"Rocking the Boat" and "Continuing To Fight": Un/Productive Justice Episodes and the Problem of Workplace Bullying

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Abstract

The term *workplace bullying* refers to an extreme form of workplace emotional abuse (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003) that is primarily accomplished through repeated negative and harmful communication behaviors (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2005). Research on bullying has predominantly explored the personality traits of targets and bullies, the causes of bullying in the workplace, and prevention and intervention strategies. In contrast, this project explored how targets of bullying understand and talk about justice in online support communities. Specifically, this research revealed targets most often talk about distributive justice and less often talk about procedural, interactional, and restorative justice. Targets also talked about an array of motives for obtaining justice including vindication, retribution, and retaliation. Analysis of social confrontation episodes revealed vast differences between productive attempts at justice and unproductive attempts. Practical and conceptual conclusions and implications for organizations and targets are discussed.

Workplace bullying has been described by targets as a nightmare, a game, a battle, water torture, or a noxious substance the target was forced to "suck up" at work or escape from in order to heal (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006). The term *workplace bullying* refers to an extreme form of workplace emotional abuse (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003) that is primarily accomplished through repeated negative and harmful communication behaviors (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2005). These behaviors are escalated and can include being ignored, humiliated, ridiculed, isolated from others, shouted at or targeted with anger, subjected to persistent criticism, intimidating and threatening behavior, excessive teasing and sarcasm, among other negative acts (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). Bullying is often accomplished by a combination of these persistent and negative behaviors.

Although there are a myriad of terms and definitions used to describe workplace bullying, most of this research agrees the phenomenon is characterized by five features: frequency/repetition, duration, escalation, power disparity, and attributed intent (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005; Porhola, Karhunen, & Rainivaara, 2006; Tracy, et.al, 2006). Targets perceive themselves as frequently ridiculed, criticized, and badgered by the bully. This goes beyond just one or two instances of low level incivility and is characterized by many frequent and repeated aggressive acts. These acts are seen as persisting over a long duration of time. Bullying acts are also escalated or are more extreme and intense than benign incivilities often experienced in today's office (Leymann, 1990; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). There is often a power disparity between the target and bully. Bullies tend to have more resources than targets; these can include a superior position in the organization's hierarchy to an informal relationship with power holders in the organization. These resources often enable the bully to enact their abuse (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Lastly, targets perceive the bully's actions as intentional, malicious, and intended to inflict harm (Tracy et al., 2005).

Much of the research on workplace bullying to date has centered on identifying possible targets and bullies. Workplace bullying is a damaging and often life-altering experience for targets and a growing and costly problem for organizations (Glenndinning, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2007; Salin, 2003; Sheehan, 1999). Many times, because of inaction on the part of the organization, the target exits the organization to escape the abuse (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Even though we know much about who the bully and targets are, what constitutes bullying behaviors, and the effects of these behaviors, we know very little about what justice means to targets and how and if they act to gain some sense of fairness in their situation. To better understand these issues, the purpose of this study was to explore how targets of bullying they understand and talk about justice in these situations.

Workplace Bullying and Organizational Justice

Organizational justice is the perception of fairness of workplace outcomes, processes, and interactions (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). Obtaining a sense of justice, in the case of workplace bullying, could mean repairing the harm that has been done, the organization and/or bully taking responsibility for their actions or inaction, or the target receiving just recompense. Although it seems an important avenue of research, the idea of justice or fairness in regards to workplace bullying has yet to be explored by researchers. However, justice does seem an area workplace bullying researchers should examine as recent findings have demonstrated that many targets don't just automatically roll over and quit in a bullying situation but do resist, at least for awhile (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Lutgen-Sandvik (2006), in her study of workplace bullying targets and co-workers of targets in the U.S., found that targets do resist the bully and bullying

situation in many creative ways. It seems plausible to imagine that targets who actively resist the bullying could be also concerned with gaining some sense of justice in their situation.

Types of Justice

As stated above, organizational justice is the perception of fairness of workplace outcomes, processes, and interactions (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). Brockner and Greenberg (1990) contend that fairness is an important dimension affecting employees' actions and reactions within organizations. Researchers have identified four main types of justice: distributive, procedural, interactional, and restorative. Distributive justice is concerned with perceptions of the fairness of outcomes (Blau, 1964). For instance, the target could see the firing of the bully as a fair outcome in their situation. Not surprisingly, distributive justice has been correlated with many positive outcomes including employee outcome satisfaction, job satisfaction, and increased organizational commitment (Bies & Moag, 1986, Clay-Warner, Reynolds, & Roman, 2005).

