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# A qualitative disaggregation of faculty perceptions of workplace bullying initiatives: an intensive case study of a Canadian university

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**A QUALITATIVE DISAGGREGATION OF FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF  
WORKPLACE BULLYING INITIATIVES: AN INTENSIVE CASE STUDY OF A  
CANADIAN UNIVERSITY**

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THE OPTICS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING MINIMIZATION INITIATIVES: A  
QUALITATIVE DISAGGREGATION OF EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS

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## **Abstract**

Numerous universities around the world have policies and procedures in place to deal with workplace bullying. However, the effectiveness of these HR interventions often depends on the perceptions of the university employees (Chang, 2005). This thesis attempts to disaggregate the different factors that lead to the creation of employee perceptions in the faculty sub-set, with regards to their organization's workplace bullying policies and interventions. This study is conducted using exploratory qualitative interviews of faculty at a mid-sized Canadian university and is analyzed using thematic coding analysis.

*Keywords:* Workplace bullying, employee perception, Canada, university faculty

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## **Introduction**

As per Einarsen (2003); “Bullying is an escalating process, in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal "strength" are in conflict" (p. 22). Workplace bullying that is specific to university communities has been termed as faculty incivility and was reported as on the rise around the world in 2008 (Twale & De Luca, 2008). Faculty incivility is defined as encompassing bullying, mobbing, camouflaged aggression and harassment in the workplace. Academic harassers “compete, gossip, divulge confidences, offer criticism publicly, patronize, find fault, and overload colleagues with work” (Twale & De Luca, 2008: xii).

. Multiple research studies around the world rank higher education as one of the top three workplaces most susceptible to workplace bullying (Randall, 2001; Vickers, 2001, Blasé and Blasé, 2003; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). To deal with this negative workplace phenomenon, a number of universities in Canada and around the world have instituted workplace bullying interventions like policies, workshops, conflict resolution processes and punitive action. Employee perceptions regarding these interventions often contribute to the success or failure of these workplace bullying interventions. (Chang, 2005)

In my thesis, I study how faculty perceive organizational workplace bullying policies and conflict handling strategies, and what the key factors are that contribute to the creation of their perceptions. This study is a qualitative intensive case study based on data from long-form interviews with faculty at a mid-sized Canadian university and aims to find overarching themes that contribute to the formation of workplace bullying related



employee perception. The study will also briefly cover recommendations for improving the existing organizational workplace bullying framework. This knowledge will contribute to the existing research aimed at the creation of healthier work environments and can help organizations better understand the gap between organizational intention and employee experience.

Perception can be described as the process of environmental sense-making where individuals organize and categorize their impressions (Robbins, 2004). Individuals form beliefs regarding their environment through processes of perception and attribution, which in turn regulates their behavior (Bernstein & Burke, 1989). Spreitzer (1996) noted that perception of environment has a dominant role on individuals' beliefs and attitudes, which in turn affects behaviors and actions. Extant literature has numerous studies that consistently show the positive effects of HR practices on employees' attitudes and increase in all metrics of a firm's performance, as a result (MacDuffie, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994, 1998; Huselid, 1995; Delery and Doty, 1996; Youndt et al., 1996; Huselid and Becker, 1996; Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Huselid et al., 1997; Delaney and Huselid, 1996). Current research consistently points to a positive correlation between employee perceptions and performance of HR initiatives.

With regards to workplace bullying, some of the most commonly cited organizational bullying interventions include ensuring ongoing employee training and knowledge-sharing regarding workplace bullying, developing a comprehensive policy, increasing personal accountability by including workplace bullying in performance management, clear punitive measures against bullies and establishing a process to handle complaints (Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009 ; Boyd & Carden, 2010 ;

Devonish, 2013 ; Glendinning, 2001 ; Quine, 2001 ; Vega & Comer, 2005). As per Heames and Harvey (2006), when top management of organizations enact relevant workplace bullying policies, procedures and practices, they are in essence assuming responsibility for limiting harassment and bullying. This is important since the impetus of safeguarding the psychosocial health of employees flows from senior management. Employees perceive their organizations as having concern for employee well-being or not, and this perception in turn affects the general behavior.

However, according to Eisenberger et al. (1987), employee perception of their organization's commitment to mitigating workplace bullying is colored by whether the measures are brought on by external regulations and constraints or are discretionary. Thus, in addition to doing more than just what is required from the point of view of legislative compliance, management also needs to be cognizant of the fact that negative employee perceptions could jeopardize organizational efforts to create a bullying-free workplace.

The research question I explore in this thesis is: *What are the different factors that lead to the creation of employee perceptions regarding their organization's measures and commitment to minimizing workplace bullying?*

To answer this research question, I pursued the following questions in identifying my data gathering method, selecting a population, and formulating interview questions:

- Are employees aware of the organizational supports available to them against workplace bullying?

- Does this awareness fluctuate based on demographic factors of age, gender, type of employment and length of employment?
- What are the most effective ways for organizations to communicate their workplace bullying support systems to their employees?
- What factors affect employees' perception of their organizations' role in minimizing workplace bullying?
- What do employees believe organizations need to do better to improve workplace bullying support systems?

## Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into the following chapters. The content of these chapters is as follows:

**Chapter One – Introduction.** In this section, I present the overview of my study, including but not limited to the significance of the study, a basic overview of the methodology, research questions and intent.

**Chapter Two – Review of the Literature.** In the literature review section of the proposal, I will briefly review extant literature in workplace bullying in Section I and give a brief overview of existing research in workplace bullying policies/measures and organizational perceptions in Section II.

**Chapter Three – Research Questions.** In this section, I present my research question and the questions that guide my research.

**Chapter Four – Research Methodology.** I describe the design and research methodology of my study. I discuss my sample frame and the assessment of qualitative research.

**Chapter Five – Data Analysis.** I outline the steps I took in the pre-analysis and data-analysis stages of my research.

**Chapter Six – Findings and Discussion.** I present my findings by first giving a broad outline of the participants who agreed to be interviewed for the study. I then discuss the over-arching themes that emerged from the interview data.

**Chapter Seven – Conclusion.** In this chapter, I summarize my research and discuss its implications, limitations and areas for future research.

## **Review of the Literature**

Workplace bullying is considered to be a nebulous concept since the lines between harassment, discrimination and ineffective management are often blurred, with added layers of complication in the form of cultural and personality bias (Power et al., 2013; Seigne, Coyne, Randall and Parker, 2007). In order to effectively understand and manage employee perceptions with regards to workplace bullying, we must first understand the phenomenon of workplace bullying in detail.

In Section I of the literature review, I will give a brief overview of the concept of workplace bullying, the different ways organizations deal with it, and then go on to discuss faculty bullying in detail. In Section II, I will discuss organizational support against workplace bullying and employee perceptions with regards to organizational support. A review of the literature will help identify why studying employee perceptions with regards to organizational policies against workplace bullying is important.

### Section I

Research into bullying started in the 1980s in Sweden with Heinz Leymann but was initially only limited to school bullying. Research into workplace bullying evolved from the study of negative behaviour in the workplace, which was originally categorized as counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBs; Fox & Spector, 2004). Spector and Fox (2010) further stated “CWB is considered an umbrella term that subsumes, in part or whole, similar constructs concerning harmful behaviors at work” (p. 133). CWBs are further sub-divided into aggression, deviance, retaliation, and revenge. The study of workplace bullying developed from the more in-depth study of aggression at the

workplace (Neuman & Baron, 2005). To understand workplace bullying better, let us examine a few models of negative workplace behaviours.

### **Conceptualizing Workplace Bullying: Terminology and Definitions.**

Definitions are important because it impacts how the organization and individual interprets negative acts and engages in negative behavior. Most bullying actions are self-reported and both employees and management need to have a clear distinction between what constitutes workplace bullying versus personality friction or an authoritative management style. A clear and comprehensive organizational stance would clarify which behaviors are a violation and which are not. For example, it would not be practical if an employer, supervisor, colleague or subordinate – were prohibited from expressing a difference of opinion, offering constructive feedback, assigning work, managing performance, or taking appropriate disciplinary action. (Reid, 2014).

Examining the exact terminology as well as the most common definitions is especially important to define the boundaries of what can and cannot be classified as workplace bullying, and what in turn, will be perceived as bullying in an organization. For example, the perpetrators can also be the organizations themselves (Liefoghe & Davey, 2001). In other words, the organization itself may be labelled a bully for its widespread practices like unfair promotion policies, threats of dismissal and undue work stress.

This subset of negative behaviours is studied across the world and different researchers use different terms depending on the country of origin of the research (Saunders, Huynh & Goodman-Delahunty, 2007). These terms can essentially be

clustered under the same category of negative acts. The term "workplace bullying" is mostly used by researchers in Australia (Sheehan, 1999), the United Kingdom (Rayner, 1997) and Northern Europe (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). "Mobbing"; is commonly used in France and Germany (Leymann, 1990; Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996), "emotional abuse" and "aggression" in the USA (Keashly, 2001; Baron & Neuman, 1998), while "harassment" is used in Finland (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994). Recently, researchers have also begun to use the term "status-blind harassment" or "equal-opportunity harassment" to distinguish workplace bullying from other forms of harassment based on gender, race, disability, religion, ethnicity and age which are covered under existing anti-discrimination legislation (Yamada, 2000). While these terms all indicate the same acts, the specifics of some of them are slightly different. For example, when "mobbing" is used, it usually denotes a group of perpetrators (Leymann, 1990; Zapf et al., 1996) or a "mob" of bullies, whereas when "bullying" is used it denotes an individual perpetrator (Baron & Neuman, 1998). This distinction is however mostly isolated to European researchers (Leymann, 1990; Zapf et al., 1996). The two terms are used interchangeably in most research, and refer to the same acts of aggression, carried out in different ways. Terms are important because they distinguish behaviours that are discriminatory (based on enumerated grounds/status like ethnicity, gender, religion etc.) versus status-blind harassment (Yamada, 2000). This in turn allows organizations to address complaints under the appropriate legislation or policy.

In this study, I will be using the term "workplace bullying" or "bullying" to denote the entire cluster of negative acts associated with the different terms. I will not be addressing physical violence or discrimination based on enumerated grounds, since these

negative acts are covered by specific Canadian legislation that over-rides organizational policy.

In addition to having a variety of terms to denote the act, workplace bullying also has a variety of definitions. As per Branch (2008), accurate diagnoses of workplace bullying cannot be made without first instituting some form of definitional precision. In addition, definitional precision is also of utmost importance when a remedial response is required and aids in continued research, prevention and redressal of workplace bullying. The definition of bullying is thus critical to understanding complaints, policy and redressal procedures and also affects employees' perceptions regarding what can be considered a legitimate claim of bullying versus for instance, a strong management style.

The definition I will rely on in this research is the one proposed by Einarsen et al (2003) who defines bullying as “harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. For the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal ‘strength’ are in conflict.” (pg. 15)

An important feature of Einarsen et al’s (2003) definition, is that there must be an imbalance of power between the bully/instigator and the target. Substantial research suggests a strong correlation between power distance and the incidence of bullying (Power et. al., 2013). This is an important aspect to consider in the context of this study.



since it is easy to assume that tenure would considerably diminish the imbalance of power. However, as research in the field progressed, it was discovered that lateral workplace bullying can be just as detrimental as hierarchical bullying (Becher & Visovsky, 2012) with elements like expert power, coercive power, referent power or reward power coming into play, in addition to hierarchical power (Bulutlar & Unler Oz, 2009)

Another important feature of Einarsen et al's (2003) definition is that it clearly states that a critical incident cannot be considered bullying. This particular aspect has been the cause of much debate. Some policy-makers and legislators tend to argue that if an isolated incident (termed "critical incident" in bullying literature) is serious enough then even one critical incident can be termed as bullying (Yuen, 2005). However, most researchers and legislators are of the view that the bullying behaviour needs to occur over a period for it to be considered bullying. For example, the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI), uses the following definition in their 2014 Workplace Bullying Survey: bullying is "the repeated, health-harming mistreatment of an employee by one or more employees through acts of commission or omission manifested as: verbal abuse; behaviors - physical or nonverbal - that are threatening, intimidating, or humiliating; work sabotage, interference with production; exploitation of a vulnerability - physical, social or psychological; or some combination of one or more categories." (WBI, p. 16). This dichotomy in research and legislation is especially problematic considering that on one hand, a high-intensity one-time incident can be completely written off and on the other hand, if bullying incidents do not occur often enough or for long enough, they do not fall under the definitions of workplace bullying. The WBI definition is consistent with

Einarsen's definition in excluding critical incident from the concept of workplace bullying, but also covers both individual and group bullying behaviours as well as verbal, physical and/or non-verbal.

