Bullying in Academe:
Prevalent, Significant, And Incessant

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the top-down perspective of bullying and mobbing of professors by analyzing why it is prevalent, significant, and incessant and then proposes a framework to produce a caring, respectful, and safe environment for professors to engage in their teaching, scholarship, and service. The author suggests that the failure of administrations of institutions of higher education to acknowledge the prevalence and significance of bullying and mobbing of members of the professorate will further contribute to the incessancy of these behaviors and actions.

Keywords: administrators; professors; bullying; mobbing

INTRODUCTION

*I*nstitutions of higher education are not immune to the prowl of bullies. A recent article published in the Chronicle of Higher Education, "Academic Bullies," commented on the covert behaviors academic bullies employ to victimize their target(s) including interrupting the victim during meetings, eye rolling, undermining credibility, and excluding the victim from social conversations (Fogg, 2008). In academe, as well as in other contexts, bullying is sometimes perceived to be lower intensity and therefore somehow of less significance than other forms of harassment or discrimination. However, members of the professorate that have been subjected to deliberate and relentless actions including rudeness, intimidation, humiliation, suppression, exclusion, or similar behaviors perpetuated by administrators are likely to perceive the actions to be undeniably abusive in nature and in many instances (cases lacking elements of race, sex, disability, or other grounds recognized by law) are left with little or no legal recourse. The Bullying of Academics in Higher Education blog begins with the following quote, which is evocative of the abusive environment riddling many college and university campuses:

The bullying of academics follows a pattern of horrendous, Orwellian elimination rituals, often hidden from the public. Despite the anti-bullying policies (often token), bullying is rife across campuses, and the victims (targets) often pay a heavy price. 'Nothing strengthens authority as much as silence.' Leonardo da Vinci – 'All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men [or good women] do nothing.' Winston Churchill.

Within higher education, bullying is not a new phenomenon. The conventional hierarchal structure of institutions of higher learning consists of President, Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs (other Vice Presidents), Deans of the various divisions, Chairpersons, and then professors. An examination of higher learning academic structures is significant because a 2007 study by Zogby International found that 72% of workplace bullying incidences involved a harasser that was ranked higher than his or her victims (Zogby International, 2007). This paper examines the top-down perspective of bullying and mobbing of professors by analyzing why it is prevalent, significant, and incessant and then proposes a framework to produce a caring, respectful, and safe environment for professors to conduct their contractual agreement for teaching, scholarship, and service.

PREVALENT

Determining the prevalence of bullying and mobbing in academe requires first defining and identifying the full range of behaviors implicit to the labels followed by a review of case studies and other evidence.

Manner Manifested

The literature acknowledged the lack of a universally accepted definition for bullying and the multiplicity of terminology used to describe the behaviors associated with bullying including "interpersonal mistreatment, psychosocial harassment, psychological violence, abusive workplace conduct, antisocial employee behavior, escalated incivility, and psychological aggression, among others" (Von Bergen, 2006). "There are three reoccurring elements found in the myriad definitions of bullying behavior, those being: a) the persistent nature of the action, b) effects suffered by the bullied individual(s) and not necessarily the intentions of the **bully**, and c) the potentially devastating effects of the bullying activity on the bullied individual" (Harvey et al., 2007). For the purpose of this research, the paper embraced Von Bergen's comprehensive definition of bullying as "harassment that inflicts a hostile work environment upon an employee by a coworker or coworkers, typically through a combination of repeated, inappropriate, and unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, and/or low-level physical behaviors that a reasonable person would find threatening, intimidating, harassing, humiliating, degrading, or offensive" (Von Bergen, 2006).

A Washington State Department of Labor and Industries report identified the following bullying behaviors: "unwarranted or invalid criticism, blame without factual justification, being treated differently than the rest of your work group, being sworn at, exclusion or social isolation, being shouted at or being humiliated, being the target of practical jokes, and excessive monitoring" (Report # 87-2-2008, 2008). Research conducted by Keashly and Newman identified ten similar behaviors of bullies: "1. Glaring in a hostile manner, 2. Treating in a rude/disrespectful manner, 3. Interfering with work activities, 4. Giving the 'silent treatment,' 5. Giving little or no feedback on performance, 6. Not giving praise to which an individual feels entitled, 7. Failing to give information needed, 8. Delaying actions on matters of importance to an individual, 9. Lying, and 10. Preventing an individual from expressing oneself" (Von Bergen, 2006). Other research has resulted in the compilation of published literature on bullying activities and behaviors into five groups: "(a) name-calling by a **bully** in public (Averill, 1983; Andersson & Pearson, 1999), (b) scapegoat failure on a stigmatized individual or group in the organization (Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990; Robinson & Bennett, 1997), (c) increased work pressure to perform on one individual and/or group beyond the level of expectations of others in the organization (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998; Youngs, 1986), (d) sexual harassment of co-workers generally by individuals with a power differential (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Bies & Tripp, 1998; Terpstra & Baker, 1991; Tata, 1993), and (e) physical abuse or harm to a stigmatized individual or group (Brodsky, 1976; Einarsen, 1999)" (Harvey et al., 2007).

Mobbing is a term that industrial psychologist Dr. Heinz Leymann has been credited as popularizing in the work context. Leymann defines mobbing as "hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic manner by one or more individuals, mainly toward one individual, who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position and held there by means of continuing mobbing activities" (Leymann, n.d.). Leymann's Mobbing Encyclopedia states that "these actions occur on a very frequent basis (statistical definition: at least once a week) and over a long period of time (statistical definition: at least six months' duration). Because of the high frequency and long duration of hostile behavior, this maltreatment results in considerable mental, psychosomatic and social misery" (Leymann, n.d.).