Procedural justice has to do with perceptions of fairness of the processes and methods used to determine outcomes (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Procedural justice can also be an important part of distributive justice, as perceptions of fair treatment and outcomes depend on the explanations given for those outcomes, not just on the outcome itself (Lind & Tyler, 1988). In addition, procedural justice is important because employees may feel resentment when they believe that they could have obtained better outcomes if the person making the decision had used other procedures that were deemed more fair (Greenberg, 1990). In a bullying situation, procedural justice could be the perceived fairness of the organization's complaint system used to recognize and discipline the bully. If the target perceived the procedures and methods of dealing with the bully and the bullying situation as fair, they may feel more satisfied with outcomes (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Interactional justice is concerned with the fairness of the interpersonal treatment a person receives (Bies & Moag, 1986; Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002). Research on interactional justice has determined that it can influence employees' trust in management, their affective commitment to the organization, and withdrawal behaviors (Barling & Phillips, 1993). In a bullying situation, the target may feel they have obtained interactional justice if their complaints are perceived to be handled in a sincere or legitimate manner by their manager and/or decision-makers.

Recently, justice scholars have begun to talk about another important type of justice, restorative justice (Strang & Braithwaite, 2002). Although there is no standard definition for restorative justice it generally focuses on repairing harm done by offenders and restoring relationships (Van Ness & Strong, 2002; Strang & Braithwaite, 2002). Offenders are called on to be responsible for their behaviors and repair harm they have done to targets. This approach to justice focuses on the needs of the target and the obligations of the organization and offender. In the case of workplace bullying, restorative justice may take the form of the organization giving the target a formal apology or admitting that harm was done to the target and trying to rectify the situation. The majority of restorative justice research has been generated by scholars in the areas of criminal justice and conflict resolution, and in practice typically takes the form of a mediation between the criminal offenders and all of the affected parties or targets (Presser & Gardner, 2000). The restorative justice philosophy and practice has been used to help targets of domestic violence (Presser & Gardner, 2000) and sexual assault (Daly, 2002). It seems intuitive that achieving justice in some form could serve to mitigate some of the negative and damaging effects of workplace bullying as well.

Reactions to Injustice

Outcomes of targets' attempts to gain justice are most often evaluated by current law, practice, social policy, and/or some other external standard of right or wrong (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992). The responses to injustice tend to fall along three dimensions: active/passive, individual/group, and positive/negative. In the case of workplace bullying, it seems target's reactions could fall anywhere along these three dimensions. The first dimension is concerned with how actively (complaining to management) or passively (complaining to others in an online community) the target reacts to the injustice. The second dimension, individual/group refers to how many people take part, whether it is an individual reaction or a larger reaction by multiple people. Current workplace bullying research would suggest that targets react individually if they don't feel supported by others in the workplace or if they are the targets of what Leymann (1990) calls "mobbing" or group bullying. However, if the target does have support from co-workers it seems the larger group could react to the bullying behavior (see Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006). Finally, the positive/negative dimension refers to the intent of the responses, whether they are intended to positively effect the organization (workplace or procedure changes) or negatively hurt the organization (decrease revenues). It also seems plausible the target/s of workplace bullying could react anywhere on the positive/negative dimension. If the organization actively works to stop the bullying and aids the target in healing it is plausible to assume the target would react positively. However, if the organization is unsupportive, blames the target, or does not recognize the bullying the target could react negatively and want retribution. Workplace bullying research seems to suggest the later as many organizations are typically unsupportive of targets (Glendinning, 2001; Salin, 2003; Sheehan, 1999; and Zapf, 1999).

Organizational justice researchers have found that the outcomes, processes, and interactions surrounding employee's complaints about grievances have a cumulative effect or become integrated into the employees' history of experiences with the organization. This in turn influences the employee's attitudes and behaviors towards the organization (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000). We know that target's experiences with bullying in the workplace have been linked to turnover and lower productivity (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2007; Zapf, 1999). Attaining a sense of justice in the bullying situation could give the target back some of the confidence and security they typically lose in these situations and reinvigorate their belief in and commitment to the organization (Martin & Bennett, 1996).

It seems intuitive that targets of workplace bullying, like other targets of abuse, would seek some type of productive outcome in their situation. A productive outcome could be one where the target's actions produced positive outcomes for the target and/or the larger problem of workplace bullying. Unproductive outcomes could be actions that go nowhere or produce negative outcomes for the target and/or the larger problem of workplace bullying. What would an unproductive attempt at gaining justice look like in relation to a productive attempt? How do targets work out meanings of justice in light of the actions they take to achieve justice? These are questions that need to be answered if headway is going to be made in better understanding the target's experiences, what they feel constitutes justice in this situation, and how and if that goal is obtained. One medium where targets could feel free to discuss issues associated with bullying and justice is in an online support community.

Justice and Online Support Communities

One medium where individuals are free to detail and discuss issues pertinent to their lives are online support groups. Online support communities are groups where people have similar

concerns and who communicate via technology (Rheingold, 1993). Online support communities are a place where people can come together to discuss specific issues, obtain feedback, and receive social support (Braithwaite, Waldron, & Finn, 1999; Cotrona & Suhr, 1992). A wide variety of topics bring these communities together. For example, topics can range from animal rescue issues to health and wellness to religious groups (Yahoo groups, n.d.). Online support group users have articulated many advantages to this medium including; anonymity when detailing personal situations, easy access to support due to decreased temporal and geographic barriers, and access to an increased amount of social support providers/other members of the group (Walther & Boyd, 2002). Online support communities seem to be a place where people, who feel they have been bullied in the workplace, can find others to discuss issues like obtaining justice in their situation. A quick search of Yahoo™ Groups, a popular host for online support communities, using the term "workplace bullying", reveals over 40 groups dedicated to this topic. From this search, it seems there are people using these online communities to talk about the topic of workplace bullying and this could be a medium through which we may better understand justice issues related to workplace bullying. With this in mind, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1:   How do workplace bullying online support communities indicate productive and unproductive episodes?

