

Counteracting Workplace Bullying: A Qualitative Analysis of Employees' Resistance Strategies Within the Service Industry

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This paper reviews employees' resistance strategies to workplace bullying. The paper integrates the theoretical philosophies of Foucault's (1977, 1982) power discourses, Scott's (1985) resistance ideologies, and thirty-five in-depth interviews with employees working within the service sector, specifically, a college, motel, non-profit organization, and hospitals. The victims' responses are thematically analyzed using a dialectic phenomenology paradigm to reveal a series of resistance responses ranging from retaliating, ignoring, quitting, avoiding, and successfully implementing anti-bullying interventions. In addition, interesting insights are proven on the detrimental impact of even non-confrontational resistance actions of employees to organizations. This study reinforces the importance of designing zero-tolerance bullying workplaces regardless of the products manufactured or services offered.

Keywords: workplace bullying, employee resistance, Foucault power discourses, Scott resistance ideologies, dialectic phenomenology, service industry

INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying, which has been used interchangeably with workplace harassment (Smit, 2021), workplace violence (Rodríguez-Campo & Paravic-Klijn, 2021), and lateral violence (Pfeifer & Vessey, 2017), have been described as harassing, socially exclusive, offensive acts instilled upon an individual or persons with limiting abilities to defend themselves (Feijó et al., 2019). Bullying is characterized by an undermining and demeaning attitude that renders a vulnerable target defenseless (Okolie & Idibra, 2021). While workplace bullying often occurs as a subtle and unconscious behavior (Hodgins et al., 2020), it poses an obtrusive problem for organizations as it ultimately affects productivity (Okolie & Idibra, 2021, Salin et al., 2020).

Workplace bullying results in depression, anxiety, low levels of self-esteem, and feelings of incompetence (Bernstein and Batchelor, 2002). In addition, workplace bullying has the capacity to trigger a neuro-immune mechanism causing severe anxiety and psychological consequences (Rajalingam et al., 2021), mental distress (Nielsen et al., 2020), insomnia (Nielsen et al., 2021), emotional exhaustion (Anasori et al., 2020), and psychological and post-traumatic stress disorders (Chenevert et al., 2022; Hong et al., 2022). Equivalently, the detrimental effects of bullying on organizational performance are significant. This

pervasive act has been associated with lessened productivity (Cullinan et al., 2020), employee turnover, and absenteeism (Khalique et al., 2018; Nielsen et al., 2020).

Yet regrettably despite the disconcerting adverse effects of workplace bullying on employees and organizations, an estimated 15% of employees experience bullying in the workplace globally (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). In the United States (US), an average of 36% of employees have reported continuous bullying, and an estimated 25% of the US companies have acknowledged bullying practices amongst their employees. Additionally, more than 80% of workers in the United States claim that they have been harassed or bullied at work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). In spite of these perturbing numbers, the United States, unlike Sweden and Spain, has not prohibited workplace bullying, resulting in the trivialization of workplace bullying in organizations (Akella, 2016; Akella, 2020; Okolie & Idibra, 2021). Consequently, this destructive and pervasive behavior has inevitably resulted in counter-behaviors that constitute resistance because power and resistance are mutually inclusive (Foucault, 1990).

This paper will further investigate the intentions and consequences of employee resistance. The study aims to answer questions such as what trajectories does employee resistance take? Are all employee resistance acts deviant acts? Does employee resistance always go against the organization's interests, rules, and policies? How does the management counter-react to employee resistance, especially when it becomes apparent? Mumby (2005) maintains that resistance and control are mutually counteractive since counter-controls are activated when resistance threatens an organization's sovereignty. Therefore, at what point do organizations retaliate against employee resistance, and how does it affect employees and the organization? Lastly, is employee resistance collective or individualized? This paper aims to contribute to a growing body of knowledge on employee resistance by exploring its actual impacts in the context of workplace bullying, power, and control.

The entire paper is divided into six sections. The first section covers a brief literature review on employee resistance in the context of workplace bullying. Section two reviews two theoretical paradigms of Foucault (1977, 1982) and Scott (1985) pertaining to power, control, and resistance. The third section revolves around methodological issues and the choice of research method. Section four consists of the empirical analysis. Subsequent sections cover the discussion, concluding thoughts, and directions for further research.

EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

Lutgen-Sandvik (2006), in her research with thirty-four participants, gathered that impuissant employees retaliated by exhibiting diverse resistance forms. The first of these forms is *Exodus*, displayed by employees' resignations, transfers, or requests to transfer. Second employees resisted through *collective voice*, in which they discussed bullying situations amongst themselves in a quest to solicit comfort, solutions, and plans to secure other jobs. Third, employees resisted by using control measures to their advantage, a tactic termed as *reverse discourse*, a form of subversive disobedience/obedience, in which workers deliberately underperformed or produced unfavorable output or communication for the bully. Lastly, employees *confronted* their abusers through public brawls or humorous counteractions. Although it took a questionable amount of time for resistance actions to take effect and produce favorable results, bullies were sanctioned, and the act subsided in some instances.

While Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) focused on resistance to interpersonal bullying, D'Cruz and Noronha (2013) studied the nascent concept of depersonalized bullying, bullying acts imposed on employees under the guise of fostering organizational effectiveness. Their research revealed that employee resistance was of three forms: disorganized coaction (victims independently demonstrated similar acts of resistance), collegial coping (sharing bullying experiences with colleagues to seek solace), and concrete supervision (supervisors opting to protect employee interests). D'Cruz & Noronha (2013) also emphasized that employee resistance type and will to resist were determined by the level of professionalism and the proportion of incentives derived from their work, as professional employees cited that they could handle workplace oppression. Nevertheless, the forms of resistance observed were routine as they were "informal, spontaneous," and "sporadic," stemming from moral necessities (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2013, p. 15).

