The Relationships Between Workplace Bullying by Graduate Faculty with Graduate Students' Burnout and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

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BRIEF REPORT

The Relationships Between Workplace Bullying by Graduate Faculty with Graduate Students' Burnout and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

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This study examined the relationships between faculty workplace bullying with graduate students' burnout and organizational citizenship behaviors. Graduate students (N = 272) completed a self-report questionnaire measuring the degree to which faculty bully them at work (i.e., through belittlement, punishment, managerial misconduct, exclusion) along with reports of their student burnout (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, professional efficacy) and use of organizational citizenship behaviors (i.e., helping, civic virtue, sportsmanship). Results of canonical correlations revealed that faculty bullying was related positively to graduate student burnout and was related inversely to organizational citizenship behaviors.

Keywords: Graduate Student Bullying; Organizational Citizenship Behaviors; Student Burnout; Workplace Bullying

When graduate students experience positive involvement and socialization in their departments, they are better prepared for their professional lives (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). However, the unfortunate fact is that some graduate students are mistreated,

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and some are bullied by faculty members (Hickson & Roebuck, 2009); over 20% of graduate students report having been subjected to bullying by their faculty (Yamada, Cappadocia, & Pepler, 2014). Faculty do engage in bullying at work, often from a top-down perspective where senior faculty bully junior faculty and also engage in peer-to-peer bullying (Braxton, Proper, & Bayer, 2011; Raineri, Frear, & Edmonds, 2011). This study examined another type of top-down workplace bullying by faculty, specifically the consequences derived from the faculty bullying of graduate students.

Workplace bullying includes "emotional abuse, social ostracism, interactional terrorizing, and other destructive communication that erode organizational health and damages employee well-being" (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012, p. 5). Bullying at work typically involves a power disparity between workers and includes persistent and aggressive patterns of communication that escalate over time (Kassing & Waldron, 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik & Fletcher, 2013), which results in stress at work (Balducci, Fraccoroli, & Schaufeli, 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007) and job dissatisfaction (Glasø & Notelaers, 2012). Although multiple types of actions ranging from general discourteousness to physical violence constitute workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009), Simons, Stark, and DeMarco (2011) identified four main types of bullying behaviors at work: *belittlement* (e.g., intimidating, shouting, teasing, gossiping, insulting), *punishment* (e.g., persistent criticism, accusations, reminders of errors, threats, suggesting termination), *managerial misconduct* (e.g., unmanageable workload, impossible projects, excessive monitoring, demeaning tasks), and *exclusion* (e.g., withholding information, being ignored, excluding opinions). These bullying behaviors have the potential to disrupt graduate students' focus on their education since most graduate students have concerns about being properly socialized and turn to faculty for help (Myers, 1996–1997).

Graduate students who are bullied may suffer from burnout, which is "a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy" (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p. 397). *Exhaustion* is characterized by fatigue, stress, and a lack of energy due to a drain on emotional resources. *Cynicism* refers to having a distant or indifferent attitude toward work in general. *Professional efficacy* refers to having social and occupational accomplishments; a lack of professional efficacy reflects reduced personal accomplishments and a lower rate of success in job-related tasks (Schaufeli, Martínez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Because workplace bullying leads to stress and burnout for employees (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012), and considering that graduate students are new departmental citizens who expect faculty to provide career and psychosocial support (Mansson & Myers, 2012), it is our contention that bullied students would also experience burnout symptoms in their graduate program. Therefore, the first hypothesis was offered:

> H1: *Faculty bullying of graduate students in the workplace (i.e., belittlement, punishment, managerial misconduct, exclusion) will be positively related to student burnout (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, professional efficacy) in their graduate program.*

Graduate students are generally expected by faculty to be departmental citizens and become integrated into academic life (Golde, 2005). An ideal way of becoming a departmental citizen is through enacting organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), which refer to worker "performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place" (Organ, 1997, p. 95). Podsakoff, Ahearne, and MacKenzie (1997) distinguished between the OCB dimensions of helping, civic virtue, and sportsmanship. *Helping* encompasses a broad set of behaviors, including being altruistic, courteous, and peacekeeping among organizational members. *Civic virtue* refers to responsibly participating within and being concerned about the welfare of the organization. *Sportsmanship* refers to tolerating work circumstances that are not ideal by not complaining or creating conflict over trivial matters. When employees enact OCBs they tend to be more productive and efficient at work (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009), satisfied with and committed to the organization (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Organ & Ryan, 1995), and engaged in less counterproductive work behavior (Dalal, 2005). Because we hypothesized that bullied students will experience burnout, and considering that burnout both demotivates and disengages college students (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Stoeber, Childs, Hayward, & Feast, 2011), it is likely that these bullied students may also be unwilling to put in extra effort as departmental citizens in the form of OCBs. Therefore, the second hypothesis was offered:

> H2: *Faculty bullying of graduate students in the workplace (i.e., belittlement, punishment, managerial misconduct, exclusion) will be negatively related to organizational citizenship behaviors (i.e., helping, civic virtue, sportsmanship) in their graduate program.*

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants included 272 adults (men = 87, women = 183, nonreports = 2) who were currently enrolled as graduate students in American universities. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 60 years ($M = 29.40$, $SD = 7.85$). Two hundred and nineteen participants ($n = 219$) were enrolled full-time, while 53 participants were enrolled part-time. Most participants identified as White/Caucasian ($n = 236$). Participants reported an average length of enrollment of 3.51 semesters ($SD = 3.19$). Over 80 disciplines/content areas were represented.

After obtaining IRB approval, participants were solicited online via graduate school and professional listservs, as well as social networking sites. Individuals willing to participate were directed to the online questionnaire. After providing consent, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire related to their graduate education experience.

Instruments

Workplace bullying was assessed using the *Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised* (NAQ-R) (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001). This self-report instrument measures an

individual's perception that one has been the target of bullying within the workplace over the last 6 months. In the current study, participants were asked to respond based on their experience with the professors of their graduate program. Responses were solicited on a Likert-type scale: *never* (0) *now and then* (1), *monthly* (2), *weekly* (3), and *daily* (4). The NAQ-R consists of four subscales: belittlement (six items; $M = 1.19$; $SD = .39$, $\alpha = .82$), punishment (six items; $M = 1.17$; $SD = .30$, $\alpha = .69$), managerial misconduct (six items; $M = 1.41$; $SD = .55$, $\alpha = .80$), and exclusion (four items; $M = 1.41$; $SD = .57$, $\alpha = .80$).

Student burnout was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Burnout is measured across three dimensions: five items for exhaustion ($M = 2.94$; $SD = 1.54$, $\alpha = .92$), four items for cynicism ($M = 1.67$; $SD = 1.80$, $\alpha = .94$), and six items for professional efficacy ($M = 4.62$; $SD = 1.11$, $\alpha = .86$). This scale was adapted in order to assess the graduate school experience rather than the overall general school experience. Responses are made on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 7 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*).

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors were measured using the Measure of Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (Podsakoff et al., 1997). This 13-item measure assesses three types of organizational citizenship behaviors: seven items for helping ($M = 5.32$; $SD = 1.12$, $\alpha = .90$), three items for civic virtue ($M = 4.94$; $SD = 1.18$, $\alpha = .70$), and three items for sportsmanship ($M = 4.85$; $SD = 1.45$, $\alpha = .86$). In this study, the scale was modified to reflect the experience of graduate student colleagues rather than coworkers. Responses are solicited on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 7 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*).

Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the workplace bullying of graduate students would be positively related to student burnout in the graduate program. To test this hypothesis and to evaluate multivariate shared relationships, a canonical correlation was computed using the workplace bullying dimensions as one set of variables and the student burnout subscales as the second set of variables. In accordance with Sherry and Henson's (2005) recommendations, structure coefficients above .45 were interpreted. Results of the canonical correlation, which accounted for 24% of the variance, revealed one significant function: Wilks' $\Lambda = .76$; $F(12, 701.42) = 6.55$, $p < .001$. The results of this function, including structure coefficients, squared structure coefficients, and redundancy coefficients, are available in Table 1. This function ($R_c = .48$) revealed that when graduate students were belittled, punished, experienced managerial misconduct, and were excluded by faculty, they experienced exhaustion and cynicism but lacked professional efficacy about their education. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed as bullied graduate students experienced burnout in their graduate program.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the workplace bullying of graduate students would be negatively related to students' organizational citizenship behaviors in the department. Another canonical correlation was computed using the workplace bullying

Table 1   Canonical Solution for Workplace Bullying Predicting Student Burnout

Variables	Function	
	Rs	r_s^2 (%)
Set 1: Workplace Bullying		
Belittlement	.670	44.89
Punishment	.863	74.48
Managerial Misconduct	.797	63.52
Exclusion	.840	70.56
Redundancy Coefficient	[.633]	
Set 2: Student Burnout		
Exhaustion	.861	74.13
Cynicism	.804	64.64
Professional Self-Efficacy	−.674	45.43
Redundancy Coefficient	[.139]	

Note. Wilks' $\Lambda = .76$; $F(12, 701.42) = 6.55$, $p < .001$. $r_s =$ structure coefficient; $r_s^2 =$ squared structure coefficient. Structure coefficients are all greater than .45 and are interpretable.