RQ2: What do these two types of episodes say about the kinds of organizational justice targets of workplace bullying seek?

RQ3: What issues about justice develop in productive and unproductive episodes and what differences exist in these sequences of development?

Method

Burke (1966) contends that by analyzing a group's communication we can better understand the way that group sees and understands their world. The research methods used in this study are consistent with this belief. In this section, I will detail sampling and data collection procedures, as well as, how the data was analyzed.

Data Collection

The text used in this analysis came from the largest online support community hosted by Yahoo™ Groups dedicated to the topic of workplace bullying. This online community is called BullyOnline. The community can be accessed through Yahoo™ Groups at www.yahoo.com. The Field Foundation started the BullyOnline community in September of 2000 and it currently has over 1,900 members around the world (Bullyonline Home, n.d.). When posting (or communicating with others in the community), the members of BullyOnline can post a new question or concern to be answered or addressed by other members. Members can also answer or respond to questions/comments already posted. Users have to be members (accomplished by filling out a brief information sheet) and membership is available to anyone with access to the Internet. An online support community was an appropriate data source to use to answer my research questions. This is not only because these communities are places where people tend to feel comfortable discussing issues like bullying (Walther & Boyd, 2002) but, this medium allowed me to get at process and uncover productive and unproductive attempts at attaining justice. By tracking posts to the community, I was able to get at the processional nature of a bullying episode. Sampling and data analysis will be discussed further in the following sections.

Pilot Study.   I conducted a pilot study using BullyOnline entries posted between December 15, 2006 and January 15, 2007 to determine what topics members were discussing. During this month there were 110 initial posts to the group. I collected every fifth post and all of

its thread responses to be included in a random sample. This resulted in 22 initial posts with 56 thread responses which resulted in a total of 78 total entries. The 78 entries were of varying lengths, from two sentences to a full page, and these served as data for the pilot study analysis. Using grounded theory's open coding procedures, organizational justice emerged as a topic that many community members seemed to be concerned with and were talking about with other targets (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I randomly identified ten of these members and printed all of their posts to the group since joining. This resulted in a total of 191 single-spaced pages of text, some dating back as far as 2004.

Sampling. The unit of analysis for this study was an episode. An episode is defined as, "a series of acts or moves which have tactical significance in accomplishing one's goals" (Newell & Stutman, 1987, p. 3). For years, communication scholars have used episodes to research social activity (see Farrell & Frentz, 1979 and Frentz & Farrell, 1976). I used an adapted version of the social confrontation episode identified by Newell and Stutman (1988). Social confrontation episodes typically include an initiation phase, an intermediate phase which looks at the follow-though or effects of the initiation step, and a resolution phase which ends the episode (see Newell & Stutman's Elaborated Model of Social Confrontation, 1988, p. 274). Initiation refers to one party acting, in some manner that hints at or directly demonstrates another party's actions, words, or behaviors were inappropriate. Typically, initiation results in a variety of reactions or follow-up interactions, these constitute the intermediate phase, and then eventually the episode closes with a resolution of some nature.

In the current study, I used a modified version of the social confrontation episode and systematically identified episodes in discussions of the ten members mentioned above. As stated above, online support groups are an appropriate data source when using methods like the social confrontation episode because they allow the researcher to uncover a succinct episode or get at the process of obtaining justice. These episodes served as the sample for this investigation. To be included, the episode had to contain 3 steps: 1) a description of taking action in the bullying situation, 2) a description of following through with the action initiated in step one, and 3) sense-making about the acting and following through. An example of step one or taking action, would be something like complaining about the bullying to a supervisor or filing a grievance against the bully. Step two or follow through, might be something like going to a follow-up meeting associated with the filed grievance or holding supervisors to their word about sanctioning the bully. And step three might be discussion of the supervisor's lack of action or discourse about feeling vindicated because the bully's activities had been exposed. In all, I identified 28 complete episodes in the entries of the 10 members that fit all three criteria and these episodes served as my sample.

Data Analysis

The episodes were first sorted into two main categories; productive and unproductive actions. In order to determine what constituted a productive and unproductive episode, I analyzed the sense-making step to decipher if the episode actually produced useful or constructive perceptions about the larger issue of workplace bullying. For example, a productive episode would be one where the target preserves and continues the fight against the bully and/or the organization in an attempt to gain some type of justice. Episodes were determined to be unproductive if sense-making alluded to the episode reaching a dead end in regards to justice or the larger problem of bullying. For example, an unproductive episode would be one where the target gives up, is fatalistic about justice being attained, gives in to the bully and/or organization,

or looks at the bullying in a positive light. From this analysis, twenty-one of the episodes were labeled productive and seven were labeled unproductive.