Employees emphasized that their behavior had no harmful intentions but to achieve a sense of relief. Indeed, these routine forms of resistance contradict the conventional forms of resistance, such as protests, riots, and mass processions, which are typically collective, formal, and destructive (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2013).

Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) and D’Cruz and Noronha’s (2013) research presented a suitable scaffold for further studies on forms of resistance; however, these studies did not investigate the relationship between resistance acts and organizational rules and policies. Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) suggests that the interpretation of resistance acts differs between bullies/supporters and the bullied. Victims of bullying often regard their resistance acts as “moral imperative, essential defensive responses” or demand for a “basic minimum of human decency.” (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006, p. 409). On the other hand, bullies view resistance acts as disloyal, defiant, or agitating. These conflicting interpretations are a cause for further study. Although it has been found that when caught employee resistance opposed organizational interests (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2013) and reduced organizational citizenship behavior (Wu et al., 2020), the link between resistance acts and organizational interests remains an underexplored study area.

Undeniably, the study of resistance is complex (Hollander & Eisenhower, 2004) and ongoing. To better comprehend its complicated nuances, Foucault’s theory of governmentality, power, and resistance and James Scott’s resistance theory will be used as suitable theoretical frameworks to research the subject of employee resistance and workplace bullying.

FOUCAULT’S GOVERNMENTALITY AND RESISTANCE THEORIES

Foucault’s theory of governmentality explains the use of control mechanisms which conform targets to certain behaviors to coordinate their actions and behaviors (Gordon, 2002). The theory of governmentality is concerned with the ‘conduct of conduct or “the art of government” wherein “government refers to a series of activities that guide and fashion an individual or set of individuals’ behavior” (Madsen, 2014, p. 814; McKinlay & Pezet, 2017). Governmentality is achieved through control mechanisms termed disciplines (Foucault, 1977). Foucault (1977) explains the concept of disciplines, by referring to the conventional appearance and demeanor of soldiers who are expected and required to assume specific postures and emanate vigor due to their military status. Although these techniques were ‘meticulous, often minute,’ they resulted in a population of ordered military personnel who innately conformed to instituted models (Foucault, 1977, p. 159).

Furthermore, Foucault explains governmentality in terms of time control. Using timetables, he depicted how school pupils and factory workers were subjected to control by allocating and monitoring their schedules. Essentially, workers were expected to resume at certain times, perform certain activities at specific hours, and avoid inefficient use of time. To be effectual, these control technologies required “surveillance mechanisms” or ‘the gaze,’ which was buttressed by the panopticon experiment (Foucault, 1977). While Foucault’s experiment focused on schools and prisons, the concept has been widely employed in organizations as well. Organizations, in a bid to establish “a means of knowing and ways of representing and ordering population” (Townley, 1993), implement organizational activities such as quality management, performance evaluations, time management, and in other terms, the ‘inspecting gaze’ which can also be perceived as bullying practices (Ekici & Beder, 2014). It should be noted that these control techniques emphasize the use of power to objectify subjects in organizations (Foucault, 1977) since workers are surveyed based on their skills, ability, and promptness to achieve organizational goals. Hence, the result is the exertion of power that ‘governs, ...compares, hierarchizes, excludes, and differentiates...’ employees (Seeck & Kantola, 2009, p. 245)

Foucault’s conceptualization of power can be condensed into six tenets. First, power is relational; ‘it is an organized, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations’ which is neither given nor ‘centralized’ (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, p. 63). Second, power is ‘an action upon action,’ an indirect action targeted at modifying or reacting to others’ actions (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). Third, again, Foucault maintains that power without exertion is inexistent; “power only exists when it is put into action” (Foucault, 1982, p. 788). Fourth, although power may be based on prior consent, as in the case of employee-employer agreement, it is not necessarily consensual when exerted, as in the case of bullying Fifth, power targets freedom. Sixth, while

power could involve violence, it usually takes a form that “incites, induces...,” and in extreme cases, “...constrains or forbids absolutely” He explained that power could be better understood through ‘conduct,’ ‘mechanisms of coercion...’ designed to control subject’s behavior thereby constituting power that is not ‘warlike,’ but solely purposed to govern. (Foucault, 1982, pp. 789–790). Certainly, Foucault focused on a ‘repressive’ kind of power, the type experienced in bullying situations (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, p. 62).

Foucault (1982) emphasized that the authenticity of power depends on its subjects, as power must include a subject with a propensity to act. While scholars have critiqued Foucault’s power and resistance relations and questioned how ‘docile bodies’ could exhibit resistance. Foucault (1990) has always hinted at the presence of resistance in power relations in his work. He asserted that power and resistance are ‘mutually constitutive,’ stating that “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1990, p. 95). He further explained that resistance is developed when power is exercised (Foucault, 1972). Consequently, targets of bullying are expected to resist the inappropriate use of power as power is incomplete without a “point of insubordination.” (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, p. 65). Contrary to the traditional views on power sovereignty (Weber, 1947), which ignore resistance (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005), subjects of bullying are rarely “docile bodies”; instead, they possess a tendency to counter-react attempts made “...to badger, harass or humiliate” (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, p. 65).