The issue of negative intent has also been a topic of debate in the bullying literature. While some researchers insist that the existence of "intent to harm" is not required to establish occurrence of workplace bullying (Sheehan, Barker & McCarthy, 2004), some psychology scholars advocate for "intention to harm" as a necessary aspect in identifying cases of workplace bullying (Fox & Spector, 2005).

Thus, to constitute bullying behaviour, the negative acts must be;

- Frequent (i.e, at least once a week) (Einarsen et al., 2011)
- Persistent (i.e, over a minimum duration of 6 months) (Einarsen et al., 2011)
- Hostile (negative intent) (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith & Pereira, 2002)
- And a power imbalance must exist between the perpetrator and the target (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith & Pereira, 2002)

Identifying and articulating which elements of bullying behaviour have to exist in order for it to be officially considered under the complaint process is the primary responsibility of the organization via the policy.

**Workplace Bullying Typology.** As discussed in the previous chapter, workplace bullying is a nebulous concept and maybe open to interpretation. This creates an issue not only for the victim and the bully, but also for the policy-makers. To help further understand what can be considered workplace bullying, we turn to the typology given by

Bartlett and Bartlett (2011). Extant literature on bullying reveals that there are three overall categories when it comes to the acts itself; work related, personal and physical/threatening (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2011). This categorization has been based on the typology given by Maglich-Sespico et al's (2007) bullying typology which distinguishes work related, psychological/emotional, and physical bullying. The typology can be further broken down as follows:

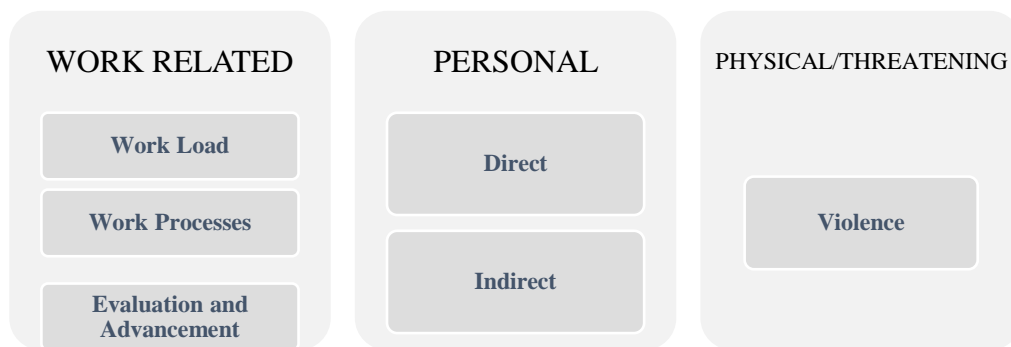


Figure 1: Typology of Workplace Bullying (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011)

**Work Related.** In work load related bullying, existing literature categorizes heavy workloads given to individuals as one form of bullying (Jennifer, Cowe & Ananiadou, 2003) since heavy workloads create unrealistic goals (Fox & Stallworth, 2006) thus setting individuals up for failure. Refusal to grant leave (Quine 1999), removing responsibilities and delegating menial jobs (Quine, 1999; Vartia, 2001) also come under the purview of workplace bullying since it can create obstacles in career advancement and enrichment.

Bullies also use work processes to sabotage their targets' work. This type of bullying can be horizontal, vertical or lateral and includes stifling opinions and overruling decisions (Einarsen, 2000; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Vartia, 2001). Other negative acts include but are not limited to withholding information and controlling resources (Baillien,

Neyens, DeWitte, & De Cuyper, 2009; Gardner & Johnson, 2001), professional attacks, and flaunting status and power (Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Hutchinson, Wilkes, Vickers, & Jackson, 2008; Yildirim, 2009).

The third category of work-related bullying occurs between supervisor and subordinate, usually at the time of evaluation and career advancement. These categories of behaviours include unfair assessments, excessive monitoring, judging work wrongly, giving unfair criticism and blocking individuals from promotions (Randle, Stevenson, & Grayling, 2007; Rayner, 1997; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). The form that workplace bullying takes usually depends on the amount of power the perpetrator has over the target.

***Personal.*** Personal bullying is also known as psychological bullying and is divided into direct and indirect types of bullying. In the case of direct bullying there is an interaction between the bully and the target whereas in indirect bullying the interactions are between the bully and others who indirectly harm the target. In case of direct bullying, the behaviours range from interrupting others to threats and/or intimidation. As reported by Bartlett and Bartlett (2011), bullies used other tactics such as verbal harassment, belittling remarks, yelling, and deliberate interruptions, (Djurkovic et al., 2005; Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005; Rayner, 1997), and persistent criticism, intentional demeaning, personal jokes, negative eye contact and humiliation (Agervold, 2007; Baillien et al., 2009; Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Quine, 1999; Randle et al., 2007; Rayner, 1997; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Yildiz, 2007). More severe forms of direct personal bullying include intimidation, manipulation, and threats (Von Bergen, Zavaletta, & Soper, 2006; MacIntosh, 2005; Rayner, 1997; Simpson & Cohen, 2004).

Indirect personal bullying behaviours include social isolation (Agervold, 2007; Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2005; Einarsen, 2000; Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Jennifer et al., 2003; Quine, 1999; Randle et al., 2007; Rayner, 1997; Vartia, 2001; Yildirim, 2009,) and spreading gossip, lies, false accusations, and undermining an employee status in the workplace (Agervold, 2007; Hershcovis, 2010; Quine, 1999; Randle et al., 2007; Rayner, 1997; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). In their study, Gardner and Johnson (2001) reported that bullies may engage in behaviours like not taking phone calls, memos and emails, which further isolated victims.

***Physical/Threatening.*** According to Nachreiner (2007), physical/threatening bullying includes but is not limited to hitting, kicking, slapping, pushing, choking, sexually assaulting or subjecting an individual to any form of physical contact which will injure or harm and in some rare cases, it may even escalate to murder. Physical violence and threats falls under the umbrella of workplace bullying, however most of these behaviours are illegal in most places around the world and thus come under the relevant legislation rather than organizational policy. In my research, I will not be covering workplace bullying behaviours that include physical violence or threats of violence.

### **Faculty Incivility**

Workplace bullying that is specific to university communities has been termed as faculty incivility and was reported as on the rise around the world in 2008 (Twale & De Luca, 2008). Faculty incivility is defined as encompassing bullying, mobbing, camouflaged aggression and harassment in the workplace. Academic harassers “compete, gossip, divulge confidences, offer criticism publicly, patronize, find fault, and overload colleagues with work” (Twale & De Luca, 2008: xii).

Oftentimes, the occurrence of generalized harassment in the workplace is normalized and employees who have been immersed in the workplace culture for a long time either become immune to it or are blind to it. The effects are felt most starkly by new employees. However, irrespective of whether the employee realises or experiences this workplace bullying and the negative organizational culture, the chances of an individual speaking up are low. This is because it is often the outspoken employee who becomes a target, as a retaliation for disrupting the status quo. (Keashly & Neuman, 2013).

Canadian universities are not immune to this phenomenon. One of the earliest pieces of research available on the changing climate in Canadian academia mentions, resource shortages, increased competition, fewer tenured positions and an overall unstable workplace environment across the board (Becher and Trowler, 2001). Academia is known to be particularly brutal with its “publish or perish” philosophy, and individualized tenure and promotion policies have lead to an atmosphere where faculty compete for individual success rather than collaborating with each other for individual, group and organizational success. In addition, as per Newson (1998), Canadian universities have faced tectonic shifts in terms of structure. Reduced funding from provincial and federal sources as well as lower funds from reduced enrolment have forced universities to move to a “budget based rationalization and corporate linking” (Newson, 1998). This has moved universities from centers of learning to service providers, thus moving them from traditional hierarchical “democratic” models to a more corporate management model (Newson, 1998; Rajagopal, 2002).

Organizational policies dealing with workplace bullying are becoming increasingly common in Canadian universities, as provincial legislation slowly moves to

considering it an occupational health and safety hazard. Most universities have zero-tolerance policies for workplace discrimination. However, in terms of a “common experience of hostility”; where it is difficult or impossible to attribute a cause, the policies are vague at best (Keashly & Harvey, 2005). The breaking of codes of civil conduct in interpersonal relationships are often brushed aside as interpersonal friction and as a result this incivility is not seen as an organizational dysfunction that needs to be addressed (Crawford, 2001).

Addressing this dysfunction does not stop with just instituting policies. The efficacy of these policies depends on how well they are received and perceived by the employees (Chang, 1999; Gartner and Nollen, 1989). For example, according to a research conducted by Chang (2005) which surveyed 959 employees in 37 companies in Korea, human resources practices of companies (included but not limited to workplace bullying redressal measures) affects the overall perception of employees, which in turn is a predictor of organizational commitment.

This thesis will explore the different factors that contribute to the formation of these perceptions among faculty.

### **Incidence and Impact of Workplace Bullying**

The impact of workplace bullying is felt by the individual, the organization and by extension, the economy as a whole. The direct fallout of workplace bullying is loss of human capital effectiveness (productivity), high attrition rates and legal costs, in addition to increased health care cost, cost of advertising, interviewing, recruiting and training, as

well as increased cost of manpower turnover (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003; Von Bergen et al., 2006).

Exact figures vary, but workplace bullying has been found to be more common than racial discrimination or sexual harassment (O'Reilly, 2000; Rayner, 1997).

In this literature review, I will examine the individual and organizational impacts since my research involves faculty and the university.

**Individual Impacts.** The individual impacts are categorized as quality of work, health (physical and emotional) and affective domain as follows:

***Quality of work.*** Bullying caused increased absenteeism, burnout, quitting the job or thinking of leaving the job (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Kivimaki et al., 2000; MacIntosh, 2005; Namie, 2003, 2007; Vartia, 2001; Yildiz, 2007). Other effects include signs of low morale, low esteem, decreased commitment to work, lower performance and resulting lower productivity. (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005; Namie, 2003; Yildirim, 2009). Workplace bullying also leads to decreased concentration, work errors, and lost time due to worrying about the bullying situation (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Paice & Smith, 2009; Namie, 2003; Yildirim, 2009; Yildiz, 2007). Victims suffered loss of income from lowered working hours (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). Bullying also negatively affects social interaction in the workplace (Yildirim, 2009). The lower job satisfaction, intolerance of criticism, heightened acts of bullying (Quine, 1999, 2001; Yildiz, 2007; Yildirim, 2009) in turn affects evaluations, leading to a downward spiral.

***Health (Physical and Emotional).*** As cited in Barlett and Bartlett (2011), physical impacts include increase in cardiovascular disease, chronic disease, headaches, higher



body mass, and decrease in overall physical health (Johnson, 2009; Kivimaki et al., 2000; Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006; Randle et al., 2007; Simpson & Cohen, 2004) resulting in increased medical leave and medical costs for the individual (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Namie, 2003). It was also reported that victims resort to smoking, alcohol, drug abuse, disturbed sleep and increase in the use of sleep-inducing medications to cope with the bullying. (Namie, 2003; Paice & Smith, 2009; Quine, 1999; Vartia, 2001; Yildiz, 2007). Emotional impacts included but are not limited to psychological health issues, clinical depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal tendencies (Ayoko et al., 2003; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Kivimaki et al., 2000; Kivimaki, Virtanen, Vartio, Elovainio, & Vahtera, 2003; Namie, 2003, 2007; Rodriguez-Munoz, Moreno-Jimenez, Vergel, & Hernandez, 2010; Yildirim, 2009; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2010).

*Affective domain.* Bullied employees are also impacted within the affective domain and show negative symptoms like anxiety, fear, anger and depression (Ayoko et al., 2003; Namie, 2003; Quine, 1999, 2001; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Yildiz, 2007). Bullied victims find it difficult to concentrate and suffer from loss of decreased motivation, lack of self-confidence and a sense of powerlessness (Baillien et al., 2009; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005; Moayed et al., 2006; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Individuals subjected to workplace bullying became easily exhausted, upset, impatient and felt isolated (Baillien et al., 2009; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005; Moayed et al., 2006; Simpson & Cohen, 2004) and these effects extended beyond working hours and the workplace. The major theme are feelings of humiliation, stress and depression (Ayoko et al., 2003; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Kivimaki et al., 2003; Moayed et al., 2006; Namie, 2003, 2007; Quine, 1999, 2001; Vartia, 2001; Yildirim, 2009).

