings such as they are “not part of the core group” or that they are “left out of conversations” and sometimes “ignored in the workplace.” These thoughts and feelings of participants is consistent with social identity theory as it relates and describes the feelings of employees who are placed in the out-group by colleagues who were already in the work environment when they arrived. One participant stated, “they exclude you, but not others, to devalue you” while another participant used “being excluded from opportunities by colleagues” to define being left out in regards to bullying in the workplace. Out-group membership often results in feelings of being left out or ostracized from the core group of employees and can result in feelings of being bullied because coworkers are not associating with the colleague who they have placed in the out-group. Being left out is often more conscious than unconscious and therefore the code was placed with the theme of intentional unkindness. However, specifically leaving colleagues out could be interpreted as a form of targeting; but, the examples provided for being left out are not as severe as the examples provided by participants when referencing feelings of being targeted in the workplace and therefore was placed with intentional unkindness.

**Summary**

The emergent themes provide insight into the specific codes and examples used by participants to define bullying in the workplace. The varied examples provided an overview of the challenge to specifically define bullying as well as the subjectivity of the experiences as perceived by in-group and out-group members. The next research question provides the specific
experiences, thoughts, and emotions participants had that led to the way they define bullying in student affairs.

**Research Question Two**

*What are the experiences of student affairs personnel with workplace bullying? What impacts, if any, did the experience have on job satisfaction and personal health?*

Survey and interview questions asked participants whether they felt they had been bullied in the higher education workplace. If participants felt bullied they were asked to share their experiences, including the thoughts, emotions and reactions they had during the experience, and their rationale for seeking or not seeking assistance for the incident.

**Personal Bullying Experiences**

Both survey and interview participants were asked to share their personal experiences with bullying in student affairs. While both survey and interview participants were able to cite examples of their personal bullying experiences, only survey participants were asked to provide direct examples of their experiences. If bullied, interview participants were asked to immediately discuss their thoughts and emotions during the experience. Therefore, only survey participant data was used to establish the emergent themes for personal bullying experiences. Table 4 provides survey participant responses and Table 5 provides interview participant responses of whether or not they have experienced bullying in the workplace.

**Table 4**

*Survey Participant Experienced Bullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n (n=60)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Interview Participants Bullied*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n (n=13)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrew from Study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several codes were created to help establish themes for personal bullying experiences of the participants. Upon review of the codes and current literature the themes of control, lingual, and sabotage were established to provide voice to the codes used during data analysis. The emergent theme of control includes codes of micromanaging, exerting power, getting picked on, and emotional experiences where the lingual theme includes codes of verbal abuse and threatening. Finally, the theme of sabotage includes the codes of preventing professional development and getting on someone’s good side. A table of all the codes and their frequency can be found in Table 6.

Table 6

*Survey Participant Bullying Experience Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n (n=39)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Abuse</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micromanaging</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Bullying</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exerted Power</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Picked On</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevented Professional Development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatening</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get on Good Side</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not want to Discuss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING

**Control.** Several codes were used that helped identify the theme of control for this study. Participant examples of micromanaging, power exertion, getting picked on, and emotional experiences allowed the theme of control to emerge to better understand the varied experiences that participants have had that allowed them to define bullying in the workplace.

**Micromanaging.** Participant responses were varied when describing the code of micromanaging. Experiences centered around a colleague or supervisor controlling their physical work and time out of the office. One example provided by a participant was, “I was not allowed to schedule my own meetings and had to ask permission from her [supervisor] if someone else invited me to a meeting in which she was not included.” Another participant, referring to a colleague, stated, “she is conniving and finds reasons to pick you apart.” One participant discussed being “held to a different” standard than her colleagues by stating:

I was held to a different standard than colleague who have less time and experience and titles when it came to turning in vacation/sick time. I received emails on the same day telling me to turn in hours when others are not required to turn in sick/vacation hours at all, let alone sent email reminders to do so.

Other examples provided by participants discussed feelings of being “continually audited” by management or not having the autonomy to “take on own projects” because the supervisor “feared” colleagues would believe there was similar authority between the employee and supervisor because of the project. The examples provided by participants as they relate to feelings of being micromanaged are similar to examples of actions bullies take in the workplace to keep successful colleagues from moving forward in their work provided by current literature in the field.

**Exerting power.** Similar examples were provided to express exerting power when defining and providing examples of personal experience. One participant stated she was “‘reassigned’ to
report to a lesser titled person” after providing feedback during an evaluation to her supervisor. Another participant shared, “I was told they have the power to make my life miserable and that work was before family.” Some participants shared that colleagues used their “connections” to make them appear as an outsider or to persuade them to align with their [the bully’s] personal agenda. Bullies using “connections” and pressuring colleagues to push their personal agendas is a significant part of social identity theory and how members of in-groups are selected. When new employees enter a department a bully will assign them to an in-group or an out-group and will use their perceived power to ensure the new employee is put into the right category [in-group/out-group] by colleagues and management by testing whether or not the new employee follows their personal agenda in the workplace.

Getting picked on. Several participants provided examples of experiences that could be interpreted as getting picked on in the work environment. Some examples from participants included feelings of being “given work for no reason” and being “trash talked” around the office. One specific example was, “I’ve been singled out in group setting and private settings where I received a ‘firm talking to’ based on something I did or they perceived that I was insinuating.” Another participant discussed how a colleague “constantly downplayed” any success that the team had in the office. Control is an important factor when getting picked on. The bully may not be able to directly control a colleague’s tasks, but does have the ability to nit-pick and find fault with colleagues’ work and share this in a group or private setting.

Emotional bullying. One participant provides an example that reflects the overall feelings of all participants who stated they experienced emotional bullying in the workplace. The participant stated:
She [supervisor] would emotionally mess with me. She would tell me to do something and when I did it she would tell me I was wrong. She didn’t provide any support or guidance with how to correct an issue and instead told me to read my manual.

Another participant shared how a colleague is very “distrusting” and “makes you feel like you are trying to get away with something.” This same participant also shared that the colleague insinuates that you are consistently lying or that you are not a competent worker. Emotional bullying experiences can sometimes have a greater impact on employees because a person’s emotions are subjective and hard to explain when discussed out of context and therefore not always recognized in the workplace. The factors of emotional bullying are often results of in-group and out-group formation in the work environment.

**Linguual.** Two codes, verbal abuse and threatening, were used to support the emergent theme of lingual experiences. Words can have significant power rendering people to feel powerless, as defined by participants, in the workplace when used to instill fear.

**Verbal abuse.** Verbal abuse was the most commonly referenced experience by participants. It accounted for 12 (36%) of 33 experiences coded from survey participants. Examples ranged from “harsh words and teasing that resulted in embarrassment” to “consistent verbal abuse and shaming.” One participant shared her experience with verbal abuse by stating:

I was 40 weeks pregnant and still working. My supervisor’s supervisor told me that I was ‘dangerous’ for being at work past my due date. The comment made me feel like a ticking time bomb and that my supervisor wished I wasn’t working. Just a few minutes before that conversation my supervisor basically told me that it was up to my department on what decision I made regarding taking maternity leave even though I had not had the baby. I felt bullied into taking maternity leave early after these conversations.
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Some participant reports of bullying could be considered gossip by definition of participants when answering research question one in that their experience with verbal bullying consisted of “speaking negatively about decisions I made to superiors.” This example, when used in the context of participant definitions, could be considered gossip. Participants also shared that they “received verbal abuse and a need to disagree with every decision” from colleagues and supervisors who they felt were bullying them. Feelings of verbal abuse are not commonly referred to in the current literature and may be a cultural or structural experience of higher education employees.

**Threatening.** Participants cited examples of being threatened with “physical harm” when sharing bullying experiences. One particular participant shared that “physical harm” was threatened after discovering an intimate relationship between their supervisor and a colleague. Threats of physical violence are not as common in the literature when studying workplace bullying as many of the actions discussed would be considered more covert and less obvious than physically harming as many employers have policies in place to handle physical violence in the workplace.

**Sabotage.** Preventing professional development and trying to get on someone’s good side are the two codes that make up the theme of sabotaging experiences. Several participants cited actions that lead to the emerging theme of sabotaging a person’s career as defining what bullying means to them when answering the first research question. During data analysis the theme of sabotage emerged again as a central theme to participants’ bullying experiences.

**Prevented professional development.** One participant stated, “I worked for two years in a position where my supervisor prevented me from pursuing professional growth opportunities in order to ensure that I would not become more knowledgeable or experienced than she” as an example to explain how professional development opportunities were withheld. Another
participant cited “false rumors” being created to prevent job advancement with the following example,

A professional staff member created a false story about me trying to get his job and calling his wife ugly. He did this to then call in his supervisor who had recently put him on disciplinary probation and shadow a meeting between him and I where he then accused me of all of these wrong doings and I had no voice in the matter.

A final example provided by a participant that cited the prevention of professional development was:

I was invited to sit on a search committee for a faculty member and was told I would not be allowed to participate as this would take time away from my work. In reality, my boss was concerned that she had never been included in such a search and did not want me to have that opportunity as she felt it threatened her authority.

As stated before, the experiences shared are through the lens of the participant. Without more context, the final example could stem from a supervisor working with an employee on time management. However, because this study focused on the lived experiences of the participants and their feelings of their experiences, the participant statement was coded as preventing professional development.

Get on good side. Only one participant (3%) of the surveyed participants who experienced bullying in the workplace cited the need to be on a colleague’s good side. The example provided by the participant stated that in order to accomplish tasks in the department an employee had to be “on the good side” of their colleague. Anything that may cause someone to feel like they are not their authentic self was categorized as bullying for the purposes of this study. This participant’s statement insinuates that in order to complete job tasks in the department the colleague must be happy and that if the colleague is not happy with an employee, then the
employee’s work could suffer because the bully would not provide the employee with what is needed in order to complete the work. For this reason, the code of “get on good side” was created to capture this experience.

**Summary.** The emergent themes help to provide context and examples of the types of experiences participants based their definitions of workplace bullying upon when answering the first research question. One participant did select that he or she felt bullied in the workplace, but declined to provide background on their experience. The next section will discuss the thoughts and feelings of participants during their bullying experience.

**Thoughts and Feelings**

Three themes emerged during data analysis of participants’ thoughts, feelings, and reactions. The first emergent theme is the different state of emotions that participants felt during their bullying experience. Participants’ thoughts emerged as the second theme during data analysis. Finally, participant actions emerged as a main theme in reference to what they did as a result of their thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Table 7 represents the top six (6) codes referenced by participants when asked to share their thoughts, feelings, and reactions during their bullying experience.

**Table 7**

*Top Codes Referenced by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>n (n=48)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerless</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singled Out</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emotions. Participants shared many different emotions experienced when they were bullied in the workplace. Feelings of anger, powerlessness, being singled out, and manipulated are a few examples of codes that were used during data analysis. A full list of codes that were used for this emergent theme are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion Theme Codes</th>
<th>n (n=50)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singled Out</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betrayed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Out</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belittled</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Angry. Feelings of anger was the top code referenced by participants during data analysis. While many participants simply stated they “felt angry”, others suggested that anger was the emotion that “dominated” them during their experience. One participant provided an example of wanting “to punch him [the bully] in the face!” to explain the level of anger felt. Another participant stated, “sometimes the anger caused me to act out and play into the hands of the many negative points the bully tried to make about me” as a reaction to the anger experienced while getting bullied in the workplace. “Shutting down” was another example shared in reaction to the level of anger experienced by a participant when bullied. It is not uncommon to experience anger when getting bullied in the workplace. This feeling sometimes stems from the frustration felt when a person is not able to do anything or is feeling “trapped” in their environment where they
are getting bullied. Feelings of anger can also stem from membership in the out-group in the workplace when the employee believes they should be a member of the perceived in-group in the work environment.

*Powerlessness.* Feelings of powerlessness are not unusual when someone feels they are being bullied. “Powerless” and “oppressed” were words used by participants to explain some of the emotions felt during their bullying experience. Other words used by participants were “trapped” and “helpless” to describe their feelings of powerlessness. Some participants used experiences instead of single words to share their feelings of powerlessness. One participant stated:

I don’t know how to get out of this situation. I don’t know how best to let my supervisor know that I feel I am being bullied. I felt like a small, inadequate nothing along with feeling sick to my stomach and seeing dots in front of my eyes.

Another participant shared, “Powerless. The only power that we had at that point was to leave.”