Foucault (1982) further argued that the study of resistance could shed light on the understanding of power relations. He suggested that “to understand what [different] forms of power” could look like it may be necessary to “investigate the forms of resistance” (Foucault, 1982, p. 780). Conceivably, power relations and their forms can be used to gain deeper insight into resistance.

Alongside Foucault (1982), James Scott’s (1985) theory of resistance presents a suitable scaffold to understand the forms of resistance. Scott (1985) categorized resistance forms into hidden transcripts and public transcripts. The former are disguised and mask resistance actions, or in other words, is everyday resistance, and the latter are the public demonstrations that aim to draw the attention of and appeal to the powerful. Scott’s (1985) framework enables understanding prevalent hidden or everyday resistance in organizations. Although grievances have been openly disclosed leading to “claims or lawsuits,” (or public transcripts), these publicized acts of resistance are often undermined or tactfully stifled, paving the way towards a concealed type of resistance (hidden transcript) that is often only apparent in high employee turnovers, demotions, and other sanctions (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, p. 76).

Scott’s (1985) ideologies were further examined and expanded by other scholars. For instance, Hollander & Einwohner’s (2004) work questions when resistance is considered resistance. They capitalized on the disagreement that resistance is characterized by recognition and intent and concluded that, for resistance to be considered resistance, it must be acknowledged by the target, agent, and observer as resistance. They further broke down Scott’s categories of resistance into overt, covert, unwitting, target-defined, externally defined, missed, and attempted resistance (Hollander & Eisenwoher, 2004). However, Johansson and Vinthagen (2014) critiqued their work by arguing that resistance is not a “clear-cut typology” which is dependent on validation by target, agent, and observer (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2014, p. 2). They developed an analytical framework that offered four assumptions. First, “everyday resistance is a practice.” Second, everyday resistance is “entangled with power.” Third, everyday resistance “needs to be understood as intersectional with the power it engages with. And lastly, everyday resistance depends on changing contexts” (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2014, p. 2). Bazz et al. (2016) suggest dimensions including the *spectrum between organized and individual resistance*, *the relationship between bodies and representations*, and *the process of self-reflection*. Essential to their study is their claim that resistance “is creative in itself” and power can be a counterreaction to resistance actions. They emphasized the agathokakological nature of resistance, having a binary nature of bad and good (Baaz et al., 2016, p. 149). This study focuses on this counteraction behavior of power in the context of workplace bullying, which is employee resistance, by explaining how individuals choose to react in an autonomous fashion when power is exerted on them and its subsequent consequences.

The next section considers methodological choices to allow thorough and in-depth investigations of employee resistance to bullying taking place at their workplaces.

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology describes an individual's lived experience, encouraging an unbiased perspective of their understanding, thoughts, and emotions on bullying and resistance (Akella & Seay, 2022). A methodical structure of the phenomenological approach begins with a researcher selecting a phenomenon of interest followed by an investigation that capitalizes on lived experience instead of conceptualization. Then, the researcher analyses corresponding themes and communicates findings through writing and appropriate use of language. The researcher maintains a "strong orientation" and opts for a holistic approach to achieve quality research (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2013). However, the crux of phenomenology is dependent on "accurate interpretation" instead of "accurate perception" (Dybicz & Pyles, 2011, p. 306), thereby, limiting the researcher's critical understanding of the subject.

Therefore, the dialectic approach, a combination of "description and interpretation" (Marsh, 1985, p. 191) which focuses on the dialogue and the researcher's "art of asking questions," was employed to complement the phenomenology approach. The dialectical approach allows the researcher to employ his/her "critical consciousness" in evaluating participants' responses and understanding of the subject (Dybicz & Pyles, 2011, p. 307). Dialectical phenomenology allows the researcher a critical examination of the data instead of a verbatim record of responses which may result in the loss of truth (Akella & Seay, 2022)

The primary author collected the data for this research as part of a previous research project. She first sought the approval of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at her institution. Then she approached thirty-five employees working at a college, various hospitals, a non-profit organization, and a motel, located in the state of Georgia in the US, to gather insights pertaining to different types of workplace bullying occurring at various workplaces, employees' reactions, and existing organizational policies and practices to counteract workplace bullying [see Table 1]. All interview questions were open-ended and semi-structured, enabling the participants to freely express and describe their experience and thoughts on the bullying and resistance prevalent within their organizations. This approach was preferable as it gave participants the latitude to use their own words, thereby encouraging originality and heterogeneous opinions that may oppose or support prior findings. All interviews were conducted in a safe and open environment such as at a coffee shop, on a university campus, or at the workplace of the participants. All interviews were tape-recorded and lasted between 30-60 minutes. Participants were promised anonymity and questioned in-depth about their jobs, responsibilities, organizational culture, leadership styles, organizational policies and workplace bullying incidents, employees' reactions, consequences, and the aftermath of workplace bullying. All interview data was later transcribed. Thereafter, the data was revisited by both the authors and reanalyzed in the context of employee resistance, a characteristic feature of workplace bullying for this research project. In other words, all participants' responses, emotions, and thoughts were reexamined in the context of resistance to explore correlations and relationships between bullying and resistance.