In further trying to sub-categorize and uncover patterns in the productive and unproductive justice episodes, my next step in data analysis was to determine what type of justice the target seemed to be seeking and/or what justice motive the target had in acting during each of the three steps of the episode. See Table I for the textual cues or words that were used to signal types of justice.

Table 1 - Types of justice and textual cues

Types of Justice	*Textual cues or words that were used to signals*
Distributive	Talked about "getting" or "wanting something done" or mentioned that they wanted a certain outcome like, "firing" or a positive end to a filed grievance or court case.
Procedural	Talked about the methods in the process of gaining an outcome, was the process "a sham" or "fairly conducted."
Interactional	Talked about the actual people involved in decision-making capacities in their situation and the words/adjectives used to describe them "competent" or "unfair" or how the person acted, "exaggerated" or "lied."
Restorative	Talked about the organization being responsible and repairing the harm done, "owned up" or "took responsibility" "admitted harm was done." Could also focus on healing because of the taking of responsibility or having a "breakthrough," "healing," or "feeling better."

I looked at each step in the episode individually using the textual cues and staying close to the text. In the action step, I asked myself questions like, "What type of action are they taking? Why? What does this tell me about justice?" In the follow-through step I asked questions like, "How are they following though? Why? What does this tell me about justice?" And in the sense-making step I asked, "What type of justice are they talking about? Did they get justice? How? Why? What are their goals in regards to justice?" Doing this simple analysis allowed me to uncover what kinds of justice I saw operating in each step in both the productive and unproductive episodes. After labeling each according to the types of justice sought or motive in obtaining justice, I then looked for patterns across both the productive and unproductive episodes to determine what was happening to the justice from taking action to sense-making about justice. These findings are further detailed and explained in the following section.

Findings and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to better understand productive and unproductive workplace bullying episodes and what they reveal about notions of justice in the workplace bullying situations. In the following section, I will first discuss the types of justice identified in the episodes, and then discuss the patterns uncovered in the analysis.

Types of Justice and Motives for Attaining Justice

In regards to RQ1 and RQ2, the targets talked about a wide variety of types of justice and motives for gaining justice throughout these episodes.   The targets most often talked about distributive justice and less often talked about procedural, interactional, and restorative justice.

In addition, the targets referenced an array of motives for obtaining justice in their situations. This section illustrates comments that reference these approaches for gaining justice and different processes that might lead to justice.

Distributive justice. The targets talked about striving for distributive justice throughout the episodes. This seemed to be a main goal of these targets as much of their talk revolved around possibly attaining, working towards, or contemplating this type of justice. For these targets, distributive justice meant acting to achieve certain outcomes in their situation. These outcomes varied widely from wanting the bully to be fired, getting as much out of the company as they could, and pursuing legal action against the company in hopes of getting a certain outcome. For example, one target commented, "I have had three offers of settlement but cannot agree to any cash amount before the matter of whether my hearing dog is allowed to accompany me into the workplace or not." This target clearly wants a certain outcome in her situation and is continuing to work towards it.

Procedural & interactional justice. The targets also talked about procedural and interactional justice but less often than distributive justice. These two approaches to justice were seen together and referenced in the negative. In regard to procedural justice, many targets' believed they were being treated unfairly in regards to processes and interactions in regards to the bullying situation. This perception seemed to be the reason for many of the targets' actions against the organization and/or bully. For example one target wrote, "They just exaggerated anything I did to make it look bad and didn't listen to anything I had to say…I still lost my job…They couldn't find anything so they fabricated." Here the target talks about being set-up by the company during her grievance and alludes to a lack of procedural fairness. In addition, she calls into question the character of the people responsible for her case and describes them as "exaggerating anything I did to make it look bad" clearly perceiving them as unfair individuals.

Restorative justice. Targets called on the organization to be responsible for their behavior and repair harm done. In these episodes, restorative justice seemed to focus on needs of the target and obligations of the organization. Some targets also talked about healing and trying to get past the abuse. In seeking restorative justice, targets commented on "staying the course" in an effort to speed the healing process. Other targets wrote about fighting to get their organization to admit the harm they felt the organization let happen, "I feel I have to take a stand, while I have a chance, to try to make my employers face the truth of the facts of the extent of distress that they have actively or passively caused. This way I can move on." These targets wrote about seeking a sense of fairness through distributive, procedural, interactional, and restorative processes. In addition, they voiced three different motives for seeking justice: vindication, retribution, and retaliation.