Feelings of powerlessness are not uncommon among employees placed in out-groups at work. Often the in-group is perceived to have all the power by members of the out-group and therefore when in-group members steer the work environment in their favor, out-group members feel as though they do not have the power to change the situation. Sometimes, the out-group does not know the power that they have if they were to communicate with each other and realize that the in-group is not as powerful as the out-group if communication was used among out-group members to try and change the work environment.

*Singled out.* Participants used examples of being “singled out” to describe not only their feelings, but also used this feeling to formulate definitions of bullying through “targeting” in addition to being singled out in the workplace. One participant shared,
the environment in which I worked steadily became more tense and filled with fear of retaliation and scrutiny by my supervisor. I felt that I had to run every decision, even inconsequential ones, across her desk. I felt that she was searching for opportunities to punish me or fire me and she grew very unpredictable and verbally abusive. Another participant stated, “I feel as if the institution is trying to get me to leave” as a way to describe the feeling of being singled out in the workplace. One participant shared that the bully was an “equal opportunity offender” and moved the “target” to different people around the office. There was always someone who was singled out or the “target” of the supervisor. There was a sense by participants that there was a “target on their back” when sharing their thoughts and emotions during their bullying experience. It is easy for new employees to have this feeling when entering a work environment where the in-group does not select them, or they do not self-select to be a part of the perceived in-group, within the office. There can be a perception that the in-group member [bully] is singling out the new employee because they are not yet, or will not become, a part of the perceived in-group within the office.

**Manipulated.** Feelings and thoughts of manipulation were not expressed by survey participants, but were shared by two interview participants. The first interview participant to discuss feelings of manipulation stated,

I think that feeling manipulated was big. I think that sometimes you’re manipulated and sometimes you are coached towards a certain thing. You wouldn’t consider it bullying, but more of my supervisor wanted this as their end goal and I can see how they kind of steered me and coached me and eventually I came around to their way of seeing it and now it’s fine.

This same participant continued to discuss her thoughts and feelings of being manipulated with two more examples. She felt as though her former supervisor would “manipulate” her and her
supervisor’s supervisor by telling her that his [the bully’s] supervisor wanted certain things certain ways and she would find out “months” later when talking to his supervisor that she “didn’t know what I was talking about.”

The other interview participant to discuss manipulation as a feeling shared how he was manipulated into bullying other people in the workplace. He stated:

I was asked to actually bully other people. If someone was not meeting the needs, or if anyone had a paperwork flaw you got a little tally mark. If a hall director turned in three thousand check out forms and they got one wrong, they got a tally mark and after three tally marks I was supposed to ‘hold them accountable’. And not just the hall director, but the assistant director too. Holding them accountable wasn’t developing them, I was supposed to yell at them.

The participant went on to share how he would find ways to avoid the manipulation by “setting false meetings” and that he “ethically didn’t like making those decisions [setting false meetings] but felt like I had to in order to have any form of self-care.” In-group members are more likely to use their perceived power to influence or manipulate other employees. The term of manipulation was used by participants to express how they felt, but was also used to define bullying in the workplace.

**Embarrassed.** There was an overall shared feeling of being embarrassed for getting bullied. An interview participant said he felt embarrassed about his bullying situation and that he let it happened and attributed his allowing of being bullied to being less confident and a new employee. The participant stated, “As the years have progressed I’ve become more confident and in and about myself and my job in general and I think the opportunity to bully me falls by the wayside quite a bit now.” The participant’s response about prior feelings of embarrassment and now not having the feelings could indicate that the participant was initially placed in the out-
group when he first started his current role and has been able to transition into the in-group providing him with more confidence to stand up for himself when colleagues or superiors attempt to bully him. This participant’s experience is unique when compared to other participants who cited feelings of embarrassment when bullied in the workplace. Most participants cited the feeling of “embarrassment” as a way to describe a feeling they were having during their bullying experience, but they also used this term to define bullying as it relates to how it makes someone feel. Embarrassment can also be a form of targeting used by in-group members to bully their way ahead of other colleagues in the workplace.

**Betrayed.** Several participants mentioned feelings of deceit and betrayal during their bullying experiences. These feelings formed from trusting colleagues, or supervisors, in the workplace and then feeling that the colleague or supervisor used their trust to bully them in certain situations or into making decisions they did not agree with. One participant reflected on their feelings of betrayal by sharing, “I lost trust in that person and in the institution.” When a new employee enters the environment they must slowly begin to form relationships with their colleagues and move into social groups within the environment according to social identity theory. This process is how employees move into an in-group or out-group and open themselves up to trusting colleagues or supervisors; which, sometimes ends with feelings of deceit and betrayal from social group members employees felt they could trust.

**Hurt.** Feeling hurt is similar to feeling betrayed, but differs on the level of severity. Participants who cited feelings of hurt centered around actions that were “humiliating” and “heart-breaking.” The actions cited that led to feelings of hurt here were most often colleagues or supervisors “intentionally” saying or doing things to the participant in the workplace. This feeling, or emotion, differs from feelings of being betrayed in that participants did not state that
trust was lost because of the actions. More simply, the actions were intentional with no prior knowledge having been shared by the participant to the bully.

**Left out.** Feeling of being left out also surfaced when defining bullying in the workplace. One participant stated, “I discovered that I was being left out of the loop in damaging ways. It’s just very difficult to expose these things.” An interview participant began to question why she was even working in the department because she felt left out and continued to have experiences that made her feel like she was not part of the team. A survey participant shared that the bullying experience “made me feel less like a part of the group and I missed out on opportunities because of it.” There are usually workgroups in the office of people who “click” better than others. Sometimes being left out can be perceived by someone who is not invited to go to lunch with a group who is always dining out together. Or it can be perceived if several coworkers always congregate in someone’s office to talk and disperse when someone from outside the group walks up. However, these types of experiences of being “left out” may not actually be bullying because of the office dynamic but can be perceived to be bullying by the person who feels they are being excluded or “left out” of the created social groups in the workplace.

**Belittled.** Several participants cited feelings of belittlement during their bullying experiences. This was expressed by one interview participant who shared that she was “feeling less than” during her bullying experience. Belittling was not only used by participants to define bullying in the workplace, but was also used as a descriptor for their thoughts and feelings during their own bullying experience.

**Frustration.** Feeling bullied in the workplace can be very frustrating. There is a close connection to feeling powerless and frustrated when getting bullied. Participants who cited feelings of frustration suggested that their thoughts and feelings stemmed from the
inconveniences that happen when bullied in the workplace as opposed to feelings of powerlessness.

**Regret.** Several participants cited feelings and thoughts of regret when reflecting on their bullying experiences. One participant stated, “I felt like I didn’t make the best decision in working here.” While another participant shared, “I never feel good about the situation. It bothers me that I was bullied, but it bothers me more that I allowed it to happen.” During reflection thoughts and feelings of regret can surface. Participants were asked share their feelings during the experience and with time could come the perception of regret that was maybe not experienced during the actual bullying event in the workplace. However, it is important to note that several participants had the emotion of regret as it relates to their thoughts and feelings during their bullying experience.

**Thoughts.** A variety of thoughts were had by participants during their bullying experiences. Thoughts of anxiety and disappointment were top thoughts shared by participants. A list of all codes used to form the emergent theme of thoughts is provided in Table 9.

Table 9

*Thought Theme Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally Unsafe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shock</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Anxiety.** Anxiety can be expressed in many different forms. Participants expressed feelings of “stress” and “nervousness.” There were also thoughts of being on “pins and needles” in the workplace because of the thought that the bully would not “like” what participants were
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doing. One participant explained that the anxiety was so extreme that “I cried several times.” Another participant shared that the anxiety of going to work caused extreme weight loss because of the worry experienced with doing something “wrong” at work. Anxiety causes different outcomes for each person. The impacts on a person’s physical and mental health vary when they are experiencing high levels of anxiety in the workplace. Participant’s examples of weight loss and being afraid to try new things are consistent with current literature explaining impacts anxiety has on individuals in the workplace.

Disappointment. Participants’ thoughts of disappointment were projected onto working in higher education as a whole. One example of a participant projecting his experience of being disappointed was shared during an in-person interview by stating, “It [the bullying experience] was hugely disappointment and disillusioning. I thought that people in this field just understand these things better and have a great sense of responsibility.” In addition to being disappointed that they [participants] had to experience bullying in the workplace “daily”, one participant stated that “it [the bullying experience] kind of started to decrease my confidence of who I was as a young professional” which led to thoughts of disappointment about deciding to work in higher education. Another participant discussed the thought process of feeling disappointed because the actions the bully was taking were “intentional” with “a disregard and misunderstanding of how they [the actions] would affect people.” Disappointment with the work environment can be interpreted as a mild version of betrayal. Higher education is seen as a place where people are developed and sent into the community stronger and more tolerant. When this idea is not witnessed in higher education by people who select to work in what they perceive to be an empowering environment, disappointment with the choice can be experienced.

Emotionally unsafe. Several participants discussed the thought that they were unsafe in their work environment during their bullying experience. One participant stated, “I’ve seen what
it takes to get rid of someone here. It’s ridiculous! By the time you need to be documenting it’s too late and you’re in for another year of it [bullying]. So you just feel unsafe.” Another participant shared that “it is hard for me to emotionally support others when I am being emotionally bullied.” Emotional experiences and feelings of not being safe or in “distress” are not uncommon by people who experience bullying. The statements from participants that they thought they were not emotionally safe and supported in their work environment is consistent with the thoughts of people who experience bullying in what is considered a traditional office environment.

**Self-blame.** Thoughts of self-blame are not uncommon when a person feels they have been bullied. As an example, one participant stated, “it’s a self-imposed feeling where it’s something that I felt whether it was intentional or not by the other person.” An interview participant used the following example to explain his feelings of self-blame:

I felt as though I was like a sad dog where it’s like you throw the bone, they [the dog] go and fetch it and bring it back and then you hit them. Then you throw the bone again and they bring it back and you hit them again. It’s like I kept getting hit, but I still wanted to play fetch. I still wanted to try and show that I can do this.

Even though the participant knew it was a bad environment, there is a thought of self-blame because he continued to allow himself to stay in the environment and try to satisfy the bully. Another participant shared that they placed the blame on themselves for the bully’s actions because “I’m new to the office or because I do something that agitates this person kind of easily.” Self-blame by a person who is bullied is not uncommon and often a thought from out-group members or in-group members that are experiencing inter-group bullying. The thought that “I must be doing something wrong” is usually the first thought by an out-group member before there is a realization that they might be experiencing bullying in the workplace.
Shock. Understanding the thought of shock during their experience was expressed by participants. The shock of “the lack of sensitivity, the lack of kind and congenial care and compassion in those moments” was a central thought from participants’ responses. One participant shared that “I later realized that he [the bully] had to plan and choreograph the whole [bullying] event beforehand” to give an example of the shock experienced during the thought process of getting bullied. Another participant shared their thought of shock by stating, “I thought, what is happening here? I am not being respected, my thoughts are not respected.” It can be a shocking experience when a person realizes that he or she is the victim of bullying. Shock by employees that bullying can happen in the adult world is a theme expressed by the current literature. Participant examples of their thoughts and relationship to shock are consistent with literature that discusses thoughts and feelings when adults are bullied in their workplace.

Silenced. Several participants thought that they were being silenced during their bullying experience. One participant shared,

I was feeling pressure to be quiet. To not say what it was that I considered to be the truth. To not press for changes that need to be made. Basically what it all came down to was be silent and conform.

The idea of “feeling like a second class citizen” when the bully finds a way to take a person’s voice is consistent with experiences shared in current literature. Participants’ thinking that they were being silenced is common when a bully wants to find a way to control the employee. The thought of being silenced is also consistent with social identity theory when discussing the mobbing mentality of the in-group to disenfranchise the out-group by removing their voice from the office.

Actions. Participants used words and statements such as job searching, pushing through the experience, and self-protection to describe their thoughts and feelings during their bullying
experience. Together, the codes helped form the final theme of actions, which describes the things participants did when they thought and felt they were being bullied in the workplace.