TABLE 1
DETAILS OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Type of Organization/s	Type of Employees	Total Number
Motel	Managers = 2 Employees = 3 Males = 3 Females = 2 Asian = 1 Caucasians = 2 African Americans = 2	5 motel employees
Hospital	Females = 9 African Americans = 3 Hispanics = 1 Caucasians = 5	9 nurses employed in hospitals in Georgia
College	Females = 5 Male = 8 African Americans = 9 Arab = 1 Asians = 1 Caucasians = 2	13 college professors
Non-Profit Organization (NGO)	Manager = 1 Employees = 7 Male = 2 Females = 6	8 NGO employees
		Total Interviewed = 35 employees

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

To reiterate, all interview transcripts were revisited by both the authors, read, and reread numerous times to discern emerging themes pertaining to resistance and bullying within workplaces. Four themes emerged under which all interview transcripts were categorized. These themes consisted of workplace bullying as a control mechanism, employees' resistance strategies, consequences of resistance, and resistance as deviant or non-deviant behaviors [see Table 2]. These themes are discussed next.

TABLE 2
EMPLOYEES RESISTANCE THEMES AND QUOTES

Themes	Recurring Patterns	Interview Quotes	Relevance
Workplace Bullying as a control mechanism	Hostile, Intimidating repetitive behaviour	<i>"I think bullying is in essence using either harsh language, harsh words or using physical means in order to intimidate or harass him or her and doing it intentionally ... be it words, language or actions and of course any type of physical means that is being used that have the intention of hurting, harming or intimidating someone."</i> (Faculty 10, College).	Workplace bullying can be defined as repetitive hostile and intimidating behaviours which hurt and harm another individual.
	Effective short-term managerial control strategy	<i>"Yes, if someone does not do a good job and you do everything possible to move him [sic] to be competent on the job then you got to be firm, and they may feel it is bullying."</i> (Faculty 9, College). <i>"In the short run... there comes a time one has to step up take the initiative s/he may feel that is needed to get it down to move the ball now as opposed to waiting for folks to come into line but sometimes you have to run with the ball with some folks that is all we can do we have to yell and get it done. But in times like this you have to hit the desk and push things forward you have to get things done."</i> (Faculty 8, College)	In the short run, despite its negative consequences, workplace bullying is effective getting quality work completed by the pre-determined time deadline.
	Tough Leadership Style	<i>"...she does not want things to be delayed when she asks for them so ...she is very fussy."</i> (Nurse 7, Hospital). <i>"The executive director, fair, firm, and friendly. She has boundaries in place and expects things to be done in a certain way she expects nothing short of perfect."</i> (Employee 3, NGO). <i>"Everyone in the building knows what is expected of them"</i>	Workplace bullying can easily be dismissed as a tough type of leadership style.

		<p><i>(pauses) in the event it does not go as expected. It doesn't ever get pushed under the rug on "Oh that's okay you were tired unacceptable" unacceptable and I have no problem in anybody knowing that on the firm side if you have done well, I have no problem in letting you know that either. So, there is never a question on where you stand with me." (Employee 8, NGO)</i></p> <p><i>"...she tells you to get it done and you better get it done or face the consequences (prompts). You could be written off, be fired." (Employer 3, NGO).</i></p>	
	<p>Surveillance & Employee Monitoring</p>	<p><i>"We always check on each other. So, you come in the morning. Everybody comes to everybody's office and makes sure we all are doing okay. We have days we do morning meetings to know what everybody is doing and things like that." (Employee 7, NGO)</i></p> <p><i>"You want to monitor them you watch them. We have camera system (laughs) I watch and know from anywhere I am where everybody is and it is just not like policing but to see how the flow of work goes for like they are supposed to go at 9:30 I can monitor them according to the clock when each person is going to work through every camera so that way you can get a sense of who is falling behind who is not doing right going against the rules not doing work properly you can write them up in that way." (Owner, Motel)</i></p> <p><i>"He does behind us and checks how clean it is. He makes sure when we clean and if we did not do it right, he will make us go back into the room and do it over (questions)." (Employee 2, Motel)</i></p>	<p>Bullying can be enforced via technological mediums, team members, and direct monitoring. Regardless of whether it is overt or covert, it is always hurtful in nature.</p>

		<p><i>“So, we just have to tell them on a one-to-one basis...we take them to the room, inspect that room from front to back, left to right.” (Owner, Motel)</i></p> <p><i>“They are like traffic controllers.” (Nurse 6, Hospital)</i></p> <p><i>“They kind of watch over.” (Nurse 2, Hospital)</i></p> <p><i>“And when I say bully, she was always that ...person pushing me in that manner....” (Faculty 9, College).</i></p> <p><i>“We do counseling referrals which we do for each other...we are support system for each other. We are therapists for each other.” (Employee 3, NGO)</i></p> <p><i>“Well, we have guidelines, training a lot of different training techniques that we do. Just to make sure they understand all the things that we do here.” (Employee 7, NGO).</i></p>	
Employees’ Resistance Strategies	Silence	<p><i>“So you just take things one at a time of the situations that have become by ignoring bullying by providing the distance so that you do not come into conflict with the person who is bullying so you do whatever is necessary to avoid it because you know how badly it can become or the person can come at you so you try to protect yourself by ignoring it and by avoiding it.” (Faculty 2, College)</i></p> <p><i>“No some... are pretty resilient they look past (pauses) they go to people they know will help and not talk about them they gravitate towards them and try to stay away from the negative”. (Nurse 1, Hospital)</i></p>	Employees resist by just keeping quiet and continuing doing their work as usual.
	Avoiding	<p><i>“I just (pauses) it is job how I feel about it didn’t like it, but it is something I have to do it is part of my job part of my job description to deal with such people and I have seen such stuff (pauses) at the end of the day no</i></p>	Employees resist by avoiding the bully and keeping a distance from him.