Vindication as a motive. The prominent motive voiced by the targets in the episodes was vindication. Many times in bullying situations, the target is made to seem like a troublemaker or as someone who is in the wrong and blamed for the situation (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Vindication is the idea that one is cleared from suspicion and free of blame. The targets talked about three types of vindication in regards to the bullying. These were internal vindication, external vindication, and collective vindication. Internal vindication referred to realizing or proving to oneself that you are right and blameless. After months of being bullied by a co-worker one target feared for her safety and called the police. She seemed to be internally vindicated or proved to herself that she was not just imagining things, "They sent out an officer and he was so nice, like they had seen this thing before." After talking with the police, the target felt more empowered to continue resisting the bully and trying to expose the situation by setting

up a microphone in order to catch the bully in the act. External vindication is the external world, especially the organization, finding out or being shown that the target was right and is blameless in the situation. One target wrote, "I gave them all documentation on what has been happening and after they read it, they changed their tune and asked me what I wanted." Collective vindication had to do with showing the world that people are indeed bullied, these situations do happen, and the targets are not to blame. Collective vindication was only talked about as something that these targets were striving for, but had not yet been obtained. One target wrote, "I suspect that we all need to work towards zero tolerance and making the fight against workplace bullying a major priority in our culture, in our respective countries." Vindication, or being shown to be right or blameless, was a prime motive espoused about by these targets.

Retribution as a motive. Another motive the targets voiced in the episodes was one of retribution or wanting punishment for the wrongs they had suffered. Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, (1992) contend that the need for retribution typically signals the perception of severe injustice. Specifically, the targets mentioned three types of retribution, self-enacted retribution to punish the organization, self-enacted retribution to punish the bully, and company-enacted retribution to punish the bully. Self-enacted retribution to punish the *organizatio*n was something that was done by the target to punish the organization for harm done. For example, one target wrote about taking his company to an employment tribunal, "So off to the courts we will go and I don't mind. The publicity this will create is something my employers can't buy :) and why would I want them to miss out! Let the world know who the poor employers are and what they are doing." Self-enacted retribution to punish the bully was something that was done to punish the *bully* for harm done. One target talked about flaming or attacking her bully verbally through email and others wrote about cutting off communication with their bullies as a form of punishment. And company-enacted retribution to punish the bully was something the target wanted the organization to do to punish the bully. For example, this target wanted their company to punish the bully but the company did nothing, "The company has a harassment policy yet chooses to ignore it …after I resign the accused bully is still in place and has little comeback from the whole ordeal." Although the targets wrote about being motivated by seeing the organization or the bully get what they deserved or their just punishment, some also seemed to be motivated by retaliation, or hurting/harming the bully and/or organization.

Retaliation as a motive. The targets also wrote about retaliating or purposely trying to hurt or harm someone in return for harm done. The targets talked about using or wanting to use two types of retaliation tactics, retaliation for the target and retaliation to hurt the organization or bully. In the first type, retaliation for the target, the target expresses that the action is motivated by them possibly getting something out of the situation for themselves. For example, one target talked how it would make her feel good to go back to work so that she could hurt her bullies by making their work lives hard. The second type was to simply hurt or harm the organization or the bully. One target wrote in regards to harming their bullies, "It has crossed my mind to punch in the face all of the bullies that make my life hard – and I consider myself to able to punch hard…" These targets voiced three specific motives for acting in their situation; vindication, retaliation, and retribution and wrote about seeking four specific types of justice; distributive, procedural, interactional, and restorative. The next section will address RQ3 and detail how these motives and types of justice were talked about in the productive and unproductive episodes.

Patterns in the Unproductive Episodes

Seven out of the twenty-eight identified episodes were determined to be unproductive. As I discussed in the method section, an unproductive episode was determined to be

unproductive if, in the last step (sense-making about justice), the target gives up, is fatalistic about their situation, gives in to the bully and/or organization, or looks at the bullying in a positive light. Essentially, these episodes do not go anywhere nor help the larger problem of workplace bullying. Although there were only seven episodes to examine, these exemplars proved to be similar and had clear patterns in all three steps. In this section, I will discuss the patterns identified during analysis of the unproductive episodes and give examples from target's online blog entries.

Step 1: Taking action. During the first step, taking action, in an unproductive episode the targets typically talked about taking action because they were seeking distributive justice or certain outcomes they saw as fair. They talked about getting distributive justice through retribution or punishing the organization and/or the bully for what they had done. The targets talked about both company enacted retribution and self-enacted retribution against the organization. Company-enacted retribution referred to punishment preformed by the company. One target wrote that she was reporting the bullying so that the bully is, "forced to leave or stop" clearly putting the impetus of punishing the bully on the organization. It was obvious, after reading these entries, that many targets did see the organization as partially and sometimes even fully responsible for the bullying situation and the abuse. Because of this, many targets wrote about wanting self-enacted retribution where the organization is punished for their role in the situation. For example, one target said, "I had some great news…we can infact at the moment at least do them for unfair dismissal! Get them for everything I can…" The "get them for everything I can" language demonstrates the target wants to punish the organization by making them compensate monetarily.