**Job searching.** Making the decision to search for a new job was the second most referenced thought and feeling by participants. The word “escape” was used by several participants to describe their thought of what needed to happen during their bullying experience. One participant stated, “It just wasn’t an environment that I really want to be in so I looked to escape.” Another participant said, “the major emotions that dominated me were anxiety, anger, and then a sense of always looking for an escape.” Other participants discussed how they wanted to leave their job and were “uncomfortable until my last day on the job” after finding new employment. Some participants did what they could to get away from the institution to escape the bullying environment while they were searching for new employment. One participant stated, “I went to friends’ places that were out of town and just wanted to get away from the institution as often as I could.” Another participant said “I didn’t feel like I could do my job and I did everything I could to get out of the office and away from the workplace.” One participant shared that it was easier to quit their job and walk away than to stay and try to find new employment before putting in their notice. It is not uncommon for employees to seek new employment when they are not able to place themselves into a social group in the workplace or when they have been placed in the out-group by members already established in the culture of the workplace. Lacking a social group, or being placed into the out-group allows bullies the opportunity to target the employee creating what is often referred to as a hostile work environment.

**Pushing through.** Several participants discussed their desire to push through the bullying situation to see if things would eventually change. One participant used the word “stubborn” to describe the desire to stay in the bullying situation and still successfully complete your job. The participant stated,
I think at some point when there’s the stubbornness that you can truly accomplish it. So even with her bullying and the tasks being something I hated doing in addition to being given so much of it. Like, still believing like a Disney movie; you can overcome. Another participant said that “I just tried to push through. I just continued to tell myself, ‘you’re doing good work.’” Some employees take on this mentality when there is a high connection to the outcomes of their work causing them to want to endure what they consider to be a bullying situation because the satisfaction of their work outweighs the negative impacts of getting bullied.

**Self-protection.** For some participants their first thought and feeling during their bullying experience was to find a way to protect themselves. Participants stated that they began “saving and printing emails” in addition to “documenting everything.” The onus for participants making these moves was to prepare a “file” to take to human resources should there ever be a need. There was a centered connection between participant responses that wanted to find a way to accomplish self-protection as a way to show they were the victim in the situation and that they had done what was needed to prove this to an outsider, should that time ever come.

**Summary.** Participants had a wide range of thoughts and feelings during their bullying experiences. The emergent themes of emotions, thoughts, and actions bring together the different aspects and views of responses to allow for better understanding and categorization of the codes created to bring forward the experiences of participants.

**Assistance**

Participants were asked to share whether or not they sought assistance for their bullying experience in the workplace. Table 7 provides the breakdown of whether or not participants sought assistance when they felt bullied. Seeking assistance from human resources or their supervisor were the top two places or people participants sought for support or assistance with their bullying situation as shown in Table 10. Seeking assistance from friends, colleagues,
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counselors, or significant others were categorized as “other” in Table 11. Table 12 provides participant’s satisfaction with the outcomes of speaking with human resources and their supervisor about their experiences in the workplace.

Table 10

*Did participants seek assistance for their bullying experience?*

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
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<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

*Participant Response Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n (n=24)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12

*Satisfaction with outcome*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-Satisfied</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n (n=10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-Satisfied</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sought assistance. Speaking with their supervisor or human resources were the top places where participants went to get assistance for their bullying experience. Participants wanted to share their experiences and wanted the bullying to stop citing that they “wanted help” and to “prevent future situations.”

Participants who spoke to human resources were not satisfied with their experience or outcome from reporting their own experience with bullying in the workplace. One participant stated, “I reached out to the human resources department at my institution for advice, but they were not supportive. I was also very fearful of retaliation as my supervisor previously fired someone for reporting her poor management to human resources.” Another participant stated that they “felt like human resources was in on it [the bullying]” after making their report to the human resources department. Participants reporting contacting human resources on multiple occasions and never receiving responses or assistance for the experiences they were trying to report. While participants were comfortable reaching out to human resources, it is clear from their responses that it was not perceived to be an effective place to report their issues in the workplace.

Overall participants were not satisfied (70%) with the outcomes of speaking with their supervisor when they were bullied in the workplace. But, some employees (30%) were satisfied with their experience after speaking with their supervisor about their bullying experience. One participant stated the following about her positive experience:

I approached my supervisor about it [bullying experience]. I have always felt very comfortable going to my supervisor. My supervisor always had wonderful things to say and would tell me, ‘I have felt the same way and just let it roll off your shoulders. Have a conversation with this person [the bully] and just sit down and say this is how I’m
feeling.’ My supervisor kept telling me it doesn’t matter if you’re actually getting bullied, it matters that you feel like you’re getting bullied.

Another participant shared the following statement about their negative experience of speaking with their supervisor:

I decided that I could be a part of the problem, by allowing it to continue, or I could be a part of the solution. So, I spoke with my supervisor and let my supervisor know that I felt uncomfortable and disrespected. I don’t believe that my supervisor understood my concern.

Another participant shared that “over time I would go to my supervisor about those situations [bullying experiences]. Unfortunately, my supervisor was experience some of the same things from the same individual so they would not do anything about it.” Overall, participant experiences with reporting their bullying situation to their supervisor were not satisfactory to what the participant expected to happen when they reported their situation.

**Did not seek assistance.** Several themes emerged from participants who did not seek assistance for their bullying experience. The ease of avoiding the situation, fear, and feeling trapped emerged as themes during data analysis based on created codes and grouping of codes.

**Fear.** Fear of the person [the bully], fear of making things worse, and fear of being branded as a whiner or trouble-maker were some of the reasons provided by participants for not reporting their bullying situations. Codes of fear, retaliation, and whiner were created to categorize participant’s rationales for not reporting their bullying experience.

An interview participant provided this statement about her feelings of fear with reporting her bullying situation:

I was unsure of who I could trust and who my supervisor had told what and unsure of what was being said about me. My supervisor’s temper was very quick and there was no
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point in kind of stirring that up. If I had gone straight to my supervisor’s supervisor, it would have been a pretty big risk because my supervisor’s supervisor would have gone to my supervisor and said, ‘why are you being such a jerk to your employee?’

Other participants shared that there was a “fear of making things worse” if they did report their bullying experience to anyone and the bully discovered. Additionally, participants shared their fear of directly confronting the bully due to the possibility that things in the office may get worse than they felt they already were.

**Retaliation.** Participants shared that there was a fear of retaliation attached to reporting their situation. One participant shared their experience of why they no longer report their bullying situation with the following statement:

> I don’t continue to seek assistance because I have talked to the director of our department and the director has told my supervisor everything I said, even when I asked the director not to and asked for help. The bully retaliates against me and makes my life miserable, so I try not to say anymore.

Other participants shared that the consequences of reporting were too great due to the fear of what could happen through retaliation when reported.

**Whiner.** Several participants shared that they did not seek help with their bullying situation because they did not want to appear weak or categorized as a whiner. Some participants were embarrassed with the fact that they felt bullied and did not want to make a report because they might be viewed as a trouble-maker within the office. This perceived fear by participants can be associated with social group membership and the participants’ desire to endure their experiences to remain a part of the social group.
Trapped. It is not uncommon for a person to feel trapped when they perceive they are being bullied in the workplace. Codes created that are associated with this theme include: No fix, not trusting human resources, and trapped.

This code also emerged as one of the themes for why participants did not report their bullying experience. An interview participant had the following statement to share about feeling trapped when she was getting bullied in the workplace:

After my supervisor [the bully] left we figured some things out. My supervisor’s supervisor was like, ‘gosh, why didn’t you come and tell me?’ and I was like, ‘how could I? How could I come tell you?’ I think my supervisor’s supervisor wanted me to have a running list of the ways that things were not working out correctly. But you can’t go to your supervisor’s supervisor every day and say, ‘hey this crappy thing happened. Hey this crappy thing happened. Hey, can I talk to you? Some other crappy thing happened.’ Separate they’re all so little [bullying instances], but when you put them all together they’re enormous.

Another participant had the following experience of feeling trapped leading to not reporting their bullying situation:

When you feel someone has so much power over the workings of an agency, it is hard to step forward. Especially if it feels it is a vague suggestion and has not actually been done.

Also, I had brought up issues with a colleague previously to my boss and it seems the boss’s interventions (boss did intervene) were not effective.

Feeling trapped and not reporting the situation is not uncommon when an employee feels bullied in the workplace according to current literature. Participant responses and feelings are consistent with the experiences of employees and faculty who have expressed similar feelings and thoughts in the current literature.
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No fix. Some participants associated their bullying experience to them being a part of the system and therefore reporting would not change the system. One participant had this to say about being part of the system that could not be fixed:

I knew that it was happening. I knew that I wasn’t the only one and I think that was better than feeling like I was targeted. I think I was just part of the system and the bully was having trouble with all of the parts of the system.

Participants shared that when reporting in the past they “hit a brick wall” with who they reported the situation to and no longer felt there was a way to fix the environment. On interview participant shared the following statement about feeling as though there was no fix for the bullying situation:

I did go and get some counseling, which was good. The struggle is that the solution was pretty apparent and nothing I was going to do in the workplace was going to fix the workplace. The workplace was toxic enough that there was nothing; Like, me bringing a positive attitude the next day wasn’t going to make the workplace positive. The reality was that I needed a different job or to leave the job.

Participants also reported administration “acting like it [bullying] didn’t happen” or suggesting that administration did not feel it was “something they would spend their mental capacity on” to fix. Overall participants felt it was “easier to avoid and move on” than it was to report the bullying, leading to feelings and beliefs that there was not a fix for the experiences.

Did not trust human resources. There was a common perception of being trapped because participants felt they could not trust human resources for one reason or another. One participant stated:
In the situation with my supervisor, there was no person to seek assistance with that would have been able to remedy the situation. My supervisor was best friends with most of human resources and she was a top performer for the vice president of the institution. Another participant shared, “I didn’t trust human resources to be helpful without threatening legal action and that seem like more of a battle than I wanted to fight. I decided to try and make the best of the situation as it was.” One participant stated they were told human resources believes that they are a liability and therefore the participant felt trapped into having no one to report their experience to at the institution.

**Ease of avoidance.** The option to avoid the situation was another theme that emerged during data analysis. Participants ways of avoidance were varied from seeking and getting new employment to working in different areas on campus or were attributed to being young and feeling it was the way the work world worked.

**New job.** Participants who cited that they did not report their bullying experience reported that they did not do so because they had already found new employment and did not want to make trouble on their way to their new job. One participant shared,

I only had a few months left. It was common knowledge each time he [the bully] moved institutions that it was due to a false recommendation simply to get him to move out of the department from whom the recommendation came from. Participants shared that it was easier for them to avoid and work through the bullying situation than report it because they felt they were “already heading out the door” of the institution and did not see a need to say anything on their way out.

**Worked in different departments.** Some participants shared that it was easy to avoid the bully after their experience because they did not work in the same office on campus. One participant shared, “Since the bully and I didn’t work in the same office it was easy to avoid the
bully and find other ways to accomplish our work.” Participants did not see a need to make a report of their bullying situation since their bully did not work with them daily and felt that by reporting they would cause an imposition on the two offices involved in the investigation due to the allegations of bullying.

**Young.** One participant attributed the ease of avoidance to being young and not knowing better or what to expect in the work environment. The participant shared that they were in a temporary job and that because they were young they did not know how to handle the situation and therefore decided to avoid the experience all together. However, reflecting back for the purposes of this study the participant shared that they probably should have sought assistance but were too young in the field to know what to do.

**Summary.** Participants shared a variety of experiences and rationales for reporting or not reporting their bullying experiences. The majority of participants ultimately chose not to report their experience for a variety of reasons shared. Overall, participants who did chose to share their experience and sought help were overwhelmingly not satisfied with the outcome of seeking assistance.

**Research Question Three**

*What are the experiences of student affairs personnel with bystander bullying in the workplace?*

Participants were asked to share whether or not they have witnessed bullying in higher education (Table 13). Additionally, participants were asked to share their thoughts and emotions when witnessing bullying and whether or not they sought assistance for the bullied colleague after their bystander experience.
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**Table 13**

*Participant Experience with Bystander Bullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Participants</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Participants</th>
<th>n (n=13)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrew from study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bystander Experiences**

Targeting and sabotaging employees were the two emergent themes from participant bystander experiences of bullying in higher education. Words and phrases were used to create the codes that were then grouped together as they related to each of the emergent themes. Codes of targeting, abusive, ridiculed, and gossip were grouped together to provide participant experiences for the theme of targeting. The codes of “forcing resignations”, “accusations”, and “withholding information” were grouped together to provide participant experiences for the theme of sabotaging employees.

