

A review of the literature on bullies from White, S., (2007) A psychodynamic perspective of workplace bullying scenarios. *Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the West of England for a PhD.* (Available on restricted access from September 2010).

Much is written about the character of bullies but few researchers can claim to have actually talked to any (Rayner, 1999). One reason for this is the reluctance of bullies to admit to their behaviour (Zapf et al. 1996). Information about workplace bullies generally comes from reports by victims and anecdotal evidence. Researchers into bullying in schools however, provide some interesting insights into the character of the bully from their observations of children.

Within the workplace, the debate about the motives of bullies has centred round their roles (Rayner, 1997) and personality characteristics (Field, 1996). British studies consistently identified bullies as being in superior position in an overwhelming majority of cases (Hoel and Cooper, 2000a; Rayner 1997). Rayner (1997) found that 83% of bullies were managers, 15% were co-workers.

Personality factors are cited as reasons for bullies bullying (Seigne, 1998, Gregersen, 2003 and Field, 1996). Seigne (1998) found that victims believed that the bully's difficult personality was ultimately responsible for them having been bullied. Field (1996) has been very consistent in his opinion that bullies are psychopaths. In his classification of psychopathic disorders, Field (1996) includes a person who is unable to conform to the rules of society, has an inability to tolerate minor frustrations, has a tendency to act impulsively or recklessly, has an incapacity for forming stable relationships and fails to learn from past experiences, however unpleasant. Although Field (1996) bases his diagnosis on his extensive experience of working with victims and managers in organisations, his view that bullies are 'psychopaths' has not been taken seriously in the academic field. Sutton (2001) suggests that whilst not all bullies are budding psychopaths, the possibility of emotionless manipulators is obviously a serious one in a school environment. Adams (1996) notes that bullies are charming to some individuals and evil to others. They have a Jekyll and Hyde character. Since bullying comes in different forms and shapes and evolves in a range of different situations it is highly unlikely that a single personality profile would be common to all bullies (Zapf and Einarsen, 2003).

Crawford (1999) likens the bully to a tyrant, and in doing so, takes the discussion about possible motives of the bully from the perspective of the individual's personality to the interpersonal dimension.

'They (tyrants) depend on people giving up; feeling so demoralized that they cannot be bothered to fight. In the cycle of demoralisation, the doubts about oneself, one's motives, what course of action to take, undermines confidence. This plays into the tyrant's hands. They rely on the victim feeling that it is not worth bothering to take action' (Crawford, 1999, p 90).

Bullies rely on victims not taking action and also on the audience playing a part too. O'Connell et al. (1999) found that a group of 5-12 year old children spent one fifth of their time in the playground, joining in as henchmen to the bully to abuse the victim and actively model the bully, and 54% of their time reinforcing the bullying behaviour by passively attending to an episode.

It has been found that teachers seldom intervene to stop bullying (Craig et al., 2000a). Teachers intervened in approximately one in six playground episodes and one in five classroom episodes (Craig et al., 2000a). The authors suggest that the low frequency of intervention provides a tacit message to bullies that there is little discouragement and minimal risk in harassing their peers.

Throughout the literature there is a consensus of opinion about the persistent nature of bullying (Leymann, 1996) and the difficulty in finding effective ways of curbing bullying behaviour (Sheehan, 1999). In the UNISON survey (Rayner, 1999) 84% of respondents thought that the bully had bullied previously and 73% thought managers knew about the on-going behaviour. Long term bullying by its nature appears to be very persistent and resistant to influence by the common procedures in school (Sharp et al., 2000).

A reason suggested for the lack of intervention by the audience is that bullies generate fear within the social group. 95% of the respondents in the UNISON survey suggested that workers were too scared to report it and that bullies could get away with it. Sutton (2001) suggests that the motivation of the bully is related to the fact that in many cases it works and the bully is rewarded. The bully seems to gain pleasure from his, or her, actions. Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) suggest that most of the unique features of proactively aggressive children converge on their 'values' and 'valuing' processes regarding aggression, namely 'it's easy, it works and it makes me feel good'. One bully, a chef, claimed:

'If I can make a remark that puts someone down, it makes me feel powerful' (Adams, 1996, p. 89).

This bully also seemed unaware of the impact he was having on his victims.