Step 2: Follow-through. The second step or follow-through seemed very bland in the unproductive episodes. The targets followed up with complaining again, going to a grievance procedure follow-up meeting, submitting documents to help prove claims of bullying, or talking with supportive friends and family. After reporting the bullying to her boss one target followed up by documenting her abuse on a daily basis so she would have proof. The targets, in this step, primarily talked about still seeking a certain outcome or distributive justice and occasionally alluded to the idea they weren't being dealt with fairly in regards to interactions and procedures in connection with the actions they took in step one. One person even alluded to the fact they felt justice may not be possible in their situation. The target wrote, "Maybe I can at least get another month of salary before things go sour."

Step 3: Sense-making about justice. In the last step, the target's tone gets more fatalistic. Although the targets are still talking about distributive justice or certain outcomes in this step, the tone has changed and is even more negative. In all of the unproductive episodes the targets either talked about being in a catch22 where they couldn't win, talked about distributive justice not being possible, or felt they would not get distributive justice so they settled. For example, one person wrote about distributive justice not being attained, "they contacted my attorney and said they wanted to take care of the problem. Head Fake! It was not true…the principal is refusing to take care of serious problems." Another wrote, "words were considered inappropriate yet nothing was done." Still another target wrote about settling for very little money and not continuing the fight because she knew that she would not win, "we agreed that going to Tribunal would be daft because I could lose money so I didn't go to court." Although this target received a small settlement sum, she lost the larger battle. She was still fired; the bullying in her organization was not recognized or dealt with which means the bullying could continue, only with a new target.

The unproductive episodes seemed to point to the idea that these targets had very individual, active, and negative responses to the bullying (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992). The unproductive episodes begin with action being taken by the target in an effort to gain distributive justice and punish the organization or the bully. The action is followed-through in various ways but the language lacks intensity. The targets just reiterated the idea that they want certain outcomes or distributive justice. The last step, sense-making about justice, got even more fatalistic with the targets writing about distributive justice not being possible or likely. Some were contemplating or had already resigned or settled and got what they could. Interestingly, there is no mention of any other type of justice besides distributive in the unproductive episodes. Certain "fair" outcomes along with some early mention of wanting the bully or organization to be punished are the only motives described in these episodes. In addition, all of the unproductive episodes, except one, were first or second attempts at action and attaining justice. This reveals, at least in this sample, that most of the early attempts at justice do not go the way targets want them too and many times fail.

Patterns in the Productive Episodes

The majority of episodes in the sample were determined to be productive which means that during the sense-making step the target preserves and continues the fight against the bully and/or organization. The productive episodes proved to be much more varied in terms of justice being sought and ways of seeking justice. The last two steps proved to be very different from the unproductive episodes and could be a determining factor if an episode ends up productive. In this section, I will discuss the patterns identified during the analysis of the productive episodes and give examples from targets' online blog entries.

Step 1: Taking action. The first step, taking action, seemed to be very similar to the unproductive episodes. The targets took action in very similar ways including complaining to management, filing a grievance or harassment claim, and documenting abuse. However, there were some different types of actions including withholding communication from the bully, returning to the workplace after medical leave, and even sending a scathing email to the bully. The targets motive for acting was also quite similar to the unproductive episodes. The majority of targets acted in their situation because they were seeking distributive justice or were reacting to perceived procedural or interactional injustice. Again, like the unproductive episodes, the targets seemed to want retribution or punishment for the bully or the organization. The majority of targets wrote about punishing the organization. One target wrote about deciding to take her organization to court, "…my employers took an action that was completely 'out of order' and that was the final straw." In another episode an employee writes about punishing the company by filing a grievance, "Although I complained and unofficial action was supposed to be taken, the behaviors towards me became worse…I took out a grievance." Others talked about using company-enacted retribution such as contacting the human resources department or asking the company to punish the bully.

Two new types of justice motives appeared in the taking action step that were not present in the unproductive episodes. These were more direct types of actions; self-enacted retribution and retaliation against the bully. Although only mentioned once, self-enacted retribution or punishment enacted by the target against the bully is a more direct and purposeful way of acting against the bullying. This target punished her bullies by withholding communication, "I put distance between myself and their sphere of influence. In other words, I made a positive decision to avoid them and ignore them." Retaliation or an action motivated by wanting to hurt or harm was also seen once in this step. One talked about finally taking action against the bullies

by sending a scathing email to them. Although there were two instances of more direct ways of dealing with the bullying, this step was more like the unproductive "taking action" step. However, in examining step two or "follow-through," this proved to be very different from the follow-though step in the unproductive episodes.

Step 2: Follow-through.   When the targets wrote about following-though with their actions they wrote about a variety of ways of trying to gain justice. Vindication and retaliation were written about most often but retribution was also mentioned. The targets also seemed to still be striving for distributive outcomes. For example, in one episode a target writes about getting changes instituted at her organization, "the employers know I am rocking the boat and am trying to show their procedures, their lack of training, the autocratic management styles in some departments and so forth have got to be addressed." Here the target seems to be talking about what Salin (2003) labeled as "enabling structures", or those structures within the organization that make it possible or easy for workplace bullying to occur. And another writes that they can only accept certain outcomes in their situation, "At the moment, my case seems to pivot on the fact that I cannot consider accepting any offer until the matter regarding my hearing dog accompanying me into the workplace has been decided."   These examples demonstrate that distributive outcomes are very important to these targets and are a main reason they are continuing with their fight. However, in the same episode mentioned above, the target also mentions restorative justice as a motive to continue fighting along with distributive justice, "Also, I am very determined to make my employers face the facts that they have caused or allowed great injury to my health due to discrimination, targetization, and bullying that has occurred in the workplace." Here, the target is calling on the company to be responsible for their part in her abuse. As mentioned previously, restorative justice could be a positive tool in helping targets heal, and help to change organizational environments where workplace bullying thrives.