		<i>matter what you get you get to go home. Unlike a battlefield where people didn't get to go home. So, you are harassing me bullying me for 5-8 hours I am going home. So, I have dealt with it that way.</i> ” (Faculty 13, College)	
	Quitting	<p><i>“Yes (laughs) ... The turnover is high right now (laughs) it may be bullying....”</i> (Nurse 1, Hospital)</p> <p><i>“I would be willing to speak to my supervisor or to my colleague but if it comes from more than one person, I might think this is not a good place and I might not stay here. It depends on how much you are bullied and if it is stressful for me. It depends on the situation.”</i> (Faculty 5, College)</p> <p><i>“I was with immigration visa and did not want to cause problems. I was able to negotiate and give the student a B and there were a couple of incidents like that, and I decided, and I started applying for jobs (prompts).”</i> (Faculty 3, College)</p> <p><i>“... but I thought it was easier to render my resignation than to deal with one versus 10.”</i> (Nurse 9, Hospital)</p>	Employees resist by finding another job and then quitting.
	Complaints	<p><i>“No, I don't keep quiet (laughs) preceptors I speak a lot to my manager about what can be done. I have spoken to a couple of nurses, and they have voiced their concerns and sometimes I take them back to the manager”.</i> (Nurse 1, Hospital)</p> <p><i>“I know the HR does some hotline calls. You let them know you feel that way....”</i> (Faculty 13, College)</p> <p><i>“Sometimes you just have to go above the administrator and because if the work doesn't get done or you can go online and</i></p>	Employees resist by complaining against their bullies. Their complaints can take the form of open oral complaints, written reports, or anonymous online complaints. Employees were also aware of the complaint processes existing in their organizations.

		<p><i>do your report there it is anonymous.” (Nurse 4, Hospital)</i></p> <p><i>“I go to my administration first and tell her “Hi, this is going on”. And she[sic] will address it with her administration at that clinic. So, I follow with my administration, and... I will type an email stating the situation and what happened to my administrator and cc the administrator of that clinic.”</i> (Nurse 4, Hospital)</p> <p><i>“I would confront the person if it were somebody under me. We would have a meeting with ... and try to figure out a way to fix it. If that did not work, we would take it to our executive director and let her handle the situation.”</i> (Employee 4, NGO)</p>	
Consequences of Employees’ Resistance	Nothing gets done	<p><i>“... the nurses will fuss but nothing gets done they will complain to people or to higher supervisors.”</i> (Nurse 5, Hospital)</p> <p><i>“They swept it under the carpet they said he is international he does not understand our culture and I said no it is not culture, differences, or anything about it bullying is not culture thing a basic thing they are trying to intimidate... No real action was taken.”</i> (Faculty 7, College)</p>	Organizations to a large extent did nothing about the employees’ complaints and ignored their resistances.
	Passive type resistance techniques	<p><i>“I don’t care either quitting or just not coming or kind of no show calling in all time”</i> (Nurse 9, Hospital)</p> <p><i>“I did report it (repeats) did not state who said it. I think some other people reported it that girl actually did lose her job...”</i> (Nurse 4, Hospital)</p> <p><i>“Just a few and those few have, or they quit (prompts) left themselves. I think I mean they really left, they leave themselves the two conflicts that I have actually seen they have actually left ... she had a melt down and</i></p>	Sometimes the management took action against the bullies. The employees took their revenge by calling in and applying for leaves. Sometimes the employees left the job themselves when no action was taken against their bullies.

		<i>started screaming, going on and on. She just walked out and quit.” (Employee 4, College)</i>	
	Acceptance	<i>“I never had any mentality (laughs) or anything like that. Like we are walking down the hallway and my coworker would come around and we go to do the job.” (Employee 5, NGO)</i>	Some employees accepted workplace bullying as a part of their job description.
	Organization Development Interventions	<i>“...we actually had a meeting two weeks ago our manager put it together because the nurse who came in suggested we open the line of communication between new nurses and the charge nurses.” (Nurse 3, Hospital)</i>	Some organizations actually did enforce interventions to eradicate bullying within their organizations.
Non-deviant or Deviant Behaviours	When does passive resistance becomes harmful?	<i>“... for those people who are like I don’t want to (makes a dismissive sound) it is not my job to make them it is my job to find someone. If they have the sort of attitude coming in here, then I don’t really care.” (Employee 7, NGO)</i> <i>“It is more harmful than beneficial because the nurses can’t go to an emergency situation with nurses she does not trust, or she [sic] feels are speaking negatively about her and it makes them less likely to trust that person and it is an emergency situation it definitely inhibits them there (prompts).” (Nurse 1)</i>	Management adopted a tough stance against the victims and their resistances. Yet even passive resistance can prove to be harmful for organizations in the long run.

Workplace Bullying as a Control Mechanism

Workplace bullying originates from the unequal power equation between the manager and his/her subordinates, where the manager consistently uses hostile, insulting, and humiliating behavior towards his/her subordinates to demean and direct them and get the work completed (Akella, 2020). As explained by the interviewees’:

“I think bullying is in essence using either harsh language, harsh words or using physical means ... to intimidate or harass ...and doing it intentionally ... be it words, language, or actions and of course any type of physical means that is being used that have the intention of hurting, harming or intimidating someone” (Faculty 10, College).