**Organizational Impacts.** The organizational impacts of workplace bullying have been cited by Bartlett & Bartlett (2011) as being:

**Productivity.** Bullying impacts productivity in the form of increased absenteeism (Kivimaki, Elovainio, & Vahtera, 2000; Namie, 2007) and decreased performance (Baillien et al., 2009; Yildirim, 2009) among bullied targets. Employees tend to miss deadlines, (Gardner & Johnson, 2001), loss of creative potential (MacIntosh, 2005), and increased errors and mishaps (Paice & Smith, 2009)

**Increased cost.** Bullying increases cost in health-related issues for victims (Johnson, 2009; Namie, 2003, 2007; Quine, 2001; Randle et al. 2007). It also increases the cost of health insurance and worker compensation claims (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Macintosh, 2005). Increased attrition was observed (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Namie, 2003, 2007) which in turn increases the costs of rehiring, advertising, interviewing, training newly hired employees.

**Culture.** Bullying is more likely to occur when the bully feels that the organization culture is conducive to/or will turn a blind eye to their actions(Harvey, Treadway, and Heames, 2007). Bullying negatively affects peer to peer relationships as well as with supervisors (Glaso, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2009; MacIntosh, 2005),lower team effectiveness (Baillien et al., 2009; Gardner & Johnson, 2001), reduced morale (Namie, 2003), and decreased organizational commitment (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). These factors could possibly negatively affect the organization's culture.

**Legal.** Workplace bullying poses a serious economic and legal liability for organizations. For example, as per McKay et al. (2008), Québec Commission des normes

du travail settled 2,200 workplace bullying complaints against Québec employers in 2006. Thirty-eight percent of these complaints were resolved by payment of indemnities and out-of-court settlements (McKay et al., 2008)

***Reputation.*** Organizations that reported higher incidents of workplace bullying showed higher attrition rate among employees, lower quality customer relationship, lower creativity and productivity (Johnson, 2009; MacIntosh, 2005; Namie, 2003, 2007). These factors suggest that workplace bullying can have a negative impact on the reputation of the organization.

From the organizational perspective, there are many initiatives that companies can institute to ensure that workplace bullying is being dealt with effectively. Some of the most commonly cited initiatives include ensuring ongoing employee training and knowledge-sharing regarding workplace bullying, developing a comprehensive policy, increasing personal accountability by including workplace bullying in performance management, clear punitive measures against bullies and establishing a process to handle complaints (Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2009 ; Boyd & Carden, 2010 ; Devonish,2013; Glendinning,2001; Quine,2001; Vega & Comer,2005). Researchers and practitioners have found that framing, communicating and applying specific workplace bullying policies have been found to be some of the most effective ways to curb workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hubert, 2003). However, there is sometimes a gap between the support system the organization has created and how employees perceive the system. In order to fully understand how employees form perceptions regarding the workplace bullying interventions at their organization, we must first briefly examine the

most common interventions that organizations use and the disciplinary philosophies they follow.

## Section II

In this section of the literature review, I will give a brief overview of organizational responses to workplace bullying and how their effectiveness is affected by employee perceptions. From the point of view of studying employee perceptions against workplace bullying, it is important to understand not only the different ways in which organizations attempt to minimize workplace bullying, but also the internal and external pressures and the overall management philosophy guiding these decisions.

**Organizational Responses to Workplace Bullying.** Every organization designs its workplace bullying response mechanism according to internal factors like resources, union influence or management stance on psychosocial safety, as well as external factors like legislation or industry-issued mandates. Even though there is no commonly agreed upon template covering all the aspects of workplace bullying prevention support, researchers do agree on some basic aspects that must be addressed. Some of them are:

- Maintaining a clear commitment to a bullying free workplace and incorporating specific identifying characteristics of workplace bullying (Boyd & Carden, 2010; Salin, 2008).
- Specifying punitive outcomes for non-compliance (Boyd & Carden, 2010).
- Outlining the responsibilities of all the stakeholders and explaining the channel and procedure for filing a complaint (Richards & Daley, 2003).
- Applying Workplace bullying policy to all levels of the organization consistently (LaVan & Martin, 2007).

- Specifying a non-retaliation policy for those who report workplace bullying as victims or as bystanders (Richards & Daley, 2003).
- Reviewing and updating the policy (Khan & Khan, 2012).
- Communicating the policy to all stakeholders clearly and at regular intervals (Khan & Khan, 2012).
- Training and awareness programs to ensure a proper understanding of the policy and to outline the specific behaviours that are associated with bullying (Boyd & Carden, 2010).

Ferris (2004) has given a typology of organizational responses to workplace bullying and divided it into three categories; (1) organizations that directly or indirectly accept negative workplace behaviours, (2) organizations that have interventions in place but dismiss workplace bullying as personality clashes and (3) organizations that have a “zero tolerance” policy and take active and proactive measures to minimize workplace bullying. This shows that the discipline philosophies of different workplaces range from rehabilitation to retribution, with deterrence being the middle ground (Rollinson et al., 1997). In addition, Hubert (2003) classifies workplace interventions as informal (e.g., conflict resolution or mediation) or formal (e.g., formal complaint procedure, formal grievance committee).

According to Salin (2009), workplace bullying interventions at the organizational level can be categorized into four types; reconciliatory, punitive, transfer and avoidance. A brief discussion of each of these categories as given by Salin (2009) follows.

***Reconciliatory Measures.*** Reconciliatory measures are those interventions which aim at protecting the target, while simultaneously attempting to modify the behaviour of

the bully. This includes but is not limited to discussions with both parties (with or without a neutral mediator), counselling sessions and training. Reconciliatory measures can be used at the early stages of conflict and when the intensity levels are fairly low.

***Punitive Measures.*** These interventions are more disciplinary in nature and focus on the perpetrator. They may include termination or other disciplinary action like being put on probation, non-renewal of work contract, including incident report in decisions regarding promotions. Punitive measures work in two ways; first, it sends a clear message about the inacceptability of bullying behaviour and second, it has strong social effects (Trevino, 1992) in the sense that it helps deter others from emulating negative behaviours.

***Transfer.*** These interventions aim at physically separating the target and the perpetrator by transfer to a different department/location. Transfer aims at protecting the target by isolating them from that perpetrator. While this disciplinary action fulfils what it set out to achieve, it does not address any root causes or provide a long-lasting effect. While it may seem natural that the perpetrator be transferred as a disciplinary action, it is usually the target who gets transferred, especially in situations where the perpetrator is in a superior managerial role (Rayner et al., 2002).

***Avoidance.*** Ferris (2004) argues that not every organization chooses to take preventive measures for workplace bullying, and there are organizations that believe their role does not extend to managing interpersonal relationships or work conflict. This attitude of management tends to lead to an escalation of bullying activity, since harassment is typically an escalating process as per Zapf and Gross (2001).

Organizations may choose one or a combination of these approaches to construct their official stance on workplace bullying. While the actual effectiveness and adequacy of the workplace bullying initiatives taken by an organization are important, this thesis argues that employees' perception of organizational support against workplace bullying is perhaps just as important since perception contributes greatly to the psychosocial climate of the organization (Law et al., 2011).

**Employee Perception and the Organization.** Over the past three decades, a large number of psychological studies have established the impact of perception on social behaviours (e.g., Snyder and Swann, 1978). As per Dijksterhuis and Knippenberg (1998), “the notion that perception (or the activation of a perceptual representation) may lead to corresponding overt behavior has been recognized since long ago by some of our most influential thinkers” (p. 866). This knowledge can be leveraged by organizations aiming at creating healthy work environments and self-reinforcing positive behaviour patterns in employees. For example, Bargh, Chen and Burrows (1996) found that the mere perception of another's behaviour led to an increase in the probability of engaging in that behaviour oneself. Implications of these findings suggest that our social behaviours (at least in part) are influenced without our conscious involvement. This holds true even for complex perception-behaviour links (Dijksterhuis and Knippenberg, 1998). In addition, the far-reaching impact of perception on shaping reality through self-fulfilling prophecies has been documented on the micro, meso and macro level (Azariadis, 1981; Rist, 1970). These findings have significant implications for organizations in terms of addressing and mitigating workplace bullying behaviours and also in terms of other generalized human resource and policy-making decisions.

The perception-behaviour link also extends to the organizational behaviour. Previous studies show that employee behavior is not only influenced by HR practices but also by the perceptions of these practices (Chang, 1999; Gartner and Nollen, 1989). This is further reinforced by a survey conducted by Eisenberger et al. (2004) with 620 participants across Europe, this survey concluded that employees perceive that the organization is supportive and committed to them and helps them to meet their socio-emotional and tangible needs, employees will reciprocate by helping the organization to achieve its goals (Eisenberger et al., 2004). In a meta-analytic assessment of 558 studies involving perception and organizational support, Kurtessis et al., 2015 concluded that positive perceptions of the organization are a key indicator of affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction and other attitudinal outcomes of employees. In other words, employees evaluate and view their employment relationship in terms of the resources given to them by the organization, which also includes tools to deal with harassment, discrimination and bullying. In terms of workplace bullying, this knowledge is a very useful asset to have since occurrence of negative behaviours can only successfully be mitigated by self-regulation. Organizations can utilize and channel employee perception into creating a healthier work environment.

Additionally, Wright and Nishii (2007) argue that it is employee perceptions of HRM practices rather than the practices themselves that influence employee outcome and attitudes. In fact, these perceptions are antecedents to employee behavior and attitude (Macey and Schneider, 2008). It thus becomes necessary for HR practices to be perceived and interpreted positively by employees if they are to be aligned with the desired organizational outcomes and impact. As per Iles et al. (1990), the degree to which



employees positively perceive HR policies and practices is directly linked to the strength of their association with the organization and its causes.

As per Guzzo and Noonan (1994), management and HR practices are likely to be perceived and interpreted differently by individual employees, and in line with others (e.g., Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In terms of a university setting however, where employee groups like faculty work in relative isolation, the number of opportunities to reconcile their individual perceptions with that of the group or the larger organization employee pool are limited. In addition, the union representation by each employee group in a university are different, leading to varying perceptions of organizational support. In my research, I attempt to disaggregate the individual perceptions of faculty regarding their university's workplace bullying support measures by conducting interviews with faculty at different stages of their career and different departments at a mid-sized Canadian university.

The perception-behaviour link can be a double-edged sword for management in organizations which have adequate prevention measures but employee perception is negative or neutral. For example, as per (Salin, 2003), poor working environments and resulting unfavourable perceptions of the organization create and sustain conditions conducive to bullying, which if unacknowledged and untreated become "institutionalized" (Tsui and Ashford, 1994; Liefoghe and Davey, 2001).

Parzefall and Salin (2010) have also argued that workplace bullying and positive perceptions can co-exist in organizations, even though being bullied would logically lead employees to believe that the organization does not care for their psychosocial well-being. Although there is merit to this line of reasoning, Parzefall and Salin (2010) argue that

most time targets see the organization as one entity and the bully as another, especially if (1) the bullies are colleagues (as opposed to management), (2) people higher up in the hierarchy are unaware of this behaviour or (3) if the intervention specialist has more power compared to the perpetrator.

However, if the intervention specialist allows the bullying to continue, this would have a negative effect on the perception of the organization as an entity (Parzefall and Salin, 2010). In spite of perception being such a key piece, very little attention has been paid to employee perceptions with relation to workplace bullying (Parzefall and Salin, 2010). Perception as a concept has been applied in various studies; in terms of being a moderating factor between workplace bullying and victim's intention to leave (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2008), in terms of bystander effect and work engagement (Christianson, 2015) and in terms of turnover intention (Schalkwyk, Els & Rothmann, 2011) among others. However, there has been no attempt at disaggregating the factors that lead to the creation of these perspectives in an already existing and functioning framework of higher education.

Consequently, an important question organizations should be asking is what determines these employee perceptions of organizational efforts to curb and manage workplace bullying? This thesis attempts to shed light on some of these factors in order to get a better understanding of how organizations can gauge employee-level perceptions of workplace bullying prevention measures and create a more synergistic collective-level climate.

## **Methodology**

While research in workplace bullying and perceptions as two independent concepts are extensive, there is a gap when it comes to insight into the formation of employee perceptions in relation to organizational support against workplace bullying. In addition, there is very sparse research that provides Canadian data, especially in the field of higher education. This study aims to explore that gap, and discover what over-arching factors lead to the creation of employee perceptions regarding workplace bullying measures taken by their organization.

In this section, I outline my data collection and analysis methods and the rationale behind my choice of sample and method. This study is inductive in nature. Inductive analysis uses the actual data to derive the structure of analysis and is most commonly used for qualitative data (Burnard et al., 2008). At the end of the study, the critical factors that colour employee perceptions regarding organizational workplace bullying measures are identified and discussed, in order to contribute to the creation of more sophisticated workplace bullying frameworks that involve all stake-holders. In addition, the recommendations mentioned by the participants are presented and discussed.