**Targeting.** Participants shared a variety of examples to illustrate their experiences with bystander bullying; specifically, their experiences of witnessing colleagues getting targeted by colleagues or supervisors. One participant shared that they witnessed a colleague get told “there are different rules for different employees” in the workplace. Examples of targeting also included witnessing colleagues being told habitually that their idea is “dumb” or “stupid” each time they
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[the colleague] tried to bring forward new ways of doing things in the department. One interview participant shared the following example of witnessing targeting of colleagues in the workplace:

Everybody was kind of getting bullied in that workplace and so you kind of got to see it widespread. I think that the more normal way that I see it is that someone genuinely doesn’t like somebody else because of something that they’re doing or that they’ve had competition in their history or something like that and because of that, they just go after that person and they try to make them look bad, show their true colors, etc. They have some form of malice towards the person and they’re taking it out on them and you [bystander] view it as an argument, but the struggle is that the person [colleague getting bullied] is not arguing back and its one sided and you’ve witnessed it [one sided arguing] for the last three meetings.

Other participants shared that they witnessed colleagues getting “punished” beyond what their “original offense was” or witnessing a colleague being the only person in the office who receives “harsh” reprimands. Participant experiences are consistent with experiences shared in the current literature of the types of experiences employees witness when bullying is taking place in the workplace.

*Abusive.* Participants shared experiences of witnessing supervisors verbally abusing colleagues to their perceived breaking points. One participant shared:

A colleague was yelling at my supervisor and I could hear it from my office. I got up and walked over to insert myself into the situation. My supervisor had teared up and the colleague proceeded to tell me how incompetent my supervisor is.

Another participant shared the following example of witnessing the abuse of colleagues in the workplace:
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A colleague from a different department continually engaged in very aggressive ways towards many people in the division who did not agree with, or were perceived to speak out against the bully in meetings. The bully took things very personally. You could hear the bully yelling at people over the phone, in person, and on at least one occasion followed two colleagues to their office suite and demanded to meet with them. The bully refused to leave the office until the colleagues ‘came out’ and met with the bully.

Other examples included witnessing supervisors “stomping” through the office when they were angry and “taking it out” on colleagues while they made their way to their office.

Participant responses of witnessing abusive actions in the workplace are consistent with their own personal experiences of bullying in the workplace as reported when answering research questions two.

*Ridiculed.* Bystander experiences included witnessing colleagues being “ridiculed or belittled because of their faith, financial status, family planning choices, and other personal life choices.” The ridicule witnessed by participants also included hearing “unkind” comments in group settings by supervisors or colleagues as well as “cutting” down colleagues in meetings or in other group office settings. Reported bystander experiences are consistent with personal reported experiences by participants in previous questions.

*Gossip.* Participants shared that they observed colleagues “constantly taking personal shots at one another” when the other was not around in what was perceived to be an attempt to divide the office. The term “mean girls” was used by participants to express the witnessed experiences of colleagues having negative conversations about other colleagues when certain colleagues were not present. Gossip has been linked to creating a negative/hostile work environment through reported experiences in current literature and from participant’s own reported experiences.
Sabotage.

**Forced resignation.** Participants shared experiences of witnessing colleagues being forced to quit or coached out of their jobs by a bully. One example provided was:

One of the members of our unit went to our supervisor to try and make some recommendations on things that needed to be done differently because our supervisor was making some mistakes. This senior member of the team went to our supervisor and said, ‘you know, these are some things that you’re doing that are creating problems and here’s some things you might want to consider doing differently.’ The senior team member had much more experience than our supervisor, not only at the institution, but in the field as a whole. Everybody assumed that this is an opportunity for our supervisor to embrace, learn, and group. Our supervisor responded to the feedback very nastily and with hostility. Our supervisor started telling people that the senior team member was being intimidating and a bully. The supervisor calling the senior staff member a bully resulted in that person [senior staff member] losing their job and being escorted off campus by security.

Another participant shared witnessing a colleague being “coached” out of their position by a supervisor who slowly moved the employee’s tasks to their colleagues and began to ask the employee to complete tasks that were not in their original job description. The participant describes the witnessed situation as one where a colleague was assigned tasks that were not desirable by the bully as a way to frustrate the colleague to the point where the colleague would become so frustrated that they would seek new employment so that the colleague did not have to be fired by the bully. This particular example is consistent with the mobbing mentality that is sometimes experienced in the workplace as described by social identity theory. The bully is using the in-group to redistribute an employee’s tasks and doing so through a mobbing manner.
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**Accusations.** Participants shared examples of accusations made about colleagues or supervisors that they felt were bullying. One participant shared that their supervisor held a meeting and referred to changes that were coming in the department and told a colleague, “If you don’t like what you’re hearing you can leave,” alluding that the colleague could be made to leave.

**Withholding information.** Several participants shared examples of witnessing their supervisors “purposefully” withhold information from their colleagues that was “detrimental” to their job performance. Colleagues were “sabotaged” by their supervisors and made to look “bad” in front of large groups because they did not have all the information. Participants shared that they knew their supervisor had purposefully withheld the information the colleague needed to be successful. A participant who had actual knowledge of their supervisor withholding information from a colleague could have been able to discover/witness the situation because the supervisor perceived them to be part of the in-group in the department and did not try to hide their actions to thwart the perceived out-group colleagues of the participant.

**Summary.** Data analysis provided a variety of experiences from participants who witnessing bullying in the workplace. The examples provided are consistent with participant’s own experiences and also consistent with literature discussing social identity theory in relation to in-group and out-group formation. Participants’ experiences with bystander bullying could be a result of their perceived acceptance into the in-group of the department by the bully and therefore were permitted to witness the bully using their tactics on perceived out-group members of the office. One participant share that they were not comfortable sharing the experience they witnessed in the workplace but did indicate that they had witnessed bullying in their higher education workplace.
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**Thoughts, Feelings, Reactions**

Participants were asked to share their thoughts, feelings, and initial reactions to witnessing bullying in the workplace. Themes of powerlessness and institution culture emerged from participant responses. Several different grouped codes represent the make-up of each theme that emerged based on the responses of both survey and interview participants. A full list of codes used to categorize participant responses can be found in Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Thoughts, Feelings, and Reaction Codes</th>
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<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commiseration/Empathy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Respect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to Assist</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shocked</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covert</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Powerlessness. The theme of powerlessness emerged from the codes of having to be alert, feeling commiseration/empathy, covert actions, thoughts and feelings of frustration, and wanting to assist colleagues but not feeling as though they [participants] could in their current environment.

Alert. One interview participant shared how witnessing bullying in the workplace put him on “alert” in the office. The participant stated, “I think it [workplace bullying] definitely puts you on alert to go, okay; I better make sure that I have all my ‘t’s’ crossed and ‘I’s’ dotted.” The participant continued by sharing that part of being alert in the workplace could also mean that
you have to make sure you are doing your fair share of work. He continued discussing having to be alert when witnessing bullying in the workplace because you do not have any control over the bully when you are a subordinate and there is a kind of “fear” of putting yourself in the same situation as your colleague and falling victim to the bully’s tactics. Bully’s often use their perceived power to influence office dynamics as evidenced in current literature and supported by the example provided by the interview participant.

**Commiseration/empathy.** One interview participant shared the following statement of how she tried to be empathetic and commiserate with her colleague: “I felt compassion for my colleague and spoke with her at length about the problem and what were possible routes to improve relations with the office bully” Several participants cited examples of going to bullied colleagues and offering their support and encouragement as a way to commiserate or empathize with the bullied colleague. One participant said that “I go to talk to my bullied colleagues to empower and encourage them” after witnessing bullying in the workplace. Another participant who participated in the interview process said that he would let his bullied colleague know he felt the same way and would do his best to try and empathize with them. Participant shared that commiserating or empathizing with colleagues who they saw get bullied in the workplace was the only way they felt they could do anything about the bullying taking place.

**Covert.** An interview participant shared how she felt that many of the bullying actions were more covert “unless you knew what was going on.” She provided an example of being in a meeting with the bully who was belittling a colleague, but not doing it in such a direct way that guests who were attending the meeting could pick up. However, because she knew of the office workings she knew that her colleague was getting bullied in front of the guests. The bully in the example provided by the participant eventually left the institution, but the participant felt that
when she witnessed the covert bullying taking place in her office that she had no power to do or say anything because it would set off the bully’s “short temper.”

**Frustration.** Almost twenty percent (20%) of participants surveyed and interviewed cited feelings, thoughts, and reactions of frustration. Frustration that bullying was happening to them and their colleagues. More frustration that bullying was taking place in their office, reported, and was not stopped. One participant shared:

Although I was frustrated with the bullying I experienced, it was even harder to watch my colleague be bullied. My colleague was attacked based on her personal values and morals whereas I was bullied for being a perceived threat to my boss’s workplace capabilities.

Another participant shared the following statement after witnessing bullying in the workplace:

It was frustrating to know that the bully was allowed to engage in such behavior when it not only should be unacceptable, but would be considered unacceptable by others. However, administration liked the bully and therefore the bully did not face any repercussions for this behavior. It [non-reaction from administration] made it clear that many of the administrators at the institution played favorites and do not treat their employees equally. I was shocked, angry, outraged, and overwhelmed by these incidents.

An interview participant shared his frustration with witnessing colleagues “trick” new employees because of their “ulterior motives.” He shared that in his department veteran staff members will use ulterior motives to get new staff members to work shifts that are less desirable; but, his colleagues are not forthcoming with accurate information and the new employee is ignorant to what really will happen while they are on duty for the perceived “less desirable” shift.

Participants mostly expressed their frustration with the actual event they witnessed as well as the lack of anything being done to stop future events from occurring.
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Wanting to assist. Many of the participants who responded shared that they “wished they could help” but were not able to in the current environment. One participant shared, “I felt awful for my coworker but felt like I couldn’t step in because it would affect my own job/relationship with my supervisor.” Another participant said, “I wanted to speak up, but did not feel I would be supported by superiors” Some participants shared that they wanted to assist colleagues when they witnessed them getting bullied in the workplace but did not step in because it was the “easier choice.” One participant stated:

It [witnessing bullying] is not a fun experience, especially when it happens in the open and we are exposed to the process. There’s a part of you that wants to step in, but it is also not your fight. While that is the wrong way to approach the situation, it seems like the easier choice at the time to not become involved than to get into a situation where you were stepping into something that you were not originally involved with from the start. The majority of participants who stated they wanted to provide support, but felt like they could not do so, provided examples of the witnessed situation and their thought process of why they did not step in to assist; but ultimately, wished they had the support to step in and help their colleague.

Institutional Culture. The theme of institutional culture emerged from the codes of climate, embarrassment, lost respect, and thoughts/feelings of shock. Institutional culture has been known to have impacts on employees’ thoughts, feelings, and reactions to how things happen and are handled in the workplace. Each code aligned with the emergent theme through participant responses indicating that their thoughts, feelings, and reactions were a result of the current workplace culture.

Climate. The climate of the institution was mentioned by participants at the same rate as participant frustration. One participant shared the following statement of how witnessing
bullying in the workplace impacted the overall climate: “It [bullying] impacted the way that we went about our work. It impacted the way that people talked with each other. It impacted the social circles.” An interview participant shared that he could not believe “the fact that the institution as a whole allows that kind of behavior to happen.” Other participants shared that witnessing bullying at their institution was “just how it was” or that it was the “common culture for advancement” One interview participant expressed his thoughts about climate and how it impacts bullying in the workplace:

It [the institution] wasn’t a supportive environment where they really cared about their staff members or making them happy. I ran into the bully at a conference and the bully’s personality is still the same. This encounter allows me now to see that that’s a systemic problem. That may not be an issue with the bully, but that’s how this person was bred at the institution and that’s what the institution promotes. So finding ways to understand that maybe it is institutionalized bullying.

Another participant shared:

Honestly, the behavior was par for the department. The bully’s behavior was allowed and even somewhat encouraged by the manager. The manager avoids confrontation so people push it down to the point they ‘throw it up’ on each other. It was the craziest place I’ve ever worked! I made a decision to not get sucked into the dysfunctional antics that had become their norm.