This management tactic was used by the charge nurses in hospitals, administrators in colleges, and managers in non-profit organizations (NGOs) and motels. When workers were not performing efficiently or not meeting deadlines, the managers stepped in, threatened, and intimidated to get things completed.

“Yes, if someone does not do a good job and you do everything possible to move him [sic] to be competent on the job then you got to be firm, and they may feel it is bullying.” (Faculty 9, College).

“In the short run... there comes a time one has to step up take the initiative s/he may feel that is needed to get it down to move the ball now as opposed to waiting for folks to come into line but sometimes you have to run with the ball with some folks that is all we can do we have to yell and get it done. But in times like this you have to hit the desk and push things forward you have to get things done.” (Faculty 8, College).

Hurtful and rude behavior was accepted because it got work, which was acceptable in terms of quality, finished on time. It was immaterial that the worker suffered and underwent psychological abuse and torture (Van Dyck & Mullen, 2007). On the contrary, bullying was often dismissed as another type of leadership style. For instance:

“...she does not want things to be delayed when she asks for them so ...she is very fussy.” (Nurse 7, Hospital).

“The executive director, fair, firm, and friendly. She has boundaries in place and expects things to be done in a certain way she expects nothing short of perfect.” (Employee 3, NGO).

In the above cases, the manager’s bullying was dismissed as being fussy or firm but friendly. To continue in the words of the executive director herself:

“Everyone in the building knows what is expected of them (pauses) in the event it does not go as expected. It doesn’t ever get pushed under the rug on ‘Oh that’s okay you were tired unacceptable’ unacceptable ...” (Employee 8, NGO).

To succinctly clarify if the worker’s performance was “unacceptable”, regardless of the reason, s/he faced immediate termination. To avoid this situation, workers had to work hard and meet the deadlines.

“...she tells you to get it done and you better get it done or face the consequences (prompts). You could be written off, be fired.” (Employer 3, NGO).

“Because they want to keep the job and get paid (laughs).” (Employee 8, NGO).

In the aforementioned examples the power exerted was direct and forceful. However, in some cases, power exertions were insidious and subtle in nature. For instance:

“We always check on each other. So, you come in the morning. Everybody comes to everybody’s office and makes sure we all are doing okay. We have days we do morning meetings to know what everybody is doing and things like that.” (Employee 7, NGO).

Instead of one manager controlling the behavior of the employees, now the control was being exerted by the entire team. Control had become distributed, and power internalized within the team itself. Just like Bentham’s panopticon which enabled the guards to monitor the behavior of prisoners (Foucault, 1977), the team members placed each other under the “penetrating gaze” of the entire team. It was no longer just the manager; instead, all individuals were under the gaze of their team members. In another instance, the gaze flowed via a technological source, to quote another interview:

“You want to monitor them you watch them. We have camera system (laughs) I watch and know from anywhere I am where everybody is and it is just not like policing but to see how the flow of work goes for like they are supposed to go at 9:30. I can monitor them according to the clock when each person is going to work through every camera so that way you can get a sense of who is falling behind who is not doing right going against the rules not doing work properly you can write them up in that way.” (Owner, Motel).

Cameras were installed inside the motel, making all employees’ behaviors and actions visible to the owner, whereby he was able to exercise power over the actions of his employees just like the panopticon model which enabled collection and storage of information and subsequently effective supervision and control of employees’ behavior (Dandekar, 1990). Tight control was also exercised over the employees, which can be described as harassing and intimidating.

“He does go behind us and checks how clean it is. He makes sure when we clean and if we did not do it right, he will make us go back into the room and do it over (questions).” (Employee 2, Motel).

“They are like traffic controllers.” (Nurse 6, Hospital).

“And when I say bully, she was always that ...person pushing me in that manner....” (Faculty 9, College).

“We do counseling referrals which we do for each other...we are support system for each other. We are therapists for each other.” (Employee 3, NGO).

In other words, surveillance mechanisms, managerial style, and organizational culture were used to bully employees at their workplaces.

Employees’ Resistance Strategies

However, where there is power, there is always resistance (Foucault, 1977). “Those who are subject to power of dominant groups are themselves knowledgeable human agents who can resist, blunt, or actively alter the conditions of life that others seek to thrust upon them” (Giddens, 1981, p. 158). Employees in the interviews were aware of the bullying strategies being practiced within their organizations. They resisted the inappropriate application of power by their supervisors. On a broad scale these resistance strategies can be categorized as no response and resistance-based responses (Leck & Galperin, 2006). Resistance took the form of silence, avoidance, open confrontations, complaints, and employee turnover (Hollandar & Einwohner, 2004; Lutgen Sandvik, 2005; 2006).

In the empirical analysis, employees refrained from taking any action against their perpetrators. They preferred to ignore, keep quiet, suffer in silence, or avoid the person. As stated by the interviewees:

“So you just take things one at a time ... by ignoring bullying by providing the distance so that you do not come into conflict with the person who is bullying so you do whatever is necessary to avoid it because you know how badly it can become or the person can come at you so you try to protect yourself by ignoring it and by avoiding it.” (Faculty 2, College).

“No some... are pretty resilient they look past (pauses) they go to people they know will help and not talk about them they gravitate towards them and try to stay away from the negative”. (Nurse 1, Hospital).