**Research Question:** *What are the different factors that lead to the creation of employee perceptions regarding their organization's measures and commitment to minimizing workplace bullying?*

In order to guide my research and data gathering method, and to define my population and interview grid, I have the following questions:

- Are employees aware of the organizational supports available to them against workplace bullying?
- Does this awareness fluctuate based on demographic factors of age, gender, type of employment and length of employment?
- What are the most effective ways for organizations to communicate their workplace bullying support systems to their employees?
- What factors affect employees' perception of their organizations' role in minimizing workplace bullying?
- What do employees believe organizations need to do better to improve workplace bullying support systems?

In my research, I studied a mid-sized Canadian University as an intensive case study. In multiple studies around the world, higher education has been found to be more susceptible to workplace bullying than most other sectors (Randall, 2001; Vickers, 2001, Blasé and Blasé, 2003). In some studies, higher education has been shown to be in the top three most susceptible sectors after postal workers and prison staff (Hoel and Cooper, 2000). For example, a review study conducted by Keashly and Neuman (2000) showed that the prevalence of workplace bullying in higher education is between 18-32%. In another study, the rate of bullying in a U.S. university was as high as 32% for self-reported cases (Keashly & Neuman, 2008). In a study based in a Canadian university, “serious” workplace bullying was reported by 32% of teaching faculty, instructors and librarians (McKay et al., 2008).

A possible explanation for this relatively high level of occurrence of workplace bullying in higher education may be the difficulty in measuring quality and quantity of faculty output which leads to higher emphasis being placed on cultivating inter-personal relationships with colleagues and superiors (Hubert and van Veldhoven, 2001; Zapf, 2001). This reliance and need for inter-personal relationships in the teaching profession creates an atmosphere conducive to bullying (Hubert and van Veldhoven, 2001). Other factors may include increased workloads (Dorman, 2003), work intensification (Roulston, 2004), additional responsibilities and activities (Moore and Knight, 2006), stress and burnout (Howard and Johnson, 2004), autonomy in decision making (Wildy et al., 2004) poor communication between management and faculty (Dinham et al, 1995) and interpersonal conflicts among teachers especially while working in teams (Main, 2007).

In addition, reactions to workplace bullying are often tempered by job insecurity or the threat of dismissal. In academia, among tenured faculty, the reactions and perceptions may be different because of job security. Finally, academics usually tend to spend many years in one institution unlike employees in non-academic jobs who have a higher likelihood of resigning from their jobs as a response to bullying. It would be interesting to see if the prospect of staying with one employer for years, decades in some cases, affects perceptions in any way.

In my study, I conducted qualitative interviews (see Appendix II) with 11 faculty members at a mid-sized university in Canada. Interviews are best suited for this type of research questions since this is a perceptual study. According to Cannell and Kahn (1968), in perceptual studies it is best to ask the individuals themselves to examine their perceptions. A purposive sampling technique was used to determine the sample (Yin,

2011). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it refers to sampling where elements of the sample are chosen based on the judgement of the researcher (Black, 2010). Purposive sampling was chosen since access was an important consideration. Interviews afforded the opportunity to compare employee perceptions with the actual framework that the management has set up and what their aim was in doing so. It also presented the opportunity to not only study perceptions and the actual framework, but also possibly discover where the gap between organizational policies/procedures and faculty perceptions, if any, originates from.

The aim of intensive case study research is to learn how a specific and unique case works and is done through contextualized and “thick description” (Geertz, 1983). Intensive case study focuses on perspectives, conceptions, experiences, interactions and sense-making processes of the case. The main aim of intensive case study differs from most other methodologies since it does not aim for broad generalizations, but chooses the case under study to explore and analyze as an ideographic and configurative unit of analysis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

### **Ethical Guidelines**

This study was conducted in accordance with the University of Lethbridge’s ethical guidelines as well as with the guidelines of the Master of Science in Management program. The study commenced after the human subject research ethics application was approved by the Faculty of Management, which is in keeping with the Tri-Council policy statement for ethical conduct for research involving humans (NCEHR, 2009). Participants were not compensated in any way. The university under study did not play any part in

choice of participants, in framing the interview questions or any stage of data collection, analysis or presentation. The consent form is available in Appendix II.

### **Sample Frame**

The sample for this study was based on several conceptual and demographic considerations like tenure, level of education, number of years employed at the University, age range and whether the participant is a member of a protected class as enumerated under the Alberta Human Rights Commission. Considerations were also based on previous knowledge of the literature. The sampling frame was restricted to full-time teaching faculty at the University. Concerted effort was made to ensure the participant profile was as diverse as possible.

### **Sampling Strategy**

I used a purposive sampling technique to generate a non-probability sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.295). Decisions regarding sample size were based on category saturation (Blaikie, 2000; McCracken, 1988) and qualitative clarity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

A recommendation by McCracken (1988) states that it is best to restrict sample size to eight participants when dealing with research that deals with long-form interviews. In consultation with my supervisory committee, I conducted 11 interviews for this study. This decision to interview 11 participants adequately allowed for participant attrition, category saturation and the development of interview skill set (McCracken, 1988). Saturation was reached by the eighth interview when themes and general data became repetitive and no new data was emerging.

## **Assessment of Qualitative Research (Rigor)**

Management research is traditionally based in a positivist scientific paradigm (NCEHR, 2009). Management research is predominantly quantitative in nature (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and for this reason the evaluation of research findings in management are most commonly subjected to quantitative assessments of validity and reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 2003). However, a quantitative evaluation metric is not appropriate to assess emergent research findings in qualitative management research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Pratt, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

According to Guba and Lincoln (2003), applying the assessment criteria of authenticity and trustworthiness to qualitative research is comparable to applying the assessment criteria of validity and reliability to quantitative research. Questions of validity can be addressed with authenticity, which covers: fairness authenticity, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity, while questions of reliability can be addressed with trustworthiness, which covers; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 2003). I will discuss each of these factors in this chapter.

### **Concepts Under the ‘Authenticity’ Criterion.**

*Fairness authenticity.* Fairness authenticity as a concept refers to “how the researcher solicited and then preserved the original intent and meaning of participants’ accounts along with their inherent value structures throughout the entire data analysis process” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 294). To ensure fairness authenticity in my



study, I obtained participants' full consent prior to conducting interviews and asked for/ recorded no personal identifying information during the interviews (see Appendix I). I informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study and provided forms to delete full or part of the information they provided. I also informed participants of how they may get in touch with me and access a copy of the research findings. All signed consent forms will be saved for a year from the date of defense.

***Ontological authenticity.*** Ontological authenticity refers to “the extent to which participants' awareness or consciousness of their personal accounts were improved, matured, expanded on, and elaborated upon as a result of their participation in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p 246). As a researcher, I made sure to disclose my personal and professional interests and experiences in the topic to the participants during the research. These disclosures are noted in my recordings as well as personal notes.

***Educative authenticity.*** Educative authenticity can be explained as “the extent an individual participant's awareness or consciousness of the accounts of others, outside of their own stakeholder group, have been improved, matured, expanded on, and elaborated upon as a result of their participation in the research process” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248). This criterion was not readily applicable since my research focused on the personal experiences of individual participants. There were instances where participant mentioned their experiences as bystanders in someone else's workplace bullying incident and those have been recorded in the study. The findings of the research may have implications for individuals who did not meet the sampling frame criteria.

***Catalytic authenticity.*** Catalytic authenticity refers to “the extent that any actions taken and/or decisions made throughout the course of the study were impacted and influenced by the research process itself, as well as by any conclusions that were derived” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248). This criterion cannot be guaranteed under any circumstance, but as a researcher I would like to consider this piece of research as having the potential to stimulate conversations about the phenomena.

***Tactical authenticity.*** Tactical authenticity is considered as “the ability of the study to empower study participants and any relevant stakeholders to take action as a result of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 249). Again, this criterion cannot be guaranteed in any way since the impact of research can never be known from the outset.

### **Concepts Under the ‘Reliability’ Criterion.**

***Credibility.*** Credibility refers to the researcher’s ability to achieve similarity between a participant’s account and the reconstruction of that account (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 2003). The assessments of credibility include: researcher familiarity with the topic, the collection of sufficient data to warrant research claims, the researcher’s ability to establish strong logical links between the research categories under study and observations and whether or not other researchers would be able to obtain comparable data and results if the situation were replicated (p. 237). To ensure the credibility of the study, I had debriefing sessions with my committee members. In addition, I took notes as well as recorded the interviews to ensure that I have original quotes and material.

***Transferability.*** Transferability refers to the degree of similarity between sending and receiving research contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 294). Transferability assessments are usually concerned with issues such as degree of similarity between the researcher's research and other research, and the ability of others to draw connections between the researcher's research and other research (p. 241).

All through the research, I have attempted to draw parallels between extant research and emerging themes and findings in this research. In addition, implications of this research have been discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters.

***Dependability.*** Dependability refers to the extent to which external researchers can explore the research process undertaken by the researcher, judge the decisions and factors leading to the decisions made by the researcher as well as understand the interpretations that were made (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 294). In short, dependability is said to be achieved if the research process can be considered to be logical, traceable and well-documented (p. 242).

I strove to maintain reflexivity in my research by regularly discussing my approach and thoughts during the process with members of my thesis committee, in order to get their feedback and input. I also recorded the interviews, had them transcribed and analyzed the data in an iterative fashion to allow for proper emergence of themes.

***Confirmability.*** Confirmability refers to “the ability of others to confirm or corroborate a research study's findings” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). It is concerned with whether the data, interpretations and conclusions are based in data and not research bias/distortions.

I took several steps to ensure the confirmability of my study. I made sure all participants strictly adhered to the sampling frame criteria, I kept detailed research notes through the entire process, I reviewed all transcriptions and recordings multiple times to make sure I was properly representing the data and tried to draw parallels with extant literature wherever possible. I conducted all the 11 interviews myself.

## **Data Analysis**

In my research, I used thematic content analysis to analyze the data. Thematic content analysis involves identifying themes and categories that emerge from the data by analyzing the data and attempting to confirm and qualify them by iteration, thus leading to possible further themes (Burnard et al., 2008). This type of coding is known as “open coding”. Once the responses have been categorized into main themes, these themes will be used to explore their role in the formation of employee perceptions regarding workplace bullying. Outliers, if any, will also be examined.

### Stages in the Thematic Coding Process

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six stages in the thematic coding process; familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

**Phase 1: Familiarization with data.** This phase included reading and re-reading the transcribed interview data and listening to the interview recordings. In this stage, I noted possible emergent themes and familiarized myself with the data in order to ensure that I have the proper grasp of the different nuances and layers in the data, before settling on themes.

**Phase 2: Generating initial codes.** In this stage, I organized the data (recordings, transcriptions and field notes) and generated an initial list of items from the data that have a recurring pattern. This coding process is iterative and evolves through the research process. This iteration also helped identify previously unnoticed patterns and improve rigor. This phase involved data reduction and data complication. Transcripts were analyzed once all the interviews were completed.

Seidel and Kelle (1995) suggest three ways to aid with the process of data reduction and coding: (a) noticing relevant phenomena, (b) collecting examples of the phenomena, and (c) analyzing phenomena to find similarities, differences, patterns and overlying structures. This phase is in essence the decontextualizing and recontextualizing of the data.

**Phase 3: Searching for themes.** In this stage, I grouped together codes to form over-arching themes and focused on broader patterns in the data. No themes were discarded at this point, since it may be deemed important in later stages of research.

**Phase 4: Reviewing the themes.** This phase involved refining and reviewing themes multiple times, till a satisfactory potential theme list emerged which can explain the data set effectively.

**Phase 5: Defining and naming themes.** According to Braun and Clark (2006), in this stage, researchers can (1) define what current themes consist of, and (2) explain each theme in a few sentences. This included naming the theme, explaining what it encompasses, linking it back to the data and including any sub-themes, if any.

**Phase 6: Producing the report.** In this stage, I present the final themes with descriptions and evidence from the data set. In order to ensure reliability of analysis, the entire coding process will be done twice; once by the primary researcher (me) and then by two independent assistants. In this way, chances of missing out on themes will be reduced and primary researcher bias will be curtailed. Assistants were given a brief orientation and required no training, since they are researchers themselves. In order to maintain privacy and confidentiality, research assistants only had access to the transcripts and not the recordings. The only sub-theme that generated conflict between the primary researcher and research assistants was the ‘joke culture’ sub-theme. A question arose of whether it should be included under the ‘victim rationalization’ theme or the ‘organizational culture’ theme. After extensive discussion and reading extant literature on humour, I decided to categorize it under the organizational culture theme. The assistants found no other discrepancy in the coding.