'It certainly never occurred to me that I bullied anyone, although I did notice that one chef was so knocked flat after I'd had a go at him that I couldn't get any work out of him for the rest of the day. I'd see him shaking all right, but I didn't realise it would destroy him' (Adams, 1996, p. 88).

Any sense of empathy regarding the costs to victims and any sense that deliberately victimising others, in the pursuit of desired instrumental gains, is not morally wrong, is missing (Arsenio and Lemerise, 2001).

Various reasons are suggested for a bully's lack of awareness of the damaging impact they have on others. Many bullies will not view their own behaviour as bullying, but rather as a reasonable reaction to a difficult and tense situation (Zapf and Einarsen, 2003). In a study to examine the self concept of teenagers who were identified as bullies, it was found that boys in particular have a positive view of themselves in terms of social competence and self esteem (Johnson and Lewis, 1999). Randall (1997) has found that bullies conceptualise themselves as being superior and powerful and have a high opinion of themselves. Bjorkqvist and Osterman (1999) claim that bullies, both boys and girls, score highly on dominance and idealising dominant behaviour, wanting to be more dominant than they think they are.

Another reason proposed for the lack of awareness is the bully's lack of emotional control, for example a supervisor venting his anger by regularly yelling at one of his subordinates (Zapf and Einarsen, 2003). Bullies are found to be impulsive and dominated by feelings. Bryne (1999) suggests that bullies follow their own urges and are careless of social rules. Johnson and Lewis (1999) suggest that it is possible that such children are unaware of, or do not care about, the effect of their behaviour on others or that they enjoy their power.

A further explanation is offered by Randall (1997). Drawing on his work with children Randall (1997) suggests that bullies do not process social information accurately and seem unable to make realistic judgments about the intentions of other people and view the intentions as hostile. The bully then seeks revenge and the revenge motive allows bullies to hold a very favourable attitude towards the use of violence and other forms of aggression to solve problems. Sutton (2001) found that pro-bullying attitudes were correlated with a desire for social success factor that incorporated a deliberate lack of effort, or hiding of effort, in class. Zapf and Einarsen (2003) suggest that workplace bullying might also be a consequence of a lack of self reflection and perspective taking.

Arsenio and Lemerise (2001) in their discussion on the variations in emotional responses of bullies, suggest that bullies suffer less from inaccurate social reasoning than from a comfort with using aggression to obtain desirable material and psychological outcomes, even when it requires victimising and harming others. Sutton et al. (1999) suggest that bullying is less about ignoring or denying the feelings of those that they are hurting and more about self preservation. Sutton et al. (1999) used a set of stories to access the cognitions and emotions of 7-10 year olds and found that bullies performed well in understanding emotions in the stories. The authors suggest that if bullies possess these skills they would be at an advantage when choosing to tease someone or bully in other ways. In physical bullying situations, social cognition would be of use in avoiding detection or in choosing the most effective time and method for each situation, in terms of maximising the victims' vulnerability and minimising the chance of hurt to themselves (Sutton et al., 1999).

When bullies are the targets of provocative behaviours, they appear to have the same concerns with moral intentions as their peers but when their needs conflict with those of others, bullies are willing to initiate intentional aggression that they would otherwise consider unacceptable (Arsenio and Lemerise, 2001). Most non-aggressive children want to be liked and accepted, or at least not disliked and rejected by their larger circle, however, in contrast, bullies seem to define competence in the narrower sense. If an act of aggression or victimisation effectively produces a desired outcome, then that act is seen to be competent (Arsenio and Lemerise, 2001).

Although they seem to get their 'kicks' from bullying others, bullies have been found to be more unhappy at school than other students and to report feeling alone (Forero et al. 1999). Bullies are found to be prone to depression and have higher levels of suicidal ideation than victims (Katiiala-Heino et al., 1999).

In the literature on workplace bullying much of the data on the motives of bullies comes from victims. One of the most common reasons given by victims to explain the motives of bullies is envy. 68% of the victims in Vartia's study (1996) identified envy as an important reason for why they were bullied. Seigne (1998) also found that victims thought that the overriding motive was envy. Adams (1992) suggests that where you find envy you will find the potential for bullying. Gregersen (2003), in telephone and postal surveys with victims, found that envy was chosen by 50% of the sample as triggers of bullying. Gregersen (2003) suggests that envy can motivate perpetrators as it is a desire to get control of something in the possession of somebody else or because the other is seen as a potential threat to their interests. Gregersen (2003) suggests that the perpetrators can gain profit from causing damage to the other, even if he, or she, achieves no other gain.