The employees reasoned that avoiding direct confrontation with their bullies minimized problematic issues in the future. So, they kept their distance from their bullies, ignored them, and pretended they did not exist, everything was normal, or this was a daily occurrence. As mentioned by the interviewee:

“I just (pauses) ... it is part of my job part of my job description to deal with such people and I have seen such stuff (pauses). At the end of the day no matter what you get you get to go home unlike a battlefield where people didn't get to go home. So, you are harassing me bullying me for 5-8 hours I am going home. So, I have dealt with it that way.” (Faculty 13, College).

In the above situation, the faculty member is aware of being bullied and its consequences in terms of stress and harassment experienced. But the employee feels he is fortunate because he can go home and put it all behind him. So, he ignores it.

For some, the alternative was to find another job and quit. This happened to be a very common reaction in workplaces saturated with bullying. The employees were not comfortable speaking against bullying, resulting in high levels of employee stress and subsequent turnover.

“Yes (laughs) ... The turnover is high right now (laughs) it may be bullying....” (Nurse 1, Hospital).

“I would be willing to speak to my supervisor or to my colleague but if it comes from more than one person, I might think this is not a good place and I might not stay here. It depends on how much you are bullied and if it is stressful for me. It depends on the situation.” (Faculty 5, College).

Victims of bullying deduced it was easier to look for another job and leave the organization. *“... but I thought it was easier to render my resignation than to deal with one versus 10.”* (Nurse 9, Hospital).

Yet, however, some did speak up. They either confronted their bully or complained to the higher management and their peers. Resistance here was both individualized and collective in nature.

“No, I don't keep quiet (laughs) preceptors I speak a lot to my manager about what can be done. I have spoken to a couple of nurses, and they have voiced their concerns and sometimes I take them back to the manager”. (Nurse 1, Hospital).

Others complained as well but preferred reporting it anonymously. They went online and complained. Reporting in such a manner did not make them overly anxious.

“I know the HR does some hotline calls. You let them know you feel that way....” (Faculty 13, College).

“Sometimes you just have to go above the administrator and because if the work doesn't get done or you can go online and do your report there it is anonymous.” (Nurse 4, Hospital).

Resistance thus took both overt and covert forms. Employees choose either one depending on their comfort zones. Individuals were also aware of the anti-bullying procedures prevailing in their organizations. As explained:

“I go to my administration first and tell her “Hi, this is going on”. And she will address it with her administration at that clinic. So, I follow with my administration, and... I will type an email stating the situation and what happened to my administrator and cc the administrator of that clinic.” (Nurse 4, Hospital)

Incidentally, this also happens to be the correct way of handling workplace bullying. The victim first confronts his/her bully, and if the bullying continues, s/he then reports it to the manager. If the manager happens to be the bully himself/herself, the victim needs to approach the manager next in the vertical hierarchy level. The victim also needs to keep a record of all events and bullying incidents for future references.

“I would confront the person if it were somebody under me. We would have a meeting with ... and try to figure out a way to fix it. If that did not work, we would take it to our executive director and let her handle the situation.” (Employee 4, NGO).

Consequences of Employees' Resistance

Unfortunately resisting, complaining, and even turnover did not have any positive impacts on the elimination of bullying from the workplaces. The higher management levels did not address the matter or try to resolve the issue. As hopelessly lamented:

“... the nurses will fuss but nothing gets done they will complain to people or to higher supervisors.” (Nurse 5, Hospital).

“They swept it under the carpet they said he is international he does not understand our culture and I said no it is not culture, differences, or anything about it bullying is not culture thing a basic thing they are trying to intimidate... No real action was taken.” (Faculty 7, College).

Some employees took their revenge by “no show calling,” or calling in absent, or not being actively committed to their job responsibilities.

“I don't care either quitting or just not coming or kind of no show calling in all time” (Nurse 9, Hospital).

Yet, for some who reported the bullies to the top management, it resulted in the perpetrators losing their jobs. As mentioned in one interview:

“I did report it (repeats) did not state who said it. I think some other people reported it that girl actually did lose her job...” (Nurse 4, Hospital).

However unfortunately for others, even open confrontations with their supervisors resulted in nothing. In the end, in desperation, they ended up quitting.

“Just a few and those few have, or they quit (prompts) left themselves. I think I mean they really left, they left themselves the two conflicts that I have actually seen they have actually left ... she had a melt down and started screaming, going on and on. She just walked out and quit.” (Employee 4, College).

Some employees treated bullying as a commonplace occurrence. They reconciled themselves and continued with their work as usual.

“I never had any mentality (laughs) or anything like that. Like we are walking down the hallway and my coworker would come around and we go to do the job.” (Employee 5, NGO).

However, in some rare cases, complaining against the bully did yield some positive results. For instance, in one hospital, the manager took the complaints very seriously and planned a series of meetings which opened lines of communication between the bully and her victims. These meetings lead to open communication and dialogue between both the parties and ultimately resulted in the creation of a healthier workplace.

“...we actually had a meeting two weeks ago. Our manager put it together because the nurse who came in suggested we open the line of communication between new nurses and the charge nurses.” (Nurse 3, Hospital).

Non-Deviant or Deviant Behaviors?

It is undeniable. Resistance always follows power exercises. It can be described as an everyday practice, an outcome of power (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2014). Even though it may not always be potent and impactful. As revealed in the empirical analysis, resistance led to action being taken against the bullies for some employees while for some nothing happened. For others it meant the implementation of certain organization development initiatives providing the much-needed reprieve.

Yet even though in our empirical data, our interviewees did not take any drastic actions against the organizations. They did not violate any organizational rules or procedures. Most either ignored these incidents, avoided their bullies, or quit their jobs when they managed to find another. Furthermore, their supervisors were dismissive of their frustrations and mocked them.