At the end of this phase, I identified the overarching themes that contribute to the creation of employee perception with regards to organizational support against workplace bullying. The themes are: organizational culture, victim rationalization and responsiveness to stimuli.

### **Data Gathering**

I conducted in-person, in-depth semi-structured interviews (Blaikie, 2000) in order to gather primary data. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) in-person interviews are effective in helping build mutual respect, in providing a direct insight into the participant’s life and work setting and in enabling the observation of non-verbal communication. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) iterate that non-verbal

communication is important, especially if it conflicts with verbal communication and can provide very valuable data. In-person interviews also increases levels of trustworthiness and reduces the possibility of communication breakdown during the interview (Seidman, 2006).

Interviews lasted anywhere between 30 minutes to 90 minutes, usually averaging around 40 minutes. Interviews allowed me direct access to participant's personal views, perspectives and demographic information (McCracken, 1988), while at the same time providing ample berth for me to explore any key themes that emerged during the conversation.

To ensure consistency across interviews, I developed an interview blue-print (See Appendix II). This interview blueprint guided the interviews and ensured that all participants were asked the same basic set of questions, but allowed enough space for additional probing, clarifications and explanations (Blaikie, 2000).

I used a digital voice recorder in order to ensure I was not missing out on information, and also took field notes during and after the interview. All participants except one consented to their interview recordings being transcribed by a professional transcription company. I personally transcribed that one interview verbatim, while all other interviews were transcribed by the transcription company. I cross-checked the transcriptions with the recording in order to ensure accuracy and found no discrepancy other than the rare minor typos. A non-disclosure agreement was signed with the transcription company and all recordings were deleted as soon as transcription receipt was confirmed.

Due to the nature of the research, utmost care was taken to maintain participant confidentiality and anonymity. No names, official titles/positions or any other identifying information (like department or affiliations) were asked during the interviews. Participant names were replaced with codes or just “Speaker #” in the interviews. Any possible identifying information was redacted from all written documentation.

### **An Overview of the Existing Supports**

Before moving on to the findings and discussion section, I will briefly outline the existing workplace bullying support system currently in place at the University. This will help get a more in-depth, well-rounded understanding of the existence of support measures versus the employee perception of these measures.

The University approaches the bullying of its faculty in a number of different ways and utilizes the resources of multiple stake-holders/service-providers (e.g. The Faculty Association, third-party counselling services) in reconciliation, mediation and in certain cases, the punitive process. The current workplace bullying support system includes:

- Harassment and Discrimination Policy
- Communication of Resources and Training
- Consultants
- Counselling, Employee Assistance Programs and other alternative methods

In this section, I will briefly outline each of these support measures.

**Harassment and Discrimination Policy.** The Harassment and Discrimination Policy goes through mandatory revision every five years. The policy is drafted,



implemented and administered by the University Human Resources Office and must pass through the Board of Governors for approval. The University Human Resources Office prepares a confidential internal annual report on workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination complaints.

The policy does not over-ride any civil, criminal or legal channels of remedy (e.g. Provincial Human Rights Legislation, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act) and in fact mentions them as possible avenues for redressal, especially for serious offenses. The policy acts as a complement to the existing collective bargaining agreements and is a common policy for all members and affiliates of the University including but not limited to students, faculty and administration. The Harassment and Discrimination Policy is complemented by the Sexual Violence Prevention Policy and the Workplace Violence Policy and is a public document available online on the University website.

Workplace bullying is included under the harassment portion of the policy and explicitly outlines the behaviours that do and do not constitute bullying. As per a section of the policy, bullying is defined as a form of aggression against a targeted person(s) and may involve persistent, abusive, intimidating or insulting behaviour, including abuse of power, which is known or ought to be known to cause the targeted person(s) to feel threatened, humiliated and/or vulnerable. Examples of bullying have been outlined in the policy as an indicative list. Behaviours that do not fall under the purview of bullying are also outlined in the same section and include behaviours such as constructive feedback as part of a legitimate performance management or review process, ongoing coaching and instruction for the sole purpose of improving performance and legitimate job or work-related instructions.

University policies for harassment and discrimination vary from policies in other sectors in one key area; academic freedom. As per this university's policy, "Academic freedom is the right to teach, engage in scholarly activity and perform service without interference and without jeopardizing employment and the exercise of this right cannot be considered bullying."

Another important clause in the Policy, is the reprisals and retribution provisions that prohibit retaliation and outline punitive measures in such cases. The clause also addresses cases of frivolous and vexatious complaints, and disciplinary action that will arise from such complaints.

In terms of the resolution process; the University outlines possible steps for reconciliation via a three-pronged model for handling complaints. This includes; self-managed resolution, informal resolution and a formal complaint process. Self-managed resolution refers to directly approaching the person engaging in bullying behaviours, communicating discomfort or displeasure and indicating that the behaviours should not be repeated. Self-managed resolution are of two types; addressing concerns directly and addressing concerns with assistance. Informal resolution refers to a collaborative problem-solving approach using facilitation and/or mediation. The process is facilitated by a third-party consultant/mediator. In addition, the target may choose to take no action.

**Communication of Resources and Training.** According to the policy, one of the provisions for the effective implementation of the policy includes educational programs created to enhance faculty and staff awareness of policy and procedures related to workplace bullying. Currently, this is being done by including a workplace bullying

(harassment and discrimination) info booth at each new employee orientation and intermittently sending out policy or procedure updates via mass email/newsletter.

In terms of proactive voluntary training, the University Wellness Office runs various training sessions and workshops to improve the skill set required to handle difficult conversations and potential workplace bullying situation. These workshops and training sessions help individuals learn skills to handle high stakes conversations, resolve problems, make important decisions and execute decisions in a collaborative environment. This training is provided free of charge and is geared towards helping reduce friction in interpersonal work relationships by providing tools for resolution. Training also covers four key components of mental health in the workplace; accommodation, resolving conflict, improving workplace relations, and responding to mental health issues.

**Consultants.** The University support system against workplace bullying also includes a network of volunteer peer consultants from across the University community. These consultants serve as the initial contact point for employees and students who are seeking information about the policy or who are in various stages of conflicts with peers, superiors or subordinates.

Consultants are nominated by two members of the University community and nominees are interviewed by a sub-committee consisting of not less than three existing consultants. This committee then makes a recommendation to the Associate Vice President of Human Resources & Administration of the University, and depending on the recommendation the nominee is appointed by the President, for a term of three years. The consultants are trained in peer mediation and informal conflict resolution and serve as the

initial point of contact for faculty seeking resolution in cases of workplace bullying..

Under this policy, consultants are impartial and not an advocate for either party.

Consultants can advise on issues such as;

- Resources available to facilitate resolution;
- The right of complainants to file a written complaint;
- The right of respondents to be informed about a complaint filed against them and to be provided with a reasonable opportunity to respond to the allegations;
- The availability of counselling, employee assistance programs, or other additional or alternative University service and resources, as appropriate and/or applicable;
- The right to be accompanied by a support person or representative from their constituency organization during interviews;
- The right, when an investigation has commenced, to withdraw from any further action in connection with the investigation (although the University may proceed with the investigation in its own right) or to suspend the complaint process pending alternate resolution efforts, or, conversely, to cease alternative resolution efforts and file a complaint;
- The right to choose other avenues of recourse, including but not limited to proceeding with a criminal prosecution or civil litigation, or filing a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights.

### **Counselling, Employee and Family Assistance Programs and Other**

**Alternative Methods.** In addition to the avenues for redressal discussed above, faculty at

the University also has access to alternative support networks like informal collegial support or personal support. The Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is a confidential resource provided to faculty at the University that offers services that includes but is not limited to identification and assessment of work-related problems, short-term counseling and consultation and referral to appropriate services and resources. This program is administered by a third-party vendor.

### **Workplace Bullying Protections Offered by the Faculty Association**

Other than workplace bullying protection measures provided by the University, protections are also available under the collective bargaining agreements entered into by the faculty association. The faculty handbook outlines expected standards for collegial behaviour and a safe and fair working environment. It also outlines the instances of contravention of these guidelines and the process, timeline and parties involved in addressing a grievance.

The faculty handbook specifies that all grievances must be brought forward within sixty working days of the incident to the President of the University or the President of the faculty association. The association will then determine whether to formalize the grievance and investigate/resolve it as per the guidelines in the Handbook. If resolution is not possible, the complaint will go into arbitration. The faculty association also encourages mediation as an alternative method to addressing the issue. In most cases, the faculty association will act as a representative of the faculty bringing the complaint against the University administration, or a mediator/arbitrator in cases of complaints against other faculty members.

## Findings and Discussion

In this section, I analyze the qualitative data obtained from long form interviews conducted with faculty at the University by first giving an overview of the participant profile and then discussing the major findings from the data, in terms of extant perception and workplace bullying research. I will present my findings using the research questions to guide the discussion. All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and as per a signed mutual agreement I have withheld all names or identifiers.

In order to ensure that I get as wide a range of perspectives as possible, while still exploring individual topics in detail, I sent out interview invites in two stages. In the first stage, I sent out five invites; two male, three female, split between working at the University for more than ten years and less than ten years. My aim in doing this in two stages is that I anticipated that I would have *a priori* assumptions and categories in the first wave of interviews and wanted to give myself the opportunity to explore those in greater detail in subsequent interviews. Based on the responses, omissions and leads in the first stage of interviews, I invited the next round of interview participants. This two-stage participant recruitment enabled both breadth and depth in my data. My sample included 9 women and 2 men ranging from 2 years of employment to 32 years of employment. The sample represented all seven Faculties in the University. My research does not specifically address gendered harassment, and so the gender of the interviewee was not considered to be an important factor. Diversity in the sample was achieved via number of years employed and department representation.

## Findings

**Research Question 1: Are employees aware of the organizational supports available to them against workplace bullying?** An overwhelming majority of the interviewees answered this question in the negative. Out of the total number of eleven respondents, nine respondents acknowledged that there must be a policy but confessed to not knowing where it is, who is responsible for it or the details included in the policy. Responses ranged from “..they (the University) usually have policies for these sorts of things” to “..I’m sure they (the University) have a policy, they need to from a legal and liability angle, I just don’t know what it is”. One respondent said, “All policies are usually online, and can be accessed if needed. I just tend not to search for policies unless I need them” (personal communication, September 16, 2017).

Two respondents were aware and familiar with the policy, however, I think it would be wise to consider them outliers to the general sample since these respondents were or are currently actively involved with the faculty association and/or the committees responsible for framing, revising or administering the workplace bullying. These two respondents were also the only ones aware of the specific provisions of the faculty handbook that relate to workplace bullying.

Of the total number of respondents, only the same two respondents were aware of the availability of confidential peer consultants for harassment and discrimination on campus. Out of the total number of respondents, four (in total, including the two considered outliers) were aware of the confidential counselling service available through the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP), but said that they probably would not

use it since they would prefer services or methods to fix the problem and the EFAP only provides generalized counselling services for workplace bullying incidents.

None of the respondents were aware of any of the University-driven communication with regards to harassment or bullying and were also completely unaware of the proactive training and workshop sessions. No interviewee recalled the harassment and bullying info booth at their respective orientations or recalled any verbal or written communication during the orientation that dealt with this issue. However, seven interviewees (>60%) acknowledged that the University Human Resources sends out regular emails and some of those emails might have contained information relating to workplace bullying resources, but they do not read mass emails from the Human Resources Office, except for the ones dealing with payroll.

With the exception of the two employees who have experiential knowledge of workplace bullying support systems on campus, all employees were equally unaware of the services and facilities available to them. Employees who have been on campus longer (more than ten years) have more anecdotal knowledge from collegial conversations or in some cases, experience, but with all such interviewees it was qualified with a disclaimer that this knowledge (a) was not received from the University or University official (b) could be inaccurate (c) is highly contextual.

It is interesting to note that all respondents expressed that they are more comfortable approaching the faculty association with a workplace bullying complaint, than they are approaching their respective Dean, Associate Dean or Human Resources. It may be a fair interpretation of these differing comfort levels to say that the faculty association is



consistently seen as more reliable in solving workplace conflicts, than the administration of the university, or of any individual faculty.