Crawford (1999) conceptualises bullying in terms of 'stealing' which he suggests involves the stealing of ideas, plagiarism and stealing the chance of promotion from a colleague and the removal of opportunities of work for the victim. The aggressive nature of the theft leaves the person feeling vulnerable and invaded just as if one had been robbed. Crawford (1999) suggests that the bully may think: 'if I can't win respect because of who I am, I must try to get what I want by controlling people'. Although Crawford (1999) does not make a direct link between stealing and envy in this paper, as he was from a psychoanalytical background, it could be assumed that he was referring to envy in his discussion.

There is evidence that the role of the bully, like that of the victim, is established early in life. Sourander and Helstela (2000) in a longitudinal study of bullying and victimisation, found that about half the boys who bullied at the age of 16 had been bullying at the age of 8. On the contrary amongst girls, only one out of four of those who bullied at age 16, had been bullying at the age of 8. A high level of self-reported depressive symptoms at age 8 was associated with both bullying and victimisation eight years later.

Various writers suggest that an explanation for the behaviour of bullies could lie with the family background. Rigby and Slee (1991) found that the bullies come from dysfunctional families in which there was little sense of love, support and belonging. Bullies see their families in terms of power relationships with siblings and family members (Smith, 1999). It seems almost inevitable that the child from this background who perceives relationships in terms of battles for power will re-enact the power relationships in school. Children who bully others may be hot tempered and come from families lacking warmth, in which violence is common and discipline inconsistent (Olweus, 1993).

Johnson and Lewis (1999) attribute the perceived social competence of the typical bully to a 'thick skin' developed through interacting with an aggressive dysfunctional family environment which disposes them to enjoy aggression and perceive it as the norm, combined with a lack of empathy for others. Johnson and Lewis (1999) suggest that children who have not had their aggressive tendencies inhibited, or whose family have modelled aggressive behaviour (all of which apply to the typical bully) do not have the same awareness of right and wrong as do other children.

There is evidence to show that it is not only the nature of aggression shown in the home which impacts on the child but also the relationships between mother and father. Christie-Mizell (2003) found that inter-parental discord significantly lowers a child's self-concept and heightens bullying. If a child has a higher self-concept then parental discord has less of an effect. Research showed that low father involvement and low mother involvement contributed significantly and independently to bullying behaviour in adolescents (Flouri and Buchanan, 2003). Even after divorce the father's involvement continues to protect against

children's externalising problems. Involvement of fathers is more important when mother involvement is low rather than high. The impact of family life is long term. Fathers who were aggressive and bullied at school are likely to have sons who were bullies (Farrington, 1993).

Children who felt ignored or sidelined by a parent figure can also develop a psychological strategy whereby aggression is an attempt to win love (Adams, 1996). Adams (1996) suggests that the fury of being ignored is dealt with by provoking an angry response which seems preferable to no response at all. In adult life, bullying can be a continuation of this pattern and reflects an individual's fear that they are not lovable. Getting at work colleagues is part of the adult strategy to evoke some sort of response.

'I would even go so far as to say that people deprived of love in childhood may have a greater need of power or even a greater need to be famous where ambitions are linked to gaining power, to compensate for the powerlessness they felt as a child' (Adams, 1996, p.74).

The literature shows the importance of the early years of childhood in the formation of both the bully and the victim. However, from their backgrounds they have learned different survival strategies, the bully to dominate and control and to take from others for self-survival, and the victim to be passive. Both are found to experience forms of depression, the bully more so than the victim. Thylefors (1987) sees similarities between the bully and the bullied in terms of narcissistic, authoritarian and paranoid character traits.

From the literature, mainly from bullying in schools, a picture emerges of the bully as someone who desires social success, can read the emotional responses of others but lacks empathy, is envious of others and will harm others to get what he, or she, wants through control and domination. Envy is considered to be a key motive in the literature on workplace bullying but little explanation is given for this. It is acknowledged that bullies need to dominate and their aggression comes from their early childhood experiences yet this knowledge is explored very much in isolation from the bully's relationship with the victim. I suggest there is a need for an exploration of the motive of envy and a need to gain a deeper understanding of the motives of the bullies within the context of their relationships with victims and others.

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