“... for those people who are like I don't want to (makes a dismissive sound) it is not my job to make them it is my job to find someone. If they have the sort of attitude coming in here, then I don't really care.” (Employee 7, NGO).

Yet these “no resistance” types of resistance acts did hurt the organizations in terms of employee performance and the quality of services provided to the customers (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005). As succinctly explained in interviews, employees tried to ignore the bullying faced at their workplaces. They tried to reduce their frustration and anxiety by avoiding their perpetrators and pretending it was a cultural, leadership, or personality issue. However, this behavior of the victims had a negative impact on the patient care being provided within the emergency units where it was an absolute necessity to work and coordinate as a team. And this proved to be difficult if the victims did not trust their perpetrators.

“It is more harmful than beneficial because the nurses can't go to an emergency situation with nurses she does not trust, or she feels are speaking negatively about her, and it makes them less likely to trust that person and it is an emergency situation it definitely inhibits them there (prompts).” (Nurse 1).

In other words, it is plausible to interpret non-deviant and non-confrontational behavior as deviant employee behavior because it interferes with the normal functioning of the organization. It would be a similar circumstance be it in a hospital, college, non-profit organization, or motel. Resistance here ends up harming the organization.

Thus, all forms of spontaneous disagreements and unsupervised actions can be classified as resistance. All forms of psychological withdrawals, even talking about bullying and resistance strategies, can be considered as resistance. All forms of employees' resentments can also be classified as resistance practices.

DISCUSSION

Workplace bullying has emerged as another form of managerial control strategy, totalitarian and inhumane with harmful psychological and health related consequences (Akella, 2020). However, despite its totalizing elements, employees in our study showed awareness of the power and domination being imposed on them and its unfairness. Our study therefore supports the later power trajectories of Foucault (1982) which mentions presence of resistance within the strong footholds of power. Resistance arises as a reversal of power forces. Subjects of bullying are not docile individuals on whom power happens to fasten without them being aware. We don't agree with McNay (1991, p. 137) that "effects of power results in a reduction of social agents to passive bodies" rendering them ineffective thereafter to act in an autonomous fashion. Instead, resistance can be configured in all power exercises. The possibility of subjects of power being able to react against control being exerted on them should not be abandoned (Foucault, 1983). In fact, resistance is a reactive force which subsists even in extreme cases of domination and subjugation. Power is always inherently induced with points of resistance. There is thus the plausibility of the subjects' traversing boundaries of control in new and creative ways (Foucault, 1983). Power can shape identities and subjectivities. Simultaneously, it also permits exploration of avenues which enable a subject to escape domination and manipulation. Power operates in the "conduct of conduct" and in the "modification of action by action." Power and resistance are thus synonymous i.e., two sides of the same coin.

Similarly, our foregoing analysis suggested that employees were being placed under inhumane control processes flowing through overt and covert bullying techniques. Employees faced verbal abuse, technological surveillance, disrespect, excessive pressure, intimidation, and rude behavior from their supervisors. Even though open rebellions such as strikes, lockouts and whistleblowing were not evident, one came across passive techniques such as maintaining silence, avoiding, keeping one's distance from the harasser or leaving the job. There was also evidence of confronting the bullying in a polite manner, reporting him/her, filing anonymous complaints, keeping records of bullying incidents for future references, and confiding with their colleagues and peers. In certain cases, employees adopted passive deviant behaviors. They called in sick, became absent for no reason or adopted a no-show policy. The organization, on the other hand, ignored the bullying taking place, dismissed the complaints, and on rare occasions acted to improve the working conditions. Our study supports the resistance techniques earlier mentioned by Lutgen-Sandvik (2005, 2006), Scott (1985), Hollandar & Einwohner, (2004) and Bazz et al., (2016).

But our study also evidences that employees' resistance, passive though it may be, mostly tends to go against the organization's rules and procedures. In certain cases, it may emerge as a collective force, but it remains primarily an individualized force. Organizations' management may refuse to acknowledge its presence. Still, resistance has the power to threaten the productivity and efficiency of the organization. From an employee's angle, resistance is a positive force which has the power to change the working conditions. For the management resistance is negative since it creates problems and issues in the day-to-day functioning of the organization. However, in the long run resistance can be interpreted as a positive force. Since it challenges the status quo resulting in implementation of organizational development interventions, leading to long-term efficiency, employees' satisfaction, and commitment.

Our study also generates insights such as contrary to beliefs, passive resistance where the employees suffer in silence or avoid the perpetrators and carry-on work as usual can also prove to be detrimental for the organization and its efficient functioning. In a hospital environment, within the emergency care unit, trust and teamwork are needed to ensure quality patient care. It could be a similar scenario in a college environment, where students' well-being is concerned, or in an NGO, where victims of domestic violence etc. need to be assured of their safety.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, employee resistance, even if it is passive and covert, should not be taken lightly. Outwardly it may seem as if management has an upper hand. But resistance devoid of open rebellions can also prove to be disastrous since it gradually weakens the trust levels, teamwork, collaboration, and

cooperation at both vertical and horizontal levels. It is therefore essential management design more congenial and respectful workplaces with zero tolerance for workplace bullying.

Our empirical data did not show any traces of organized labor groups such as trade unions. Yet, trade unions and workers' cooperatives happen to exist within universities, and hospitals, with a more minimal presence in motels and NGOs. It would be interesting to explore whether resistance can be an outcome of trade unions' activities.

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