**Research Question 2: *Does this awareness fluctuate based on demographic factors of age, gender, type of employment and length of employment.*** The awareness levels with regards to the various workplace bullying supports available did not seem to fluctuate based on demographic factors of age or gender. However, it did seem to fluctuate with length of employment, where employees who worked at the University for ten years or more were able to draw information from experiential or anecdotal evidence. This information is qualified by the fact that it is mostly second-hand and generally not up-to-date.

**Research Question 3: *What are the most effective ways for organizations to communicate their workplace bullying support systems to their employees?*** As discussed in the previous section, the University disseminates information about workplace harassment and bullying policies and interventions primarily via the info booth at the New Employee Orientations which are held twice a year and then intermittently via email. The information is also accessible via the Human Resources website and the faculty handbook. All university employees participate in the new employee orientation just once, as they enter into new positions at the university. At these orientation sessions a great deal of information is presented and new employees face the challenge of absorbing and prioritizing all the incoming information about their new employer and work environment.

Despite the university's efforts at dissemination, there is a massive communication gap as evidenced from the data in terms of almost none of the

interviewees knowing what the available support systems are. When probed, all employees who claimed to not be aware of the available supports confessed to not reading mass emails. The main reason cited for this was being constantly inundated with a high volume of emails through the day and having to prioritize. In terms of the info booth at the orientation, none of the employees (including those involved in the faculty association or in the framing/administration of policies) were aware of its existence. Most faculty cited information overload at orientation, lack of prominence given to diversity/equity/discrimination/bullying issues at orientation, absence of talks from University administration regarding healthy work environment/relationships and lack of time to visit each info booth.

**Research Question 4: *What factors affect employees' perception of their organization's role in minimizing workplace bullying?*** At this point, I would like to discuss the overarching themes that I have derived from the data that will help explain the factors shaping employees' perception of their organization's role in minimizing workplace bullying.

The main themes are: organizational culture, victim reasoning and responsiveness to stimuli

I will discuss these themes in detail.

*Organizational culture.* Organizational culture is a set of shared assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006).

Based on my data, the university faculty feel that the workplace bullying support systems put in place by the university management are mostly ineffectual because of the organizational culture. From my data, the way in which organizational culture as a concept affects employee perceptions of their employer's commitment to addressing workplace bullying at the University can be categorized into what is referred to as "aggressive/defensive culture" (Cooke, 1987; Restubog et al., 2015) in organizational culture literature. To better understand how faculty perceptions at this University are shaped by the culture as opposed to the reality of existing workplace bullying support systems, we first have to explore aggressive/defensive culture and its factors.

As per the organizational culture inventory measures model given by Robert A. Cook (1987), culture is the set of behaviours that employees feel the need to emulate in order to fit in with their organization and can be grouped under three general types of cultures:

- Constructive cultures; workplaces where collaboration is encouraged and interactions are aimed at satisfying higher-order needs.
- Passive/defensive cultures; workplaces where employees believe that they must not have any interactions that threaten the status quo of their own security.
- Aggressive/defensive cultures; workplaces where members are expected to approach tasks in aggressive/defensive ways in order to protect their status and security.

Based on participant's descriptions of their workplace experiences and perceptions, I would categorize this University as having an aggressive/defensive culture. As per Cooke (1987), aggressive/defensive cultures are categorized as having, in general, a higher emphasis on task than on people. This creates a high-stress environment, where there is a

risk of decisions being made based on status rather than expertise and individuals focusing on personal success rather than group success. In addition, aggressive/defensive cultures have implicit expectations of members that require them to appear controlled, competent and superior and seeking assistance or admitting shortcomings are viewed as incompetent or weak. These organizations also tend to encourage employees to compete against each other rather than external competitors, and finding errors or mistakes in the work of colleagues are rewarded. In the context of an educational institution, intellectual disagreements are commonplace and expected. This may lead to normalized behavior of challenging and correcting colleagues on large and small points throughout a range of daily interactions and collaborations. As per one interviewee, “Professors sometimes forget to turn off their critical modes when they have personal interactions, and that creates a very adversarial work atmosphere, when it doesn’t need to be so. I guess what I’m getting at is that, I’m fine if you’re critical of my work but, (a) reign it in a little, you don’t need to be nasty about it and (b) no one needs to be critical in a personal sphere.” (Personal communication, October 11, 2017). Another respondent commented that, “...it almost seems as if being mean here (at the University) gets you rewarded or gets you ahead of the game. I’ve seen people give feedback with what seems like the sole intent of tearing the person down. I mean, you don’t need to censor yourself but how you say things is as important as what you say” (Personal communication, September 19, 2017).

Aggressive/defensive culture as per the model given by Cooke (1987) can better be understood based on its cultural norms as follows:

- **Oppositional:** This cultural norm is based on the idea that cultures like this encourage defending one’s status by being overly critical and sometimes even

bordering on cynical. While this is presented as using rigor to better a product/service, the norm may even go as far as belittling co-workers and using irrelevant or trivial flaws to put them down.

- Power: This norm is based on a workplace where a need for prestige and influence is seen as an important asset and often, self-worth is equated with control of others.
- Competitive: This is an extension of the oppositional norm, where there is an overwhelming need to protect status. In this norm, employees protect their status by comparing themselves to others and out-performing them. It also manifests as constantly seeking appraisal and recognition.
- Perfectionistic: This norm refers to the need to achieve perfect results and extremely high standards. Employees tend to be extremely detail-oriented and place excessive demands on themselves and others.

Adapting these workplace descriptions to a university setting, aspects of these characteristics can readily be found in standard behavior of academics. Rather than focusing on the production of a product, academics are focused on research and teaching – in both cases disseminating knowledge. Hence, they need to constantly demonstrate their grasp of knowledge and establish their expertise. Based on the data from the interviews, all the respondents were of the opinion that the existing organizational culture nullified any effects of the workplace bullying support measures in place. The over-riding theme in the interview data is that the faculty is aware of a detrimental “joke culture” that exists in the University, and attributes it to the low levels of trust most of the faculty has in the workplace bullying redressal mechanism. As per one respondent, “They always

have a way of brushing it (a hurtful comment or joke) away. It's always – oh we didn't mean you, or oh can't you take a joke? And you're expected to laugh along and pretend that it's ok that they're saying these (culturally insensitive or sexist) things, because if you don't you now that they'll probably turn on you, and you don't want that to happen. It is amazing really, some of the things that are said and passed off as a joke" (Personal communication, October 17, 2017).

This finding on organizational culture aligns with existing research that states that work environment; which consists of organizational and social cultures, as well as multi-level dynamics, is one of the more important antecedents of workplace bullying (Carter et al., 2013; Jenkins et al., 2012; Salin, 2008; Sammnani & Singh, 2012; Vartia & Tehrani, 2012). Research by McKay et al. (2008) links systemic bullying to toxic/weak organizational cultures. Higher education is particularly interesting as a work environment because it's very structure makes it vulnerable to workplace bullying (McKay et al., 2008; Taylor, 2013). Factors such as peer-review, competition for funding, competition for tenure, evaluation processes and criteria and committee participation are listed as possible sources of academic frustration leading to workplace bullying (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Zabrodska et al., 2014). These negative behaviours are sometimes even inadvertently rewarded by the organization if it brings desired organizational results (Twale & DeLuca, 2008).

*Victim Rationalization.* Another theme that emerged from the data is victim rationalization. Drawing from extant literature in psychology, rationalization is considered as a defense mechanism used by both the victim and the perpetrator to justify controversial behaviours or feelings in a rational or logical manner, in order to make the

incident tolerable, and in some cases to avoid the true explanation (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

In every single interview I conducted, without exception, participants recounted incidents of bullying and immediately qualified it with something that would either minimize their own experiences or belittle their reactions to it. The majority of these reactions can directly be linked back to the aggressive/defensive organizational culture that exists in this University, as in most centers of higher education. However, the lack of clarity provided on what exactly constitutes bullying as per this particular University, survivorship bias (discussed below) as well as the perceived lack of options to deal with it also contribute to the creation of this perception factor.

Numerous responses centered on how they (the faculty interviewees) felt bullied by their superiors or co-workers, but how they felt that since it is considered a privilege to have positions in academia, they should not be complaining about incivility in the workplace. One interviewee commented that “..it’s almost as if they (the University) is doing us a favour by giving us this job and we are supposed to feel indebted to them and never be dissatisfied no matter what the conditions” (Personal communication, October 19, 2017).

I consciously did not provide a definition for workplace bullying (unless specifically asked) in order to be able to gauge how faculty makes sense of possible psychosocial violence in the workplace. Almost all interviews included a variation of the question “is that considered bullying?” immediately after recounting an incident of bullying. The perceived lack of clarity by the University on the specifics of what it considers to be workplace bullying/ microaggressions/ psychosocial harassment has

contributed greatly to the faculty perception that only physical or critical/high-intensity acts (e.g. racial attacks, gendered harassment) would be considered for resolution or serious discussion. This aligns with research that suggests that there are elements of shame and fear in the victim's role that make them question their own ability to identify if what they are facing is workplace bullying or a repercussion of their own shortcomings (Zabrodka et al., 2014). In addition, bullies tend to morally condemn the victims in order to justify their own actions (Zabrodka et al., 2014). This could lead to even more rationalization, shame or fear for the victim. A clear case of victim rationalization was when one interviewee commented, "...that (the bullying incidents) were worse all those years ago (referring to when they first joined this University in the 1980s). Right now, it is a 180-degree difference. Perhaps people were not used to working with a woman in this department or worse, reporting to a woman in this department! And I was so young, I barely knew what I was doing. That probably attracted a lot of these behaviours" (Personal communication, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

Survivorship bias plays a big role in victim rationalization. Survivorship bias, also known as survival bias, is the logical fallacy of focusing on the people or things that made it past some selection process or stage, while overlooking those that did not make it past the selection stage, generally due to their lack of visibility (Shermer, 2014). Survivorship bias can lead to false conclusions. In the context of this research, the interviewees who had experienced workplace bullying reasoned that what they faced must be an anomaly or that perhaps they are not strong enough to deal with the pressures of the job since xyz person had it so much harder, but still managed to excel. Comments ranged from "...I shouldn't complain, I was not the first woman in that department, imagine how much



worse it must have been for them” to “...everybody seems to be ok with it (bullying), maybe I am not cut out for this job”.

Almost all responses mentioned the peer feedback systems in place at the University which encouraged harsh criticisms of co-workers’ research which often crossed the line into personal attacks, going as far as ridiculing disabilities, gender and ethnicity in some cases. Tying it back to the previous section on culture, one respondent mentioned how “I am never excited to present my research to colleagues because it is almost a guarantee that there will be comments that have nothing to do with critiquing the research itself.” When asked for an example they went on to say that their data is exclusively qualitative, and qualitative data is considered “inferior” by their department. This opens the door for colleagues to dismiss qualitative research completely. The same interviewee recalled an incident where a colleague who only uses quantitative methods openly joked about how qualitative research is basically just fiction writing and all that is needed is an imagination, no “real” research skill” (Personal communication, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017). One respondent referred to the process of presenting research and receiving feedback as the “academic bear pit”, another referred to it as being “in the lion’s den” and “bring thrown to the wolves”. There were multiple instances where participants mentioned how delegitimizing co-worker’s research methods (qualitative versus quantitative) and Faculty/department was completely normalized at the university. This was exacerbated by the perception that the University’s senior management’s funding decisions favoured some Faculties over others. Most participants felt bullied by the internal research dissemination process and mentioned that there is no official facilitator/chair who steps in to make sure the feedback is not only purely professional but

also pertinent. In addition, a couple of interviewees mentioned that the lack of reaction from bystanders to the bullying made them think that they were being hyper-sensitive and over-reacting to the situation. In one interview, the respondent recounted a series of verbal attacks that occurred in research presentations over the years and then commented that, “All these are really insignificant little things when you look at the big picture really. But it is like the whole concept of the “ton of feathers”. It wears you down, and I think that’s what the intent is, I think, what do they call it? Death by a thousand cuts. Thinking back, I really should not have let it get to me, but then I wasn’t as strong then” (Personal communication, October 20, 2017). All these perceptions are included under the code of “victim rationalization”. Victim reasoning is detrimental on multiple levels; it indirectly puts the onus of dealing with the situation on the victim, it gives legitimacy to bully actions and it creates a self-fueled perception that organizational support is not deserved.

*Responsiveness to Stimuli.* The most interesting perceptual code that emerged from the data is responsiveness to stimuli. Interviewees talked about how they judged the University’s commitment to having a psychosocially safe and healthy work environment by the following; (1) if and how the University responds to workplace bullying cases on campus (2) if and how it responds to workplace bullying developments in higher education in the country (3) if and how it responds to workplace bullying developments in non-academic spheres.