When following through, the targets talked about being vindicated in certain ways or desiring vindication.   In this step, the targets wrote about being vindicated in two ways, internally and externally. In regard to internal vindication, one target wrote about secretly tape-recording meetings at work where the bullies were present to prove to herself that she was indeed being bullied and it was not all in her mind, Another target hinted at one day being externally vindicated by the documentation she had accumulated, or showing the external world that she was right all along, "They are covering their backs and believed I would never know the facts they have been twisting – I hope they have been told I now have so much documentation."

In addition, retaliation and retribution were also used in the follow-though step. Retaliation was used four times and retribution was only used once however the increased use of these very direct tactics demonstrate to the organization and bullies that targets are serious about justice in their situation and are using a variety of follow-up tactics to try to get it. When retaliating in this step the targets talked about retaliating for themselves and retaliating to get even with the bully for harm done. When retaliating for himself, one target talked about getting back at his bullies by staying at his job, "I wanted to irritate the low-life I work with because it amuses me." Another target wrote about warning her organization that she will retaliate if she is forced to be in the same space as the bully, "I take a bottle of water mixed with salt into the workplace each day…I have told present management I will drink the salted water, throw-up and that should prevent me to ever to have to face this moron again."

Step 3: Sense-making about justice. In the last step, or sense-making about justice, the targets continue to concentrate on vindication and write even more about seeking and attaining distributive and restorative justice. When sense-making about justice these targets concentrated

on striving and gaining vindication. Vindication has progressed from being mostly internal in step 2 to being mostly external and collective in this step. This is promising as it demonstrates to the target and other targets that they are actually getting somewhere in acting against the bullying and some even see it as a small win that helps them continue the fight. One target writes about being externally vindicated and achieving a sense of restorative justice by the Superintendent of schools after she tells her about the bullying situation she has been dealing with for the last year:

> This woman who I have known all of 20 minutes looks at me and says, 'I am sorry Julie.' In all the time I have been in this sick district that is the first time anyone with any authority has said something that human to me…she continued to say, 'I don't want to lose a good teacher like you. I don't want you to leave.'

Another target talks about being externally vindicated after the bully slipped up and showed his true colors through an email, "I am also reaching the stage where I want to go all the way to get some justice for what happened to me, and to stop the bully from ever being able to do this again to anyone else." As the quote demonstrates, because of this small win and external vindication, the target feels empowered to continue the fight against the company and the bully. In this same vein, other targets talk about collective vindication as a main goal and one that will do good for other targets:

> I feel the same as you, we must expose and resist + it is essential we make this a vocal stand…I hope that you find a way to make those that are meant to uphold justice support the truth…and light a fire that never dies, but blasts the right of other targets of bullying into victory upon victory.

As with the other steps, distributive justice is still a main focus for the targets, however, unlike the unproductive episodes, the sense-making about distributive justice is very positive and some even write about achieving a bit of distributive justice. One target writes about how she won by being able to stay at her job even though the bullies tried to force her out. Although only a few other targets talked about "winning the war", others did talk about winning small battles that could help them continue fighting for justice.

Interestingly, the targets talk more about seeking restorative justice in this step than any of the steps in both the productive and unproductive episodes. One target talked about seeking restorative justice and wanted her organization to be responsible and repair the harm done, "I feel I have to take a stand, while I have a chance, to try to make my employers face the truth of the facts of the extent of distress that they have actively or passively caused. This way I can move on." This target clearly wanted her company to face up to the harm they have let happen and in doing this some needed healing will be provided to the target. Another target writes about restorative justice after mediation with her company that seems very similar to the mediations talked about in the restorative justice literature:

> It appears changes have been implemented at the company as a direct result of what has happened to me and others are planned to be carried out in the near future. I have been given these in writing. I have also received a written and verbal apology and a reference. I will carry on the fight from a campaigning angle. Everyone has a different case and need to do what is the best for their own case.

This target seems to have obtained restorative justice in her case, at least in regards to the organization taking responsibility for their role in the abuse. The target talks about being given an apology and is promised changes to be made by the organization. Overall, the productive episodes used more varied tactics and motives for obtaining justice and also went beyond just trying to obtain distributive justice to fighting for restorative justice. This signals that although

targets started out responding to the injustice in very individual, active, and negative ways, they ended the episode seeking more positive ways of dealing with the injustice like vindication and restorative justice (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992).