dimensions as one set of variables and the organizational citizenship behaviors subscales as the second set of variables. The results of this function, including structure coefficients, squared structure coefficients, and redundancy coefficients, are available in Table 2. Results of the canonical correlation, which accounted for 19% of the variance, revealed one significant function: Wilks' $\Lambda = .81$; $F(12,$

Table 2   Canonical Solution for Workplace Bullying Predicting Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Variables	Function	
	Rs	r_s^2 (%)
Set 1: Workplace Bullying		
Belittlement	.773	59.75
Punishment	.528	27.88
Managerial Misconduct	.839	70.39
Exclusion	.892	79.57
Redundancy Coefficient	[.594]	
Set 2: OCBs		
Helping OCB	−.807	65.12
Civic Virtue OCB	−.753	56.70
Sportsmanship OCB	−.812	65.93
Redundancy Coefficient	[.107]	

Note. Wilks' $\Lambda = .81$; $F(12, 701.42) = 4.89$, $p < .001$. $r_s =$ structure coefficient; $r_s^2 =$ squared structure coefficient. Structure coefficients are all greater than .45 and are interpretable.

701.42) = 4.89, $p < .001$. This function ($R_c = .41$) revealed that when graduate students were belittled, punished, experienced managerial misconduct, and were excluded by faculty, they engaged in less helping, civic virtue, and sportsmanship OCBs. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed as bullied graduate students enacted fewer OCBs.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that bullied graduate students do experience student burnout and are unwilling to engage in OCBs for their department. First, students who were bullied by faculty experienced exhaustion with their program (i.e., felt emotionally drained and tired), held cynical attitudes (i.e., became less interested about their studies and doubted the usefulness of graduate school), and lacked professional efficacy (i.e., lacked confidence about their potential to succeed); indeed these students reported all three symptoms of student burnout. This finding is important, considering a major reason for college student departure is due to stress, anxiety, and burnout (Hunt, Boyd, Gast, Mitchell, & Wilson, 2012) coupled with a lack of social involvement and sense of belonging (Cooke, Sims, & Peyrefitte, 1995) and feelings of alienation (Daugherty & Lane, 1999).

Second, students who were bullied by faculty engaged in less helping (e.g., aiding other graduate students in their coursework or problems), civic virtue (e.g., doing what is best for the graduate students as a group), and sportsmanship (e.g., withholding complaints over minor issues and finding faults with others). These bullied students reported a general unwillingness to help their fellow graduate students in the program. This result is consistent with research that suggests that employees are unlikely to use OCBs when morale is low (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). It may be that these bullied students feel like out-group organizational members and are discouraged to exert extra effort because the departmental climate lacks procedural fairness, as some students are bullied and others are not (van Dijke, De Cremer, Mayer, & Van Quaquebeke, 2012). Additionally, not only are these students displaying fewer OCBs, they may be learning from their graduate faculty that bullying behaviors are acceptable in academia and may be more likely to demonstrate bullying behaviors themselves when they work with their own students (Braxton et al., 2011).

It is important to note that overall, graduate students reported low levels of bullying taking place by their professors. Students reported that bullying took place *now and then*, which is less frequent than *once a month*. Yet, the relationships between bullying with students' burnout and organizational citizenship behaviors indicate the potential short-term and long-term damage of bullying in the graduate education culture.

This study had several limitations. It is important to note that this study focused on relationships, not causation. While the bullying literature would support the claim that faculty bullying would decrease students' OCBs and contribute to their burnout, it is also possible that faculty may bully those students who do not show interest or have low activity in their departments. Another limitation was that the sample was predominantly White students. While the students in this study come from many

disciplines and are attempting to earn various degrees, future research on graduate student bullying should consider utilizing more diverse samples. It is also possible that some disciplines (or departments) more actively practice and condone bullying. Attention should also be paid to graduate student peer-to-peer bullying, not just faculty-to-student bullying. Jacobs and Dodd (2003) found that peer support was related to lower levels of burnout; possibly students who are targets of bullying from their peers experience higher burnout. Future research may also consider uncovering the unique bullying behaviors that transpire in academia instead of adopting a general workplace bullying perspective.

In summary, academic departments and administrators should be concerned about the bullying of graduate students by faculty members. How professors communicate with their graduate students greatly impacts those students' educational experiences (Lechuga, 2011). "Graduate students may be particularly vulnerable to workplace bullying by their supervisors, given the competitive and individualistic nature of obtaining promotions in academia and the power differential inherent in the student-supervisor relationship" (Yamada et al., 2014, p. 58). Chairs, advisers, and faculty members must recognize and intervene when bullying takes place for the sake of their students' academic careers (De Luca & Twale, 2010).

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