All respondents were of the opinion that their University lagged behind other comparable universities in terms of having workplace bullying support systems for its faculty. It is interesting to note that about 80% of the respondents specifically mentioned how the University is a great place for students, since the infrastructure to help students

who are bullied by peers or faculty is accessible, well thought-out and effective. However, according to the faculty I interviewed, the same could not be said for the supports available for faculty. Three respondents mentioned how the University was in the process of overhauling its Sexual Violence Prevention Policies and Measures in the light of incidents on campus, and used it as an example of how the University follows more of a reactionary policy to issues like this, rather than being proactive. In addition, respondents mentioned that there seems to be no effort by the University or HR to create a healthy work culture on campus and the current organizational culture is just one that has evolved organically.

One of the respondents specifically mentioned a different University in a neighboring province that is comparable in terms of faculty-student ratio, resources and overall size that had a much better support system for workplace bullying and was much more proactive in terms of training, workshops and generalized initiatives to increase awareness (e.g. posters, talks, mass emails etc.). The respondent also mentioned that the fact that the Occupational Health and Safety regulations as well as the workplace bullying legislation in that province were more stringent and sophisticated as compared to the province that the research was being conducted in. They also pointed to the fact that this University seemed to be doing the bare minimum that is required of them as per the legislation, instead of benchmarking and trying to provide more than just the basic. They also mentioned that universities in Canada on an average, tend to lag behind the corporate sector when it comes to HR policies and sensitive issues like workplace bullying, gender spectrum and sexuality sensitization and diversity training.

**Research Question 5: *What do employees believe organizations need to do better to improve workplace bullying support systems?*** The participants were unanimous in their belief that the University does the bare minimum as required by legislation to protect its employees from workplace bullying. This is quite surprising since when further questioned, only one participant had any idea of what the provincial legislation or collective agreement required. The participants felt that the University's funding decisions reflected its priorities and employee psychosocial safety continues to be an afterthought.

The recommendations given by the respondents can be discussed under four categories: Communications, Training, Benchmarking, Reporting.

*Communications.* When asked what the University can do to improve its workplace bullying policies, training and remedies, all participants were of the opinion that there should be more efficient and proactive communication from the University administration and Human Resources. Respondent recommendations included different mediums of communication like talks regarding healthy work environments, sessions on civility in the workplace, workshops and discussions on what actions are considered as workplace bullying, training on conflict resolution and complaint escalation procedures. According to a participant, "...the University's stance on workplace bullying right now is lukewarm at best. There is an overwhelming air of you guys (faculty) are so privileged to have this job and are adults with a PhD, don't be crybabies" (Personal communication, November 7, 2017). As per another participant, "...they (the University) expects us to solve this (workplace bullying) ourselves or go to our deans or associate deans but the problem is that no one in this equation is trained or equipped to handle these kinds of

conversations or friction. So, it goes from one position of helplessness to another” (Personal communication, October 13, 2017).

Participants suggested that the University senior management and Human Resources talk about healthy workplaces/workplace bullying at the orientation in order to signal their commitment to creating a safe psychosocial climate as well as a positive organizational culture. To quote a participant, “They (the University) don’t want to deal with the problem because that means admitting you have a problem. They have to start talking about it as if it’s a “real” issue. They need to start leading by example. There is a sense of empowerment that comes with openly talking about the issue (workplace bullying)” (Personal communication, November 7, 2017).

Most participants expressed concern that there are no communications or visible repercussions for bad behavior, and this naturally encourages more bad behavior. According to one respondent, “You (bullies) can be as terrible as you want and you get away with it. Why would anyone stop when I’m sure they (the bullies) are getting some sort of professional gain or personal pleasure from it? More importantly, why would anyone bother complaining when you know nothing is going to happen to them (the bullies).” (Personal communication, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

Participants suggested a clear and transparent progressive discipline guideline, to ensure that all cases are dealt with in a fair and even-handed way and also to publicize the fact that certain actions will attract serious consequences. This participant-generated recommendation directly ties in to research that recommends handling workplace bullying by instituting a “zero tolerance policy” that outlines clear punishments for those

engaging in workplace bullying, so that the costs of bullying are clear to perpetrators (Namie & Namie, 2011; Salin, 2008).

*Training.* All respondents were of the opinion that the university lacks a proper conflict resolution training and skill development system. As per an interviewee, “this (conflict resolution) is definitely a problem. I have been here for more than two decades now and I have never heard of anyone being trained in conflict resolution or in managing workplace friction. You would think that if the university expects us to solve things within our own department, they would make sure we had the tools we need! Plus, if I were a Dean, the last thing I would want to deal with is a workplace bullying complaint, on top of all my other teaching duties and research” (Personal communication, October 16, 2017). In addition to conflict resolution training, two participants also suggested micro aggressions training, in order to help faculty and employees understand the nature of subtle negative acts and how to identify and self-regulate them. This communication and training would also help to strengthen the informal information and support networks that exist in the workplace, and people would be equipped to address workplace bullying concerns with facts. A recommendation that grew out of a discussion about lack of mention of healthy workplaces in the Orientation, was the lack of faculty mentorship. Most of the participants who have been appointed at the University within the past ten years mentioned that post orientation, there is a sink or swim environment, and it would have been helpful if there was a faculty mentor for each new employee who could provide guidance through the major milestones of the academic career. Also, in most instances, this mentorship relationship would also work as a contact point in case of workplace

bullying, since the trust has already been built up. This would enable early stage interventions.

This recommendation can be tied back to extant literature which repeatedly mentions the benefits of training in reducing and addressing workplace bullying. In a review study done on the implications of training and education for organizational leaders and managers, Kelloway and Barling (2010) found that leadership development in the form of training worked as an effective intervention that enhanced psychosocial health and safety of employees. In addition, Bryant et al., (2009) recommends developing a proactive stance to managing workplace bullying by investing in training at all levels of the organizational hierarchy.

*Benchmarking.* Another recommendation from a few of the participants was bench-marking. Participants felt that the University looked for the easiest route when it came to setting up the workplace bullying framework instead of trying to design the best framework possible under the available resources. A participant suggested that the University benchmark the workplace bullying practices of comparable universities from other provinces, and in that way, start creating a healthier work environment for the faculty and staff, improve the university's reputation as an employer and prove its organizational commitment to creating a bullying-free workplace. According to one interviewee, "It (bench-marking) is really not that hard you know, it's just research. And guess where we are? In a place full of researchers, that's right! All it really needs is to research what's out there (workplace bullying measures used in different universities across Canada and the world), study those results, see which ones will fit us and then

create something specific for us (the university)” (Personal communication, October 19, 2017).

In addition to bench-marking of the overall framework, one respondent suggested bench-marking of processes. According to them, “Firstly, we do not have clear, centralized systems for redressal. Secondly, we do not have dedicated positions to handle complaints. Lastly, we do not have systems and procedures in place to ensure fair and equal treatment of (bullying) complaints. It (resolution) really comes down to who you know – if you know the right people, your problem will be addressed. If not, you might as well not complain. If we had, well, standardized processes, at least you know the element of partiality will be reduced.” (Personal communication, September 28, 2017).

*Reporting.* The topic of how it was problematic to have a multi-level and disjointed redressal system came up multiple times in the different interviews. One participant commented that “it (the complaint and resolution process) really depends on who is bullying you. If it is a colleague, I am expected to go to my dean. If it (the bully) is my dean, I am expected to go to HR. If it is the University, I am expected to go to the Union. If it is a student, I am expected to be the “bigger person” and just let it go! It would be great if we could instead, perhaps, have an ombudsman type of person who will handle all these complaints, irrespective of who is doing the bullying and who is being bullied. I think that would make me much more comfortable if there ever arose a situation where I would have to complain (about bullying).” (Personal communication, October 27, 2017). Another respondent spoke about their experience with the complaint resolution process and said, “I was lucky because the person who I complained against (for bullying me at work) was eventually removed because they had multiple serious (workplace



bullying) complaints against them. But I'm thinking, what happens if the bully is not removed and I have to go back and work under them. Did I just make the situation worse for myself. The resolution process was so vitriolic and stressful, traumatic even. There were multiple times where I wanted to say ok I'm done, I take back my complaint, forget I said anything." (Personal communication, October 23, 2017).

A participant made a recommendation to have a position created to deal with psychosocial safety and employee friction. When informed during the interview that unbiased consultants were available, most participants emphasized the need for a separate specific office/position to handle issues related to discrimination and workplace bullying stating that "the unbiased consultants have no real power to do anything other than direct you to resources". According to a participant, "... I'm already stressed out with work, and if I were being bullied, I would be even more stressed out if I have to research where I have to do go deal with this issue and which silo I fall under, how do I navigate this maze of policies and which measure applies to me. I think it would be much easier to know that – hey, here's this office if you need it, they'll deal with everything. That way it doesn't force all the work onto the victims." (Personal communication, October 17, 2017).

Research suggests that co-ordination between the different units on campus is necessary for a successful workplace bullying redressal framework (Salin, 2008; Namie & Namie, 2011). In the setting of this University, it would include (but not be limited to) Management, Health and Safety, Wellness and Risk Services.

### Discussion

The University attempts to manage workplace bullying through policies prohibiting all forms of harassment on enumerated or non-enumerated grounds.

Prevention measures include voluntary workshops and policy provisions that cover expectations of civil behavior and the responsibilities of all stake-holders to maintain dignity in the academic workplace. The University's most preferred channel of resolution is for faculty to self-manage the issue, as mentioned in the policy. This expectation is problematic because studies have shown that attempts to self-manage the harassment, like ignoring the behavior or telling the bully to stop, usually increased the likelihood of the negative behaviours worsening in intensity and regularity (Cortina & Magley, 2003; Keashy & Neuman, 2012).

When questioned about the resolution process and the likelihood of filing a complaint, all interviewees expressed reticence. One interviewee said, "I would be really concerned about retaliation. I mean, we work in environments where you have to work with pretty much the same set of people over the next 25 years. I really don't want to rock the boat for nothing" (Personal communication, October 13, 2017). Another participant, who has been a victim of bullying in the past responded with, "Sure, that works!" with an eyeroll when asked if they went or would go to the bully and try to reason with them (Personal communication & field notes, October 19, 2017). The general tone when talking of self-managing the bullying was of anticipated disregard; where interviewees assumed that their complaints would either not be addressed properly or they would be ridiculed in some way, or of anticipated hostility; where they feared retaliation and animosity arising as a result of the complaint.

Even though recommending self-managing as a method of resolution is the fairly standard first-response in most workplace bullying policies (Cortina & Magley, 2003), the University workplace bullying framework would be more efficient if this were offered as

an option, instead of as a mandatory first step to be completed in the resolution process. In this way, victims would have the option to handle the issue themselves, but would also have an option to use a formal conflict resolution process in cases where the imbalance of power that exists in incidents of workplace bullying target (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, & Pereira, 2002) is too difficult to overcome.

This also ties in to the victim rationalization piece of the findings, where there is reluctance and paucity of information for faculty to self-label/self-report themselves as being victims of bullying. With the lack of clarity on what kind of specific behaviours constitute bullying, there is a likelihood of faculty believing that the way they are being treated at work is reflective of their job performance or personal shortcomings, rather than being a systemic problem of workplace culture (Keashly & Harvey, 2005). Multiple participants also mentioned the involvement of peers; as possible mentors, as bystanders, as possible mediators. The informal networks and collegial support system was discussed by participants as being the first avenue they turn to if faced with incivility. The University should consider increasing bystander engagement, which has been shown, in various studies, to have a beneficial impact in handling workplace bullying with early-stage intervention and peer support (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008).

From the data from the interviews, it is clear that there is an overwhelming feeling that the University is not sufficiently attentive to the needs of its faculty and does not value the collaborative approach as much as the faculty expects it should. While the workplace bullying prevention and redressal framework was designed by committees that had faculty representatives on it, almost everyone I spoke to was of the opinion that there were many areas where a more broad-based perspective would have helped make the

framework a lot more robust. According to one participant, “I have no idea when those (workplace bullying framework working group) meetings were held, I mean, who put out a call, who did the call reach, when did this happen? I have no idea.” This ties back to the University’s communication patterns with regards to workplace bullying. It would be wise if the University were to have open consultations where all the interested faculty is invited to join in, rather than having just one representative.