Participant responses were consistent with mentioning the climate of the office created by the culture of the supervisor or institution when citing their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to witnessing bullying in the workplace. Additionally, participant responses are consistent with current literature citing examples of office environments creating a culture of bullying for the organization.
UNDERSTANDING WORKPLACE BULLYING

*Embarrassment.* Participants who cited feelings and thoughts of embarrassment stemming from their feelings that they were not able to intervene on behalf of their colleague. Thoughts and feelings shared by participants had some feelings of self-blame as referenced by participants when speaking about their own bullying experiences. Participants had thoughts and feelings of embarrassment for themselves because they were too afraid to stand up and help out a colleague due to the fear of what would happen to them had they done so in the moment. Sometimes it is easier to “look away” and stay a perceived member of the in-group while the bully uses their power to belittle a colleague who is perceived to be a member of office out-group.

*Loss of respect.* Some participants shared that they lost respect for the bully and the institution after witnessing bullying events in the workplace. Most participants who shared that they lost respect for the bully and the institution shared that they were “let down” or “disheartened” by the experience and by who was the bully and who did not do anything to stop future situations. Examples of the bully being a respected supervisor who “finally showed their true colors” followed with examples of “administration doing nothing” were the center of participant feelings for losing respect. One participant shared:

> It’s really disheartening to see someone that I’m supposed to view as a supervisor as well as a leader of the institution, instead of taking the high road and doing the right thing professionally, take the low road. It makes me lose respect for not only the person but also the institution because as a whole they allow that kind of behavior to happen.

Another participant shared, “My thoughts at the time was, ‘this is not a good look for the institution.’ But more importantly the supervisor [bully] destroyed any good will they built up with employees.” Participant responses provided insight on how bullying in the workplace can change employees’ perspectives as well as how they interact with each other day to day.
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**Shock.** Two survey participants who witnessed bullying in the workplace shared how they were “shocked/stunned” by the experience and how the institution allowed the bully’s behavior to continue. On participant shared “I was shocked! The experience convinced me that my supervisor was an underhanded, dangerous, and untrustworthy person and that the system offered me and my colleagues no protection.” The system is a part of the institutional culture and climate and is a large consideration when employees make the decision, or do not make the decision, to report a witnessed experience.

**Summary.** Participants shared their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to witnessing bullying in the workplace. The central themes of powerlessness and institutional culture emerged from the variety of codes created to categorize the reported data. Thoughts and feelings of frustration, losing respect, and the idea that institutional culture may breed bullying were key findings from participant responses during data analysis providing examples of the multitude of institutional cultures and experiences of the participants.

**Assistance**

Finally, participants who selected or stated they have witnessed bullying in the workplace were asked to share whether or not they sought assistance for the colleague they witnessed getting bullied. Participants were also asked to share why they did, or did not seek assistance for their bullied colleague. Table 15 provides information on the number of survey participants who sought assistance for their colleague and Table 16 provides the number of interview participants who sought assistance for their colleague. The majority of survey and interview participants sought assistance for their colleagues which is not consistent with current literature. Forty-six percent (46%) of both survey and interview participants stated that they sought assistance for their colleagues. The following text will share the emergent themes for why or why not participants who witnessed bullying in the workplace sought assistance.
Table 15

*Survey Participant Sought Assistance for Bullied Colleague*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n (n=28)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16

*Interview Participant Sought Assistance for Bullied Colleague*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n (n=13)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Experience</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrew from Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sought assistance.** Several codes were created to categorize participant responses when they sought assistance for their bullied colleague. One theme emerged from the created codes, trust. Codes such as wanting behavior to stop, talking to the bully, and trusting administration were used to identify the emergent theme of trust.

**Trust.**

**Wanted behavior to stop.** Many of the participants who sought assistance for their bullied colleague simply wanted the behavior of the bully to stop. Statements of “fighting for the underdog” and “no one should go through a hostile work environment” were used to describe why participants stepped in to try and stop the behavior. Participants who stated they wanted the behavior to stop, so they talked with administrators, the bully, and human resources. It was important for the participants to step in and stop the behavior so that it did not create an unpleasant office environment.
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Talked to bully. Several participants stated that they helped their bullied colleague by directly talking with the bully. One participant stated, “there were a couple of times that I would notice something and then have a one on one conversation with the bully.” Other participants shared that they talked directly with the bully because the situation happened in a large group and they did not want the bully to “get away” with doing it again. A participant shared that, “I spoke to the source of bullying directly to let the bully know it did not go unnoticed.” An interview participant shared how he addressed an entire room of colleagues who he felt were bullying a new, younger, staff person. He shared:

I addressed the issue with the people in the room. I had witnessed the behavior from the group twice and so I chatted with my supervisor a little bit and he told me he was fine with me addressing my colleagues. I asked the bullied colleague not to attend the next staff meeting and I talked to everyone in the room.

The scenario provided by the interview participant is consistent with in-group and out-group dynamics in the workplace. Through this example it is clear that his colleagues perceived the new and young staff member to be in the social out-group of the office. But, the participant used his in-group status to talk with his colleagues to try and stop the in-group from continuing to bully the person they perceived to be part of the out-group. Participants who spoke directly with the bully did so because they wanted to “save relationships” in the office. Relationship building and understanding is a key component to working in student affairs and therefore it is not inconsistent for members of this division to want to stop negative relationships and create positive ones in the office.

Trusted administrators. Participants did speak directly with their supervisor or other administrators about the bullying they witnessed in the office. Feelings of trust were the center of why participants felt comfortable sharing what they saw and explaining that they wanted the
problem to stop. One participant shared that “it [witnessed bullying] needed to be addressed at a higher level” in order to change the culture of the office and prevent future situations. Not all outcomes of speaking with a supervisor or administrator were positive when reporting witnessed bullying in the workplace. One survey participant shared:

I believed my supervisor’s supervisor would trust me and other staff members who had been there much longer than our supervisor [the bully]. I believed we would be treated with professional care and concern, and that some sort of attempt would be made to establish a safer working environment. None of that happened. In fact, the bullying was only magnified.

Participants shared that while they did speak with a trusted supervisor or administrator that they were not sure that the supervisor or the administrators they spoke with understood completely what transpired in the office.

**Did not seek assistance.** For varying reasons participants chose not to intervene and seek assistance for their colleague who they felt was being bullied in the workplace. The created codes helped understand the emergent themes of empathy and fear experienced by participants who did not seek assistance for their colleagues.

**Empathy.** Empathy, or commiseration, is a common feeling for employees who witness bullying. Codes created that align with this emergent theme are coaching the victim, not their place to step in, and believing that even if reported, no one could help.

**Coached victim.** Instead of seeking assistance for their bullied colleague, several participants talked directly to the bullied colleague and tried to coach them. One participant shared:

I followed up with my colleague and we went out to lunch and we chatted all the way through. She was in tears because she had been bottling up all those emotions and I was
trying to make sure she was feeling the value, that I understood. I didn’t know how she was feeling, but I did understand how she was feeling it and that was really important to her and she really appreciated it. Having an advocate, I think is an important tool to get you out of bullying situations.

Other participants shared that they would try and “affirm” or “counsel” their colleagues who they witnessed getting bullied. They knew their colleagues were getting bullied and that they were not willing to step in to directly confront the bullying situation; but, they were willing to show genuine empathy towards their colleague. Several participants shared that they would try and offer “perspective” to their bullied colleague on the entire situation that they experienced. It was important for participants to share with their colleagues that they saw what happened, and did not agree with it, but were not going to step in and assist. Through the lens of social identity theory as it relates to in-group and out-group dynamics, participants may not be stepping in to assist their colleagues because doing so may change their perceived status from in-group to out-group member in the office culture.

Not their place. Many of the participants who shared that it was “not their place” to step in and assist and felt this way because it was “not my problem” to resolve in the workplace. Participants stated that while they did not agree with the bullying taking place, it was not their problem to fix and that their colleague should address the issue themselves. Statements of “it was up to the victim” and “not my issue when both people are acting as the aggressor” were shared as rationales for not stepping in to assist a bullied colleague. While participants empathized with their colleagues, they did not feel a need to solve their “issues” in the workplace. Again, participants could be speaking from an in-group membership perspective and not want to jeopardize that membership to assist a colleague. Additionally, as stated earlier by a participant,
the two aggressors could also be the bullied employee “playing into the hands of the bully” due to frustration.

_No one can help._ A few participants mentioned that while they felt bad for the experiences their colleague was having in the workplace, they did not feel that anyone could help if they did seek assistance. One participant shared that they specifically did not seek assistance because “I knew that no one would do anything about it” if the incident was reported. Another participant shared that “it does no good” to step in and directly assist a colleague, but that they did feel bad for the bullied colleague. Feeling as though no one can assist is not uncommon among employees bullied in the workplace when discussed in current literature.

_Fear._ Several participants shared that they not comfortable reporting the bullying experience they witnessed because of the current culture in their office. Codes of retaliation and seeking new employment were created to capture participant rationales for not seeking assistance. During data analysis the feeling of fear emerged as the second theme regarding why participants did not seek assistance for their bullied colleagues.

_Retaliation._ Rationale for not reporting for some participants was simply their fear of retaliation in the workplace. Participants stated that the “consequences were too great” to report what they witnessed in their office. There was also a fear from participants of the bully turning their attention to them because they tried to intervene. Social identity theory in reference to in-group and out-group dynamics shares that participant responses are not uncommon. Bullying experiences often go unreported due to fear of retaliation and when compared to in-group and out-group dynamics, they are not reported because participants wanted to remain as a perceived in-group member.

_New employment._ One participant cited that the work environment was so “toxic” that it was easier to find another job than report the bullying situations. The participant stated, “It was
faster and cleaner for me to leave my place of work than to battle an unfair battle with human resources (due to the bully’s connections with that office).” This participant’s response is similar to other responses shared about the ease of avoidance when witnessing bullying in the workplace. The idea that it is easier to find other employment than to report bullying in the workplace is consistent with faculty reports of how they handled bullying in their departments.

Summary

Participant experiences, thoughts, reactions, and feelings are consistent with current literature that discusses employee bullying experiences in the corporate and higher education workplace. Additionally, terms and phrases used by participants are consistent with the current field of literature that discusses the definition of bullying in the workplace as defined by corporate and higher education literature. Overall participant responses are consistent with current literature and faculty experiences with reporting bullying in the workplace. The thoughts, feelings, and reactions of participants when witnessing bullying in the workplace are consistent with the current field of literature too. However, participant responses and experiences with witnessing bullying and reporting are not consistent with current literature. The similarities and differences between current literature and participant responses will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary and discussion of the results, relating the experiences in survey and interview responses to current literature. Additionally, limitations of the study are addressed, as well as current literature on creating and promoting a bully-free environment in higher education.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain understanding of how student affairs professionals define bullying in the workplace, as well as to learn about their lived experiences of being personally bullied or of witnessing bullying in the workplace. Sixty student affairs staff members participated in an online survey asking about their definition of workplace bullying as well as their personal and witnessed experiences with bullying in the higher education workplace. Additionally, thirteen survey participants volunteered for in-person interviews to share their definition of bullying, their personal experiences with bullying, and their experiences with witnessing bullying in the higher education workplace.

The majority of participants reported instances of witnessing or personally experiencing bullying in the higher education workplace. Reported experiences in some instances resulted in colleagues losing their jobs or reputation in the office. Personal experiences reported made participants feel less than or that they could not adequately do their jobs. The reported experiences by participants were used to form their personal definition of bullying in the workplace. Many participant responses defined workplace bullying as some kind of action that happens to make a person feel uncomfortable or causes a person to not act as their authentic self in the workplace. The central themes that emerged from the data regarding definition formation,
personal and witnessed experiences, all allow for a deeper understanding of the bullying culture that can take place in higher education.

Several participants reported that the culture of the institution supported the bullying experiences they witnessed or had personally. Through the lens of social identity theory and group formation of in-groups and out-groups an understanding of participant experiences helps decipher the group formation structure in the workplace of many participant experiences. The self-selection process of an individual in the workplace into an in-group or out-group begins from the first day of work. This selection process, or sometimes placement process, has a significant impact on the employees’ experience in the workplace. Placement can lead to feelings of being bullied through placement in the out-group or because of inter-group competition when placed in an in-group.

Overall, participants felt that they had been bullied in the higher education workplace based on the experiences they have had at their current or previous institutions. Participant responses indicated that they are more likely to report instances of personal or witnessed bullying in higher education when compared to current literature.