Discussion, Implications, and Limitations

Analysis of the workplace bullying productive and unproductive episodes revealed these targets sought many different types of justice at different times throughout the episode and had a wide array of motives when trying to attain justice. The targets talked about distributive, procedural, interactional, and restorative justice. Procedural and interactional justice were most often mentioned together and were usually mentioned in the negative. Although distributive justice was overwhelmingly the type of justice sought in these episodes, restorative justice was also mentioned in the last steps of the productive episodes. The targets also wrote about many different justice motives including vindication, retribution, and retaliation. Vindication was mentioned most often and was seen as a main motive and goal in the productive episodes. In addition, the unproductive and productive episodes looked similar in the taking action step but very different in the follow-though and sense-making about justice steps. These findings point to several practical and conceptual conclusions and implications.

Differences Between the Productive and Unproductive Episodes

An interesting difference between the productive and unproductive episodes was the giving and taking of advice. Advice was a large part of the productive justice episodes; giving advice, taking advice, thanking others for advice, and reporting on how the situation turned out after using advice. Some of the things targets asked for advice on were how to handle their legal cases or company grievance procedures, how to obtain optimal union assistance, and what to do in emergency situations. They also offered little tidbits of advice while going though different situations in resisting the bully and fighting the organization. There seems to be a link between the productive episodes and using the online community for information gathering purposes. Although this study was not aimed at uncovering how targets used the online community, this seems a fruitful area for future research. The sheer volume of advice, in all of its forms found in the productive episodes, and the utter lack of advice in the unproductive episodes, warrants further investigation.

Although both the productive and unproductive episodes were very similar in the first step of taking action, they were very different when following through and sense-making about justice. Instead of fatalistically framing their chances of gaining justice, sense-making in the productive episodes had a more hopeful tone of attaining distributive and restorative justice. In addition, the productive episodes included a variety of tactics to obtain justice including various forms of retribution, vindication, and retaliation. Interestingly, although the episodes all started out trying to get punishment for the bully or the organization, which is something that is meant to hurt the other party, only the productive episodes moved to seeking vindication, something that could help the target and the bully and/or organization (Ahmed, 2001). In fact, by the end of the productive episode, vindication, in varying forms, was one of the target's main goals or something they had already attained and were celebrating. Vindication has been seen as a productive way to help offenders acknowledge their shame, and shame acknowledgment has been linked to a reduced risk of being a schoolyard bully or a bully target (Ahmed, 2001; Harris, et. al, 2004).   This research may translate to recommendations for organizations when dealing with workplace bullying. It seems, from this research, that using methods like mediation aimed at restorative justice and facilitating the vindication of the target could help organizations productively deal with the larger problem of workplace bullying. This seems a productive area

for future research as vindication is obviously a motive voiced by these targets and it could help organizations plagued with allegations of bullying.

Justice as a Process

There are many findings in this study that suggest striving and attaining justice may be a process or a series of actions, rather than a one shot attempt. To begin, the unproductive episodes in this study were all either first or second attempts at acting in the bullying situation. The targets represented in the unproductive episodes, acted in an attempt to gain distributive justice by punishing the organization, and end the episode talking about how justice may not be possible or how they didn't get anywhere with their action. However, if they try again and again, these targets were able to at least have some productive episodes in their fight. In fact, only one person ended up having no productive episodes after having unproductive episodes. This is a hopeful sign and suggests that if these targets carried on and acted again, even though the episode was unproductive, they eventually (after one or two more tries) had productive episodes. Although this finding can't be generalized to all targets, it is at least a jumping off point to further investigate this phenomenon.

In addition, the evolution of the productive and unproductive episodes suggests that justice is itself a process. As I described above, the unproductive episodes were predominantly first and second attempts so when looking at the third, fourth and subsequent attempts, the majority are productive and look different than the unproductive episodes. It seems, at least in these episodes, the seeking of justice evolves from just wanting fair outcomes and trying to get them through punishment, to wanting larger more all encompassing outcomes like restorative justice and vindication as seen in step three of the productive episode. This evolution points to the idea that the types of justice sought may change over time as a result of 1) the actions used in obtaining justice and 2) the outcomes that result from these actions. This seems a fruitful area for future research and should be investigated with a wider sample of justice episodes.

Some obvious limitations of this study are the sample size and sample frame. Although the online community used in this study did have a sizeable amount of members, it is likely some targets of bullying might not have access to the Internet or these types of websites. This, of course, limits the generalizability of the findings. However, they are still heuristic none the less. These findings should be seen as a jumping off point for many important future research endeavors on justice and workplace bullying and could serve as the first step in uncovering very important information that could help targets and organizations address bullying in the workplace. Future studies should not only use online communities but also interviews, organizational documents and even participant observation to further explore these issues. Communication researchers' attention to this phenomenon could uncover various coping and prevention strategies that would be highly beneficial for organizations and employees affected by workplace bullying. As the workplace grows less civil and the world continues to become more fragmented, a more in-depth understanding of workplace bullying and issues of justice could mean a happier, more productive workplace for all.

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