In addition, multiple participants have mentioned the lack of professional or social collaboration with colleagues from other faculties. These recommendations go beyond feeling isolated from colleagues, feeling excluded from the process and feeling unheard, and extends to the concept of trust in the organization (Six & Sorge, 2008). A research study conducted by Six and Sorge (2008) used the Relational Signaling Theory to study trust as a function in organizations. According to the study, (organizational) trust is a function of constantly and consistently giving off signals to potential trustors that indicate credible concern. The study revealed that organizations can achieve higher levels of trust by used an inter-related set of policies that promote a relationship-oriented culture, facilitate unambiguous signaling, create opportunities for meeting informally and have consistent induction training (Six & Sorge, 2008). These findings also encapsulate most of the opinions, experiences and recommendations of the interviewees with regards to how faculty could signal their commitment to managing workplace bullying by investing more resources towards it, increasing communications and training and having senior administration “talk about it as if it matters” (Personal communication, November 2, 2017).

While the University has third party services and consultants, the interviews revealed that not only did most faculty not know about them, but when further questioned it was revealed that none of the participants would use those resources if they were facing an issue. This finding is congruent with a workplace bullying study conducted in Welsh universities by Lewis (1999), who found that victims have increased absenteeism, leading to less productivity and collegiality and are also highly unlikely to use counselling or third-party services.

One area where the results of this study diverged from extant literature, is the bullying of newly appointed faculty. As per McKay et al., 2008, newly appointed untenured faculty are at the highest risk of facing the brunt of workplace bullying since they are at the bottom of the system of patriarchal managerialism. However, in this research, diametrically opposite views were expressed, where the newly appointed faculty (less than 3 years) spoke about how they were warmly welcomed by their colleagues. There was a positive correlation between length of employment and bullying in this University, the longer the faculty stayed, the higher the chances of facing or witnessing bullying. This could mean that the incivility is subterranean and takes a while to make its presence felt. There is no definitive way to explain what causes this anomaly, but there is a definite trend of instances of bullying increasing the longer the employee stays. On the other hand, the responses from participants regarding reporting of bullying were congruent with extant literature, which shows that new employees are more likely to report bullying (Lewis, 1999), if they experience it. Implications and Limitations In this section, I will discuss the theoretical and practical implications, as well as the limitations of this study.

## **Theoretical Implications**

This research has theoretical implications on two levels. Firstly, from the point of workplace bullying research, most studies are conducted in the United States and there is very sparse workplace bullying data originating from Canada. Of this, a limited number are centered around faculty in Canadian universities. My research contributes to the existing research and provides a different perspective in terms of providing data on Canadian higher education, as well as data on the formation of perceptions.

Perceptual studies have been around for decades and have mostly covered perceptions as a moderating factor between workplace bullying and victim's intention to leave (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2008), in terms of bystander effect and work engagement (Christianson, 2015) and in terms of turnover intention (Schalkwyk, Els & Rothmann, 2011) among others. However, few, if any studies examine the factors that go into the formation of these perceptions and how they impact the efficacy of workplace bullying interventions as envisioned by the organization. This research contributes to extant literature by examining the factors that affect perceptions, and have an impact on the efficacy of organizational policy regarding workplace bullying.

## **Practical Implications**

Firstly, since most workplace bullying studies have been conducted in the US or in Europe, this study contributes to the sparse Canadian workplace bullying research data. Canadian studies are important, since cultural reactions, perceptions and treatment of bullying behavior differ around the world and localized studies can help to create more tailored-to-fit solutions.

Secondly, organizations such as universities are complex since (as employers), they have to deal with a much wider range of education levels than most corporates. In addition, University management also must deal with the existence of multiple employee labour unions. All this put together means that perception management is exceptionally complicated in this environment. By disaggregating the factors that combine to form workplace bullying perceptions, this study helps start a dialogue on ways to bridge the gap between interventions and perceptions. This may prove useful to organizations whose bullying prevention frameworks are strong but who are not achieving the level of effectiveness they set out to achieve. By creating strong frameworks and also making sure that employee perceptions align with the goals of the framework, organizations can create healthier psychosocial work environments.

Lastly, for employees, perception management and continual iterations of organizational support against workplace bullying may hopefully lead to a healthier work environment.

### **Limitations**

This intensive case study was conducted on a mid-sized university in Canada, thus limiting the applicability of the results. It would be unwise to assume that all other universities or organizations comparable in size and resources face the same problems or choose to deal with them in the same way.

While interviews provided rich data and the ability and flexibility to explore topics as they arose, the nature of the interview method necessitates a smaller data set as opposed to, for instance, the survey method. While 11 interviews are considered sufficient

for a study of this size and scope, and saturation was reached by the 8<sup>th</sup> interview, perhaps additional interviews would have revealed outliers. In addition, participant accounts and experiences are subjective and socially constructed and thus, cannot be claimed as objective reality or an all-encompassing truth. Nonetheless, in support of participants' claims, I feel it necessary to state that all participants were exceptionally open and honest while talking about their experiences even though this is a sensitive topic and a potential trigger.

Longitudinal data would give a more comprehensive perspective on this issue, however time and resource constraints only allowed for a cross-sectional study. However, participants' accounts of workplace bullying incidents as well as their accounts of how the university has handled them, were retrospective and often spanned the length of their employment which went as far back as three decades.



## **Conclusion**

In a large number of studies, higher education has been ranked as one of the top three workplaces most prone to bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000). With faculty incivility increasing due to the changing landscape of academia in Canada (Becher & Trowler, 2001) and Canadian legislation increasingly recognizing this as a serious workplace issue under Occupational Health and Safety regulations, universities will now have to create policies and redressal frameworks that specifically address this problem beyond the definitions of harassment on enumerated grounds.

However, the creation of policies brings with it its own set of issues. Universities across Canada, which are in various stages of framing, revising and administering policies must be cognizant of the fact that unless workplace bullying policies and frameworks are tailor-made for the organization, their effectiveness is limited (Salin, 2008). The efficacy of policies depends on how well they are received and perceived (Nollen, 1989; Chang, 1999) and universities will need to be aware of the factors that shape employee perceptions, in order to be able to work with them and provide more effective solutions.

The organizational culture and general nature of academia is one which encourages critical feedback and this makes framing policies difficult, since attempts to create guidelines for feedback and dialogue could be considered as infringing on academic freedom. This push-back can largely be avoided by the inclusion of all faculty members in the policy creation, open discussions and clearly outlining what does and does not fall under the purview of workplace bullying. This would help faculty self-identify if they are being bullied. Consultations across departments and levels are critical to the creation of effective workplace bullying measures.

Most current workplace bullying measures deal with the aftermath of an incident, and provide almost no proactive measures. In my research, the majority of interviewees expressed the need for a more proactive framework that would not only provide training and skill development in areas like conflict resolution, micro-aggression and healthy psychosocial workplaces, but also targeted efforts on the part of the university to create a more positive work culture. In addition, universities should consider making healthy workplace frameworks and regular workplace surveys a priority, and constantly update in order to provide the most effective solutions. A clear policy would also enable employees to properly self-identify bullying behaviours and help curb victim self-doubt.

The default first-response of all policies is to ask victims to confront the bully themselves and solve the issue. In some cases, that is a mandatory first step before being allowed to escalate a bullying complaint. This puts the victim at a serious disadvantage in some cases, since the power imbalance, personality or nature of appointment might not allow for this kind of interaction to occur without repercussions. Policies and frameworks should be designed to provide protection to the victim, while making sure that all the work is not solely the victim's responsibility.

The results of all research are only generalizable to limited contexts and there is a paucity of faculty-centered qualitative research in higher education in Canada. More research is needed in this niche of workplace bullying research in order to obtain a greater understanding of the challenges of addressing workplace bullying in this population.

### Future Research

While intensive case studies provide a wealth of knowledge, future research could possibly consider conducting a comparative analysis between universities of different

sizes and in different provinces to properly gauge the impact that legislation and size (in terms of resources, number of faculty, number of students etc.) have on organizational workplace bullying decisions and the resulting employee perceptions.

In addition, universities are complex ecosystems with different types of employment contracts, different kinds of employee needs and multiple employee unions. Research that delves into whether teaching and non-teaching employee perceptions differ within a university would help provide a more well-rounded picture and help universities frame and administer more robust policies and measures.

In terms of employee perception research, there is a shortage of research examining these issues from the organization's perspective. This research would help organizations manage their initiatives in such a way as to bring about a positive impact on employee perceptions and acceptance of the measures introduced by the organization/human resources.

The process of creating vigorous redressal mechanisms and consequences for organizational phenomena like sexual harassment in the workplace or workplace bullying; which are largely normalized, requires not only increased volumes and funding in research, but also social change and legislative attention. There has been a positive trend in legislation in terms of including psychosocial health as part of the Occupational Health and Safety legislation in some provinces and increased research in this area will help organizations realize the impact workplace bullying has on employees and on the overall health and success of the organization.

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## Appendix I

### Letter of Consent for Interviews

**The Optics of Workplace Bullying Minimization Initiatives:  
A Qualitative Disaggregation of Employee Perceptions  
LETTER OF CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS**

Date:

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study on *employee perceptions of the strategies used by your employers to minimize workplace bullying*.

This interview will require about 45-60 minutes. During this time, you will be interviewed about the subject described above. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. **No names or official positions will be asked for or recorded at any point during the research.**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any question or you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. You may contact the undersigned if you wish to withdraw. If you do this, all information from you will be destroyed, if you would like it to be. Transcript of this interview will be shared for your review along with a Transcript Review Form, if you so wish.

The results from this study will be incorporated into a thesis to the Faculty of Management at the University of Lethbridge.

No identifying information other than type of employment (faculty/staff) and length of employment in current organization will be collected. You also have the right to review information you provide before it is made public. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or email [research.services@uleth.ca](mailto:research.services@uleth.ca)) or to my supervisor, Dr Robbin Derry ([robbin.derry@uleth.ca](mailto:robbin.derry@uleth.ca)).

If you or anyone you know experiences feelings of discomfort arising from the survey or the interview, please contact the Employee and Family Assistance Program at 1800.663.1142 (24 hours)

The transcription of the interview will be done solely by the investigator, Faye Salins. I will be the only person with access to the recordings. The transcribed interviews will be kept on a password-protected computer. The transcript will be edited to remove any accidental identifying information. The transcript and recording will be destroyed one year from the end of data collection for my thesis. The report will not contain any mention of your name and any quotations used will not be attributed to an individual. Some quotes will be reworded to mitigate the risk of identification.

If you require any additional information about this study, please call me at 403-929-4585 or email me at [faye.salins@uleth.ca](mailto:faye.salins@uleth.ca)

**I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on the employee perceptions of their organization's measures against workplace bullying and I consent to participate in this study. I understand that I have the right**

**to review a transcript of this interview and to request that specific portions be deleted or presented anonymously. I also understand that I have the right to refuse to answer particular questions or terminate the interview at any point.**

**I consent to the information I give in this interview being shared with others in the form of a report and eventually a knowledge sharing tool.**

Name of Interviewee (Please print)

.....

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

**To be signed in the presence of interviewee**

Name of Interviewer: **Faye Salins**

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

## Appendix II

### Interview Grid

Research Question	Interview Question	Probes
<p><b>What are the different factors that shape employee perception of their organization's commitment to minimizing workplace bullying?</b></p>	<p>Are employees aware of the organizational supports available to them against workplace bullying?</p>	<p>Do you have policies, training, workshops?</p> <p>Would you say it is formal or informal?</p> <p>Is there a mandate for reconciliation vs punitive resolution?</p> <p>Which units/positions are involved in the framing of these interventions?</p> <p>How familiar are you with the policy on workplace bullying?</p> <p>How familiar are you with the legislation on workplace bullying in your province?</p>
	<p>What are the most effective ways for organizations to communicate their workplace bullying support systems to their employees?</p>	<p>Direct vs indirect</p> <p>Single vs multiple times</p> <p>What would be the most effective channels of delivery?</p>



		<p>Any difference in communicating to faculty vs staff?</p> <p>Any point person?</p> <p>Where does this/should this communication originate from?</p>
	<p>Does this awareness fluctuate based on demographic factors of age, gender, type of employment and length of employment?</p>	<p>Have you seen any changes or trends in how the University deals with workplace bullying over the years you have been employed here?</p> <p>Has changes in senior administration during your term affected the way the University handles workplace bullying?</p>
	<p>What factors affect employees' perception of their organizations' role in minimizing workplace bullying?</p>	<p>How are employee suggestions handled?</p> <p>Do employees play a part in creating the bullying resolution framework?</p> <p>What do you think of the way your University handles workplace bullying? Why?</p>

	<p>What do employees believe organizations need to do better to improve workplace bullying support systems?</p>	<p>How can the resolution or rehabilitation be improved?</p> <p>If you were able to, what changes would you like to see in the current workplace bullying framework?</p>
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