**Discussion and Implications**

The following topics discuss the results and implications of this study as they relate to the current field of literature. Discussion of the study will center around the conceptualization of workplace bullying, the reporting of bullying, and responses to bullying in the workplace. Where appropriate, connections from social identity theory’s culture development, group interactions, and self-concept development will also be discussed as the theory relates to participant experiences and the current body of literature available.

**Conceptualization of workplace bullying.** What one person feels is bullying, another could feel is a supervisor explaining the roles of employees in the office. While it is possible to
assume the interpretation of participants and what their feelings mean in order to place them into categories, the finite definition of bullying is too relative to encompass the feelings of all who have felt bullied. However, the general themes provided by participant responses help identify different actions within a culture or environment that can provide a general definition of bullying in the workplace. Many participants used various actions that took place in different environments to define bullying in the workplace that can help inform current literature and definition development. How a person interprets different actions in the workplace does have a direct impact on their sense of self and sense of belonging to the environment or culture. Participants cited examples of experiences that caused them to feel less than or not confident with their job performance when they felt bullied. Additionally, participants shared examples of thoughts and feelings of anxiety during their bullying experience in the workplace that helped them identify actions that define bullying in the workplace for them.

The work of Simpson and Cohen (2004) support participant feelings and thoughts during their bullying experience. Through their work, Simpson and Cohen (2004) found that employees in higher education who experience workplace bullying report at higher rates the “loss of confidence, anxiety, and the loss of self-esteem” (p. 170) and G. Namie and R. Namie (2009) provide examples of situations that help employees identify if they are being bullied in the workplace. The conceptualization of workplace bullying provided by G. Namie and R. Namie (2009) and Simpson and Cohen (2004) is consistent with participant responses from this study. G. Namie and R. Namie (2009) suggest that an employee is being bullied in the workplace when they “feel too ashamed of being controlled by another person” (p. 55) or when an employee tries to “attempt the obviously impossible task of doing a new job without training or time to learn new skills, but that work is never good enough for the boss” (p. 55). Both statements provided are almost identical to statements from participants. Some participants shared thoughts and
feelings of self-blame for letting themselves get bullied in the workplace while others provided examples of being assigned new tasks or positions by the perceived bully. One participant who observed bullying in the workplace explained that they watched a colleague get reprimanded for not taking enough initiative and then reprimanded for taking too much initiative which can be interpreted to align with the previous statement of work never being good enough. There was a shared experience by a participant of witnessing a colleague be accused of bullying after speaking with their workplace bully about their own personal experience. G. Namie and R. Namie (2009) state, “you finally, firmly confront your tormentor to stop the abusive conduct, only to be accused of harassment by him or her” (p. 56), which is consistent with the experience provided by the participant. The current literature and participant responses allow for a generalized definition of bullying to be formed in regards to the workplace that is different from what people would normally associate with harassment. The works of G. Namie and R. Namie (2009) Simpson and Cohen (2004), and Sutton (2008) provide experiences that align with those felt by participants who reported their definitions of workplace bullying; allowing for a greater understanding of the data collected and analyzed for this study. However, the challenge with defining bullying for staff in higher education is that current literature overwhelmingly covers participant experiences when working in a traditional corporate culture or when participants are new or tenure track faculty members. Additionally, the participants of this study appear to define bullying by their experiences instead of using a definition to define their experiences. Collaboration between the current fields of study to define bullying for staff in higher education would be beneficial to the field as it may give staff a definition to work from when trying to define bullying in the workplace instead of using their experiences to create the definition.

explaining that the current commercial culture of higher education is to always have a smile on; which, Hollis (2012) refers to as the “post-secondary uniform” (p. 13). The explanation from Hollis (2012) continues by stating that the culture of higher education in today’s society mandates the requirement of emotional labor and courtesy for internal and external colleagues, students, and families. She continues to share that staff must always “strive to connect with students from different backgrounds and values that at times are incongruent with the university culture” (Hollis, 2012, p. 14). Hollis (2012) suggests that staff members are required to report to supervisors and managers “who may shed the cloak of respect and civility once students or external university staff members have left the building” (p. 14). The literature provided by Hollis (2012) is consistent with participant responses. Responses from participants discussed experiences that are similar to the shedding of the cloak as discussed by Hollis (2012) in her literature. One participant shared an experience of witnessing a colleague getting bullied in front of external visitors but that the external visitors appeared to not see/understand the bullying situation. This example from a participant aligns with the assumption of Hollis (2012) that managers and supervisors will dawn a cloak of civility in front of some internal and external visitors but are quick to shed said cloak when the visitors are no longer around. The institutional culture plays a factor into staff experiences and was mentioned by several participants when discussing their own or witnessed bullying experiences.

Institutional culture. The institutional bullying experiences reported by participants is consistent with reported experiences from employees in a traditional work environment as reported in current literature (Barnes, 2012; Fuller, 2013; G. Namie & R. Namie, 2009; Sutton, 2008). Hollis (2012), Lester (2013), and Twale and De Luca (2008) all provide examples of faculty bullying experiences in higher education that also relate to participant responses of feelings about institutional bullying. What is important to note about the institutional bullying
experiences reported in the current higher education literature is that with the exception of Hollis (2012), all references are to faculty experiences and how they perceive the culture of the institution. Participant responses could be reviewed through the four frames discussed by Bolman and Deal (2008) to help guide institutional culture change. Overall participant responses are consistent with the claims of creating a bullying culture in the workplace as discussed by Hollis (2012), Lester (2013), and Twale and De Luca (2008). Additionally, the culture of bullying described and supported by the institution as shared by participants provide qualitative experiences to support the work of Hollis (2015) on the cost to the organization when staff feel as though they are bullied in the workplace. The important takeaway from the experiences of institutional bullying as described by the participants is that student affairs staff work in an environment that is trapped between two worlds of research: corporate bullying and faculty bullying. Higher education institutions should work to blend together the current literature to help create institutional environments that do not support the growth and cultivation of bullies in the workplace. A blend of the current literature can be accomplished through campus wide training initiatives that allow campus stakeholders the opportunity to learn and understand how a bullying culture is created on campus.

**Social group membership.** Social group formation and identification have significant impacts when relating to feelings and experiences of bullying in the workplace. Group membership into an in-group or out-group in the workplace are discussed in detail by Hollis (2012), G. Namie and R. Namie (2009), as well as Ramsay et al. (2010). There were several statements among participant responses that discussed feelings of “being left out” or feeling like they are “not part of the core group” when reflecting on bullying experiences. Hollis (2012) shares the following analogy to explain how an employee in the perceived out-group in the workplace may feel:
While reflecting on the domestic sphere, Cinderella illustrates how the marginalized character is overwork and devalued by a dominant culture (in-group). Cinderella finds herself struggling to please her stepmother and evil step-sisters. Their tactics, in addition to the cackling and insults, include unreasonable tasks and expectations. On several occasions, Cinderella is left toiling along, without empathy or support. (p. 29)

This example of being left out, belittled, and expected to do seemingly impossible tasks in the workplace is consistent with participant responses of how they felt during their bullying experiences. Ramsay et al. (2010) shares how employees use the “process of social categorization” (p. 803) to “classify themselves and others” (p. 803) in the office. Through this categorization process an employee may end up in an in-group or out-group that can impact their experiences with self-esteem, social identity motivation, as well as the possibility of experiencing bullying in the workplace. Some participant responses are consistent with the idea of inter-group bullying that Ramsay et al. (2010) discusses to help readers understand how bullying in the workplace does not only happen between in-group and out-group members; but, can also be experienced between fellow in-group members.

While not directly expressed by participants in their definition, thoughts, reactions, or experiences, the idea of in-group and out-group competition and bullying was present in the reported data. For example, one participant spoke of not being able to join projects where the supervisor was not also part of the invitation. This experience by the participant could be interpreted to represent inter-group bullying through the means of the supervisor competing with someone they feel is a fellow in-group member. However, there is also the perspective that the bully themselves could be a part of the out-group and targeting a member of the in-group that is perceived to be successful and well liked. This idea, not expressly stated by participants but shared by Hollis (2012) and G. Namie and R. Namie (2009), is that bullies target the more
successful and well-liked employees in the workplace. This “targeting” could be the impetus behind some of the experiences reported by participants of this study. Social categorization into in-groups or out-groups as identified by social identity theory has significant impacts on the conceptualization of bullying in the workplace; both in the traditional office environment and in higher education.

Reporting of workplace bullying. Participant responses and current literature have commonalities about the reporting of bullying in higher education. Responses indicating that bullies were protected and received increased power are consistent with the work of Barnes (2013), who reported that bullies are often protected and promoted because they target people who are believed threats to them. Barnes (2013) continues to share that because bullies are often promoted, and therefore receive increased power, increases the likelihood that bullying experiences will not be reported because of the current structure or fear of retaliation. The thoughts and statements shared by Barnes (2013) are consistent with study participant responses. Participants shared that they did not report bullying because of their fear of retaliation or because they felt as though nothing could/would be done. These feelings of the study participants align with the work of Barnes (2013) in that because the bully is promoted and rewarded for their behavior, reporting of the experiences are deterred by the culture of the environment.

Additionally, the lack of reporting stated by Barnes (2013) could also be a result of employees’ desire to remain as part of the office in-group. Reporting incidences of bullying in the workplace could place employees into the out-group and thereby placing the target of the bully on them because of their new social group membership.

Higher education reporting. Taylor (2013) suggests that recognizing and addressing bullying in the realm of higher education is more complicated than in traditional office environments. Taylor (2013) also suggests that because higher education workplaces are so
much more complicated than traditional office environments that bullying often goes unreported. This suggestion by Taylor (2013) is not consistent with the responses from study participants. Many study participants attempted to report their bullying incidences in the workplace. While many of the reported situations were perceived to be not resolved; there is the fact that contrary to current literature, an attempt to rectify the bullying situation in the workplace was attempted. Where there is consistency is in the reported data is with the challenge to recognize and address bullying in the higher education workplace because of the varying roles and responsibilities of staff members. Participant responses regarding reporting bullying experiences in some areas are consistent with in-group and out-group placement while some experiences were not consistent with the current literature when considering interventions after witnessing bullying in the workplace. Responses of talking with the person who was bullied to offer support and guidance do not align with the current research in regards to private-sector and faculty experiences with workplace bullying. The work of Barnes (2013), Lester (2013), and Twale and De Luca (2009) all suggest that employees bullied in the workplace do not report the incidences or offer support. Therefore, the aforementioned authors all provide examples of how to report and deal with bullying in the workplace since their experiences working with bullied employees shows that reporting is not taking place. These experiences by the authors is not consistent with the reported data of this study as participants made attempts to report the bullying incidences; But, where the failure happened for study participants was in the follow through of where they reported the experiences they had or witnessed.

Based on the results of this study it can be concluded that the student affairs professionals in this study were more likely to offer indirect interventions when witnessing bullying in the workplace in the form of developmental support and encouragement to utilize appropriate resources to find a solution to the incident or conflict. This discovery adds to current literature,
allowing for further questions about why student affairs professionals are more likely to indirectly intervene when witnessing bullying than people in other fields or areas of higher education.

**Social group interactions.** The interactions of social groups also have an impact on bullying in the workplace. Study participants who did not report bullying in the workplace did not report because they did not feel it was their place to intervene. This decision by study participants is consistent with the current literature of not reporting provided by Barnes (2013), Lester (2013) and Twale and De Luca (2009). The study participants’ responses are consistent with the idea of social identity theory and in-group and out-group placement. Ramsay et al. (2010) suggests that members of a work environment place themselves into social groups to help build their self-identity. Members of the environment are placed into in-group or out-groups and can either place themselves or are placed by current members of the environment. Placement into a social group in the workplace has a significant impact on the experiences an employee has in the workplace according to Ramsay et al. (2010). Participants who did not step in to intervene and report bullying situations at work may have been trying to protect their own social group identification. While they may have empathized with their colleague, their identification with their social work group was stronger and influenced their decision making when witnessing bullying in the workplace.

**Responding to workplace bullying.** Participant dissatisfaction with reporting to human resources is consistent with Harber, Donini, and Parker (2013), who state that human resources in higher education is not equipped with the same tools available to human resource colleagues in the private-sector because of the “academy’s structure, priorities, and values” (p. 122). Harber et al. (2013) continues to explain that a one size fits all bullying policy to respond to incidences in the workplace is not possible because of the varying roles of employees in higher education.
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One example provided by the authors relates directly to a statement made by one of the participants when it was said “there are different rules for different people” in the workplace; the statement from Harber et al. (2013) is as follows:

In higher education, where the diverse categories of employees complicate the environment, a one-size-fits-all doctrine does not work well. For instance, a staff manager who acts as a bully at work is discipline or fired. When a million-dollar research scientist or patient-saving physician bullies his or her staff there are more complications. The academic playing field is not level (p. 122)

Considering the varied rolls of staff employees in higher education the statement made by Harber et al. (2013) does align with participant responses from this study about the experiences they had when reporting bullying in the workplace.

Self-care. Barnes (2012), Fuller (2013), G. Namie and R. Namie (2009), and Sutton (2008) all provide examples of experiences from traditional office cultures that help provide context for participant bullying experiences in their offices as reported in this study. Barnes (2012) provides not only examples of traditional office bullying, but a framework for surviving those she calls “bullies, queen bees, and psychopaths in the workplace,” as adjectives on the cover of her book. While Fuller (2013) provides a guide on how to identify the eight types of “office mean girls” in order to “rise above workplace nastiness” on the cover of her research. G. Namie and R. Namie (2009) use the title of their book to provide a framework that will guide readers on what they can do to “stop the hurt and reclaim their dignity on the job”, while Sutton (2008) lets readers know on the cover that his book will teach readers how to “build a civilized workplace” and how to “survive one that isn’t.” The common theme from all of the resources provided is how the individual can take care of the bullying themselves (self-care); not, how to work through the bullying when a report is made. All sources do provide resources that can be
used in a student affairs professional environment because, unlike faculty experiences, student affairs professionals’ day to day jobs align more with those of “traditional office jobs” than with the faculty experience. While all the authors do suggest some form of reporting bullying in the workplace, the focus of their collective works is to learn how the individual can manage bullying in the workplace themselves to create a better office culture.

*Higher education response.* The response of their home institution when reporting bullying in the workplace was a central conversation among participants of the study. As stated, student affairs professionals are more likely to find some pathway to report their own or witnessed bullying experience to prevent future incidences which is not consistent with current literature reports. What is noted through participant experiences is that while they attempted to report, the response was not always positive. In fact, the response of the institution shared by participants was overwhelming disheartening for participants who made the decision to report their own or witnessed bullying experience. Examples of human resources sharing the reported information or the bully getting preferential treatment were experiences shared by study participants. In their work, Harber et al. (2013) discuss how ill-prepared higher education human resources offices are to deal with workplace bullying. This is stated because of the wide variety of rolls in higher education creates an environment where higher education human resource offices are not able to create a standardized bullying policy that can usually be found in a traditional office environment. When considering participant responses, it is no surprise that Harber et al. (2013) are not able to provide higher education human resource offices with a way to recognize workplace bullying, but are able to provide suggestions on how higher education human resources offices can respond to bullying in the workplace.

The main suggestion to higher education resources offices provided by Harber et al. (2013) is to support the victim. Responding to reports through this method allows bullied
individuals to share their experiences which can often alleviate a lot of the stress the bullied individual was feeling in the workplace. This type of support can fit the varying types of employees in higher education because the human resources staff member becomes “more of a coaching role providing feedback, connecting him or her to resources, and encouraging the individual as he or she works to create a better work environment” (Harber et al., 2013, p.127).

There is discussion that victim’s needs fluctuate and that more long term support may be needed for victims of bullying in higher education. A response that is suggested by the authors is a “no blame approach” (Harber et al., 2013, p. 127) where a support group is created to assist the victim. Through this support group the target (victim) is first interviewed alone by human resources after which a group of suggested people by the victim is convened. The group usually consists of the victim, the bully, witnesses, and allies who are all made to feel that they are not accused or guilty of bullying in the workplace. The group is invited instead to “problem solve to help the person who is having trouble” (Harber et al., 2013, p.127). There are opportunities for check-ins and follow-ups and also a community of people that the victim can discuss the bully’s behavior. Subtle monitoring can also be put in place in this type of group because the bully is not identified to anyone in the group which allows for the subtle monitoring of the bully while the group together helps the victim.

**Summary.** Participant responses and current literature are consistent when relating to participant experiences. The inconsistency between participant responses and current literature surfaces when discussing the reporting of personal or witnessed experiences. Employees who work in a division of student affairs are more likely to report personal or witnessed bullying experiences than what is reported in current literature. This inconsistency between responses and current literature allows for an assumption that relationship building and a positive work environment is important to members of a division of student affairs and that unlike faculty who
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have been reported to leave the institution, student affairs practitioners are willing to try and change the culture/environment of their department or division.

Significance of the Study

An understanding of the experiences and perceived definitions of workplace bullying provides a lived experience perception of bullying in higher education as experienced by staff members. Alsever (2008) discusses how easily an organization can create a culture of bullying, while Hollis (2015) provides data on the cost to higher education; the culture creation and cost to the institution are both significant impacts to the bullying experience as reported by participants. Responses sharing why a participant left the job and how the culture of the office impacted their experience allow for a lived experience approach to the research conducted by Alsever (2008) and Hollis (2015). Learning about the different organizational factors that impacted participants allowed for an opportunity to expose evidence of bullying that may be misconstrued as a casual work environment. The data collected and analyzed is available and can be used in conjunction with the current literature by members of the higher education community to help provide a civil working environment for their employees. Higher education professionals should no longer have to worry about the constant and subtle personal bullying or bullying of coworkers in their respective departments. They should also feel confident in the resources and people they seek when reporting their experiences in the workplace.

Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the participants and the results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed and outlined below. The impact of bullying on staff members in higher education was expressed through the responses of participants. Rooted in participant responses and current literature the following recommendations are suggested to help transition
departments in divisions of student affairs to more positive and supportive environments for employees.

**Training**

Participant responses and current literature suggest that trainings are needed to help identify bullying in the workplace as well as deal with the reporting of bullying in the workplace. The first step that would need to be implemented in order to have successful training would be a common campus definition of bullying. The definition could be a blend of the current fields of literature or could be created specific for the campus based on key terms and experiences of campus stakeholders. Either option for definition formation would need to be vetted by the campus community to ensure that the campus’s definition aligns with the feelings and experiences of the campus community.

Implemented trainings should provide employees with the opportunity to learn the difference between harassment and bullying. The training should also train human resources and supervisors on how to handle bullying situations when reported so that the bullying does not continue. Currently higher education requires all employees to complete training to understand the difference between sexual harassment and harassment. Similar training could be instituted using the results of this study in conjunction with the work completed by Hollis (2012, 2015) and Lester (2013) to allow employees the opportunity to prevent and report bullying in the workplace. Additionally, the experiences shared by participants could be used in conjunction with the work of Harber et al. (2013) to provide guidance on how human resource departments can help victims of reported bullying in the workplace. In order to be comprehensive, training would need to be completed in three different areas in order to be effective on campus. Training and knowledge sharing of the phenomena would need to be completed with supervisors, employees, and human resources across the university campus.
Supervisor training. Specific training needs to be provided to higher education supervisors that not only highlights the cost of bullying in the workplace, but also the actions that can lead to feelings and experiences of bullying on campus. Several participants approached their supervisor or supervisor’s supervisor about their experiences and shared how their supervisor or supervisor’s supervisor often did not seem to understand what it was they were reporting. As witnessed and experienced by study participants, the experiences of participants shared actions of the types of bullies that G. Namie and R. Namie (2009) reference in their development of bullies in the workplace. Helping supervisors understand the different types of bullies and possible situations could allow for better understanding and knowledge when a victim makes the decision to speak with their current supervisor about their bullying experience.

Hollis (2012) makes specific suggestions that to fix bullying in higher education that transformational leaders need to be put in place. Participant responses align with the work of Hollis (2012) and with the need for transformational leadership. However, transformational leadership cannot take place if leaders do not have the appropriate training and support to be transformational leaders in the workplace. Supervisor training to be transformational leaders starts with ensuring their management style aligns “with the vision and mission of the institution” (Hollis, 2012, p. 105). Each department within a division of student affairs produces documents and learning outcomes of students that align with the university mission and vision, so supervisor leadership styles should be held to the same standard. Through training and development of supervisors understanding of their own management style and how it aligns with the university’s vision and mission there can be growth that allows the supervisor to recognize bullying situations when reported, and sometimes maybe even before they are reported.

The most important component of supervisor training is ensuring that the supervisor knows resources that are available to the victims. Hollis (2012) Lester (2013), and G. Namie and
R. Namie (2009) all agree that supervisors need to understand how they can assist a victim when bullying is experienced or witnessed in the workplace. Participant responses shared that their supervisors “did not understand” what they were reporting or how it was impacting the office; and therefore, nothing changed as a result of speaking with their supervisor for participants. Through effective training, supervisors can be taught how to handle reported personal and witnessed bullying experiences in their office which in turn will help create a positive and healthy work environment for all employees. Since the results of this study indicated that participants were more likely to report their personal or witnessed bullying experiences, it is important that supervisor training be implemented to ensure knowledge and understanding of bullying in the workplace to allow for empathetic listening and real action when an experience is reported.

**Employee training.** Mandatory training should be required for all employees on a regular basis to provide information on the differences between sexual harassment, harassment, and bullying. Participant responses shared that they felt bullied in the workplace and sometimes reported their personal or witnessed bullying experience. But, did participants know all their options and where to go when having or witnessing these experiences? Several participants did seek the help of their supervisor or human resources, while others stated they “did not know where to report” their experience or felt like “no one could help.” Through employee training there is a possibility that employees could feel more empowered to not only recognize, but report personal and witnessed bullying experiences. There are plenty of current literature references in the field for both a traditional workplace and higher education workplace that can be used to create annual training for employees that could help them better understand what is and is not bullying and how to deal and/or report these experiences in the workplace (Barnes, 2012; Fuller, 2013; Galinsky and Schweitzer, 2015; Lester, 2013; G. Namie and R. Namie, 2009; Sutton,
2007; Twale and De Luca, 2009). The addition of bullying to the current mandatory trainings at universities could provide individual employees with the knowledge to understand and also to recognize when they, or a colleague, are being bullied in the higher education workplace. Hollis (2012), Lester (2013) and Twale and De Luca (2009) all provide higher education employee examples of bullying in the workplace that align with the statements made by study participants. Using the recommendations of the current higher education literature with the statements shared by study participants a comprehensive awareness training could be created to disseminate to higher education staff and faculty to help bring awareness to bullying. Adding this component to already existing trainings could allow for more open conversations between colleagues that would resolve misunderstandings or varying communication styles before they are escalated to feelings of being bullied. The use of open communication and distribution of knowledge to the employee base could provide a more inclusive and tolerant work environment, in addition to an enhanced view of how and why intervening when a colleague is bullied is in the best interest of the victim and the bully.

Mandatory training of employees could also assist with bystander experiences in the workplace. Study participants who shared that they had witnessed bullying in the workplace also shared that they did not intervene on behalf of their colleague because “it was not their place” to step in and assist. Similar to supervisor training, employees need to be made aware of all the resources available to victims of bullying in the workplace. Harber et al. (2013) discusses the importance of the bystander in the bullying situation and how the bystander can help the bullied colleague. Employee training needs to include how witnesses of bullying the workplace can assist and help the victim, but also how they as reporters will be protected when making a report of their experience. This understanding by employees can only be actualized if appropriate and
knowledgeable supervisor training is instituted to allow for understanding and assistance when reporting bullying in the workplace.

Requiring training for employees on the same rotation of current harassment and sexual harassment training could help staff understand the different situations and experiences that may happen in the workplace that may not fall under harassment and sexual harassment. Providing more information and understanding to employees could allow for a healthier and more open work environment where colleagues recognize hurtful situations and are willing to step in and assist because they know about resources and understand that administration wants to know and solve the situations they are experiencing or witnessing at work. Additionally, trainings could make employees feel more empowered that stepping in to assist a colleague during a bullying situation is their place instead of the feelings of study participants who felt “it was not their place” to step in and assist.

**Human resource training.** Harber et al. (2013) provide a great resource for training human resource professionals on dealing with bullying in higher education. However, before human resources can be trained the institution has to provide the office with the tools needed to address the varying bullying issues in higher education. The professional development of human resource professionals is paramount when considering the best pathways to resolving bullying on campus. Human resource staff need to have the tools and staffing needed to help address the issues of the institution. Several study participants stated that they never heard from members of human resources when reporting their personal or witnessed bullying experience. Ensuring that human resources has the staff available to assist is just as important as ensuring they have the appropriate training to help the victim. As stated earlier, human resources staff at higher education institutions work with employees who have different rules based on their population; different rules in the sense that a staff member will have a different path for reprimand than a
high dollar research faculty member. Participant frustration centered around human resources not being able to assist them when they reported their experiences. Using the suggestions of Harber et al. (2013) to train human resources staff could change the perception and experiences of victims when they report their experiences. Training human resource staff members to act as coaches to the victims is a first step as suggested by Harber et al. (2013) when working with a person or persons who have reported bullying in the workplace. The needs of the victim(s) could be long term so training human resources on how to work with victims longer than just one or two sessions where bullying is reported is important. Harber et al. (2013) suggests that a support group be created for the victim that includes the bully, witnesses, and allies as a way to create an environment where guilt is not placed on any one person. In the support group the bully is not identified and the human resource staff member facilitates the group as a solution-focused initiative to help the victim with creating a positive work environment. Through these support groups human resource staff members have the opportunity to monitor the interactions of both victim and bully and monitor whether or not change is taking place in the work environment without having to identify the bully or share that experiences of bullying have been reported.

Another key component needed when training human resource staff members to handle incidences of workplace bullying is to understand the cost to the institution. Hollis (2012, 2015) provides formulas to calculate the cost of bullying in higher education. Employees who are bullied miss work on a more frequent basis, have lower morale and production, as well as leave the job quicker than other employees. All these experiences have a dollar amount tied to them in current literature. Study participants shared the qualitative story about how they were absent, found new employment, or were less productive at work because of the bullying they were experiencing or witnessing. Considering the budget cuts and changes in funding for higher education institutions cannot afford to have wasted human capital because of bullying in the
workplace. Therefore, training human resources staff to not only help the victim, but analyze the cost of the situation for the institution is important. Understanding the quantitative side of bullying in the workplace is just as important as understanding the qualitative side for members of the human resource office. The use of this information can help change the culture of a department or institution when implemented by well trained and fully staffed human resources departments.

There are programs already in existence that could help human resource departments with employee and supervisor training about bullying in the workplace. KiVa is an anti-bullying program that is currently being used in Finland schools to eliminate bullying by focusing on the bystander. “The program is based upon the premise that bullies are rewarded by earning higher social status because of their bullying” (Barnes, 2012, p. 114), which was a feeling shared by several study participants. KiVa uses skill building and education to help empower bystanders to defend bullying targets instead of rewarding the bully. This program includes “20 hours of activities such as discussion, group work, films, role-playing, and computer exercises” (Barnes, 2012, p. 114). Implementing this training on college campuses and requiring participation and successful completion on the same rotating basis as harassment and sexual harassment training could reduce the number of bullying incidences and conflicts among university professionals. Additionally, since this particular training focuses on the bystander, there could be a decrease in bystanders feeling as though “it is not their place” to step in and assist a bullied colleague. Human resources could implement this training along with the suggestions of Harber et al. (2013) to create a comprehensive model of understanding and reactions to bullying in the higher education workplace. However, this type of training is time consuming and would be challenging for an institution to implement and monitor. But, while time consuming, this training could have positive impacts on the campus culture when fully supported by the institution through time off
to attend as well as working with departments on campus to find the ideal time of the year to complete the training so that time away from the office has minimal impact on the day to day functioning.

Successful human resources training on how to react and handle bullying situations is the most important part of the suggested recommendations. Without trained and fully staffed human resource departments there is a perpetuation of participant feelings of human resources and supervisors not being able to assist when they want to report bullying in the workplace. Successful supervisor and employee training about bullying in the workplace starts with a well trained staff in human resources. The attitude and example set by this department on campus has a trickle down impact on every employee’s experience when they witness or are personally bullied in the workplace.

**Future Research**

The results of this study allowed for the exploration of definition development of bullying in higher education. Additionally, the experiences, thoughts, and reactions also allowed for the formation of themes that encompassed participant experiences that led to their own personal definition formation of bullying in higher education; specifically, within a division of student affairs. Further research should explore the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation with workplace bullying in student affairs. There is an opportunity for future research to explore the impact of getting bullied as a staff member in student affairs and the student experience of working with bullied staff members. This study suggestion is formed from a participant response that suggested they could not positively impact students when they were not having a positive experience themselves. Finally, the study found that staff members in student affairs are more likely to report bullying experiences than faculty; future research could explore
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why staff members who work in student affairs are more likely to report bullying in the workplace than faculty in higher education.
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Appendix A

Request to participate in survey

Workplace Bullying Survey

“This study is being conducted in an effort to understand workplace bullying and learn more about employees’ experiences with specific behaviors on the job. The results of this survey will help guide our efforts to promote healthy and respectful workplaces in higher education” (Williams & Ruiz, 2012, p.1).

“You are invited to participate in this brief, 10-15-minute online survey. The questionnaire asks you to report on whether you have observed or experienced behavior in your workplace that you believe was bullying. It is important that we hear from as many employees as possible, whether or not they have personally experienced bullying” (Williams & Ruiz, 2012, p. 1).

Your responses are completely confidential. Information is provided below describing this research study. By clicking on the participation link in this email you consent that you have read the below information about your participation and consent to participate.

If you are interested in participating in an interview to discuss your experiences with workplace bullying, or observing workplace bullying, contact Cornell Thomas at 817.257.6775 or cornell.thomas@tcu.edu or Justin Gerstenberger at 817.908.1756 or j.gerstenberger@tcu.edu.

Your participation in this online survey is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw from this study at any time by contacting the researchers. To withdraw contact Cornell Thomas at 817.257.6775 or cornell.thomas@tcu.edu or Justin Gerstenberger at 817.908.1756 or j.gerstenberger@tcu.edu.

Please click HERE to participate.

Should you feel that you need to speak with a professional counselor, please use the following link to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) http://hr.tcu.edu/employee-services/faculty-staff/benefits/employee-assistance-program/ to find free counseling services available to you in your area.

Justin

Justin Gerstenberger, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education
TCU College of Education

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
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Title of Research: Understanding Academic Bullying Among Staff in Higher Education

Funding Agency/Sponsor: N/A

Study Investigators: Cornell Thomas, Ed.D. and Justin Gerstenberger, M.Ed.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to learn how professional staff within the division define workplace bullying, their experiences with workplace bullying as well as any experiences of witnessing workplace bullying in higher education.

How many people will participate in this study?

Approximately 100 participants will be recruited to participate in taking the open-ended online Qualtrics workplace bullying survey instrument and ten (10) participants will be recruited to engage in a short audio recorded interview taking approximately 30-60 minutes of time over the course of approximately 6 months.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?

You are being invited to take the online Qualtrics workplace bullying survey that consists of open-ended questions and/or possibly participate in one in-person audio recorded interview upon completion of the open ended question instrument.

How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required?

Your expected time commitment for the online Qualtrics open-ended survey instrument is approximately 15 minutes. Your expected time commitment for the in-person audio recorded interview is approximately 30-60 minutes.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

Potential risks to participants at each level are considered minimal. The final report will not be shared with the institution.

Online Qualtrics survey participants may experience distress or discomfort when asked to reflect upon or respond to particular questions. The participant has the option to not answer/skip any question that may cause them discomfort.

For interview participants, there may be concerns about location of the interview meeting or being recognized while participating in the interview. There may also be anxiety experienced due to the nature of the discussion surrounding the research questions. Participants have the option to decline answering any question that may cause them discomfort. Participants may also be concerned with the amount of time required, approximately 30-60 minutes in total, to complete the audio recorded interview process. For these reasons, interviews will be scheduled for and conducted in places that are most convenient for the participants and that provide a quiet environment.
atmosphere where respondents can speak freely and openly about their experiences. Audio recording will be a part of the in-person interviews conducted for this study.

Some participants may feel coerced to participate because of a relationship with the primary investigator or co-investigator. Your choice to participate, or choice not to participate, will have no impact on your employment or student status at Texas Christian University. The co-investigator will conduct all in-person interviews to mitigate any confidentiality issues that you may have due to the primary investigator’s employment at Texas Christian University.

What are the benefits for participating in this study?

You will be providing data that could potentially inform higher education administrators about the culture creation in their division as well as how staff members feel when bullied by other staff members or when witnessing the bullying of colleagues.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

No. Neither compensation nor incentives are being offered for your involvement

What is an alternate procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?

While there is no alternate procedure, you may simply choose not to participate.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

No names will be used in this study nor will any identifying information be used. All effort will be made to disguise your identity. Your name will be masked during analysis and will not be disclosed. All digital recordings from interviews will be kept in a password-protected location.

Is my participation voluntary?

Yes. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Can I stop taking part in this research?

Yes. You may refuse to participate without penalty. You may also withdraw your consent to participate at any time – even if you agree at first but change your mind later.

What are the procedures for withdrawal?

Simply inform the researchers by phone, email, or in person that you prefer not to participate. If you decide to withdraw from the study after it has already started, then the information collected will be excluded from the study and any of your response will be destroyed. To withdraw contact Cornell Thomas at 817.257.6775 or cornell.thomas@tcu.edu or Justin Gerstenberger at 817.908.1756 or email j.gerstenberger@tcu.edu

Will I be given a copy of the consent document to keep?
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Yes, you will be provided a copy of the consent document.

**Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?**

Contact Cornell Thomas at 817.257.6775 or cornell.thomas@tcu.edu or Justin Gerstenberger at 817.908.1756 or email j.gerstenberger@tcu.edu

**Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?**

Dr. Tim Barth, Co-Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, Phone 817 257-6427.  
Dr. Bonnie Melhart, TCU Research Integrity Office, Telephone 817-257-7104.

Your clicking the participation link indicates that you have read the information provided, you have received answers to all of your questions and have been told who to call if you have any more questions, you have freely decided to participate in this research, and you understand that you are not giving up any of your legal rights.
Appendix B

Email Participant Questions

1. What is your definition of workplace bullying?
2. Have you ever experienced a situation where you feel a colleague in the workplace bullied you? (Y/N) (If no, go to question 6)
3. IF YES: Please describe a situation where you feel a colleague in the workplace bullied you.
4. Please describe a situation where you observed a colleague bullying another staff member.
   a. Please describe how you felt when you were bullied in the workplace.
   b. Describe why you did or did not seek assistance when you were bullied in the workplace.
   c. Have you ever experienced a situation where you observed a colleague bullying another staff member? (If no, go to question 6)
5. IF YES: Please describe the situation in which you observed a colleague bullying another staff member
   a. Please describe how you felt when you witnessed a colleague being bullied in the workplace.
   b. Describe why you did or did not seek assistance when you witnessed bullying in the workplace.
6. How long have you worked in higher education?
7. What is your race/ethnicity?
8. What is your sexual orientation?
9. Is there anything about workplace bullying that you would like to share that was not covered in the previous questions?
Appendix C

Participant Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Interview Question: Tell me how you define workplace bullying. (RQ1)

2. Tell me your experiences of workplace bullying. (RQ2)
   a. What feelings did you have during this experience?
   b. What stands out to you about this experience?
   c. Did you seek any assistance or advice about the experiences you were feeling? (If yes, ask sub question i. If no, ask sub question ii)
      i. How did you decide whom you would confide in for assistance with your experiences and feelings?
      ii. Why did you not seek assistance or advice about your experiences and feelings?

3. Tell me your experiences of being a bystander and witnessing bullying in the workplace. (RQ3)
   a. Please describe this experience.
   b. How did this experience make you feel?
   c. What stands out to you about this experience?
   d. Did you intervene? (If yes, ask sub question i. If no, ask sub question ii)
      i. Why?
      ii. Why not?
Appendix D

Dear Colleagues,

Over the next few months the Division will have the opportunity to participate in a research study by one of our higher education doctoral students from the College of Education. The study will seek your input on workplace bullying experiences in a student affairs setting. Some of you may know the researcher, Justin Gerstenberger, who is conducting this study as a part of his dissertation. You may also know the faculty member who will oversee the study, Dr. Cornell Thomas.

Your decision to participate or not participate will have no impact on your job or student status at the institution. Identifiable information about participants and the institution will be kept confidential and will not be shared with members inside or outside the division. Following my email to you, Justin will provide an opportunity and way for you to participate. I am copying Justin on this email so that he may have a mailing list from which to work.

If you have questions, please contact Justin directly at j.gerstenberger@tcu.edu.

Thank you.