Dr. Ken Westhues, a sociologist at the University of Waterloo, has experienced and conducted extensive research on mobbing including almost 150 case studies involving review of official documentation and interviewing victims of mobbing. Dr. Westhues has stated that essentially "anything that can be a basis for bickering can be a basis for mobbing: race, sex, political difference, cultural difference, intellectual style. Professors with foreign accents, he says, often get mobbed, as do professors who frequently file grievances and 'make noise.' But perhaps the most common single trait of mobbing targets, he says, is that they excel" (Gravois, 2006). Dr. Westhues states in his book <u>The Envy of Excellence: Administrative Mobbing of High-Achieving Professors</u> that to calculate the odds of being mobbed a professor must count the ways he or she shows up their peers including "fame, publications, teaching scores, connections, eloquence, wit, writing skills, athletic ability, computer skills, salary, family, money, age, class, pedigree, looks, house, clothes, spouse, children, sex appeal. Any one of these will do" (Gravois, 2006). His research revealed patterns that are stereotypical in mobbing cases: 1) "period of increasing social isolation" (eg. left off guest lists, eye rolling), 2) "petty harassment" (eg. delayed/lost administrative requests, inconvenient parking and class schedule), 3) "critical incident" (racial/sexual/plagiarism charges or one incident with a student that results in colleagues signing a petition and voicing concerns that the incident confirms suspicions and "demands swift

administrative action"), 4) "adjudication" (individual is "brought before an ethics tribunal, an ad hoc disciplinary committee, or one of academe's myriad other quasi-judicial bodies. An outside arbitrator may be brought in. Months pass. A decision is handed down."), and 5) individual leaves (regardless of outcome, mobbed individuals may decide to leave the institution) (Gravois, 2006).

Evidentiary Report

Callers from the education sector including universities have accounted for around 20% of all calls and enquiries to Bully OnLine since 1996. A survey published in the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) on 16 September 2005 found that bullying is common in the academic workplace, with 40% of respondents saying they were currently the target of bullying. Lead researcher Petra Boynton, a University College London psychologist, uncovered 800 almost identical cases of bullying" (The Field Foundation). The 2005 survey found that "those most likely to report being bullied were in the caring or support professions, such as social sciences - particularly psychology - health and medicine and academic support or human resources. It also indicated that senior academic staff - senior lecturers and professors - are as likely to be bullied as junior or contract staff. University HR departments, rather than helping victims, were seen by respondents as protecting institutions and bullies (The Field Foundation).

        One case study by Dr. Westhuess involved the **"Ouster of Frank Glamser and Gary Stringer at Southern Mississippi"** in which Dr. Westhues declared "the **dismissal in 2004** of sociology professor Frank Glamser and English professor Gary Stringer by President Shelby Thames was about as clear a case of administrative mobbing as I have come across in recent years" (Westhues, 2009). A related Chronicle article entitled "2 Professors at U. of Southern Mississippi Settle for Pay Without Jobs" elaborated on the outcome for the two professors stating, "now the termination proceedings against Gary Stringer, a professor of English, and Frank Glamser, a sociology professor, have been stopped. Both of the professors, who are nearing retirement, will be paid their full salaries for two more years. But they will not teach classes and will no longer have offices on the campus. They also agreed not to criticize the university administration publicly" (Smallwood, 2004). This case received so much negative publicity that one article published in the Chronicle reported "from the vantage point of a retired professor who lives in Hattiesburg, Miss., and who has closely followed the current crisis at the University of Southern Mississippi, I have concluded that it would be highly inadvisable for anyone at present to accept academic employment in the state" (Ower, 2004).

        Another case study by Dr. Westhues involved the dismissal of two tenured professors at **Medaille College in Buffalo, NY.** President Donohue dismissed both Therese Warden and Uhuru Watson for turpitude in 2002. In those cases, Dr. Westhues reports that "following publication of a damning report on the dismissals by the American Association of University Professors in the spring of 2004, and under imminent threat of formal censure by that organization at its meeting of June 2004, the new President of Medaille College, Joseph Bascuas, reached mutually agreeable settlements with both professors, reinstating Watson to his faculty position and compensating Warden monetarily. Regrettably, despite giving redress to Warden and Watson for the enormous harm to them, the Medaille administration did not regain much trust from the faculty, and conflict continued into 2006" (Westhues, 2009).

        At the 2010 American Association of University Professors conference, Dr. Faith Edwards shared her story that led to her "eventually winning a wrongful termination lawsuit against the Michigan higher education institution where she had been harassed" (Hernandez, 2010). For additional reported case studies, settlements and commentary of bullying in academe, *see* (The Ticker, 2011) (former professor paid $210K settlement after suffering mental breakdown from being pushed out of her job); (Schmidt, 2009) (personal stories of bullying/mobbing in academe provided in commentary to the article); (Westhues, 2009) (32 Academic Mobbing Cases); (Bullying of Academics in Higher Education Blog); (Jaschik, 2007) ($600K settlement for Virginia State University Professor); (Zogby, 2010) (survey finding that respondents with more formal education reported a higher bullying rate).

        Figure 1 illustrates the process this research utilized to determine prevalence of bullying, and its extension mobbing, of professors and further reflects recognition that the manner in which bullying and mobbing behaviors are manifested can be categorically divided as inaction, subtle action, and action.
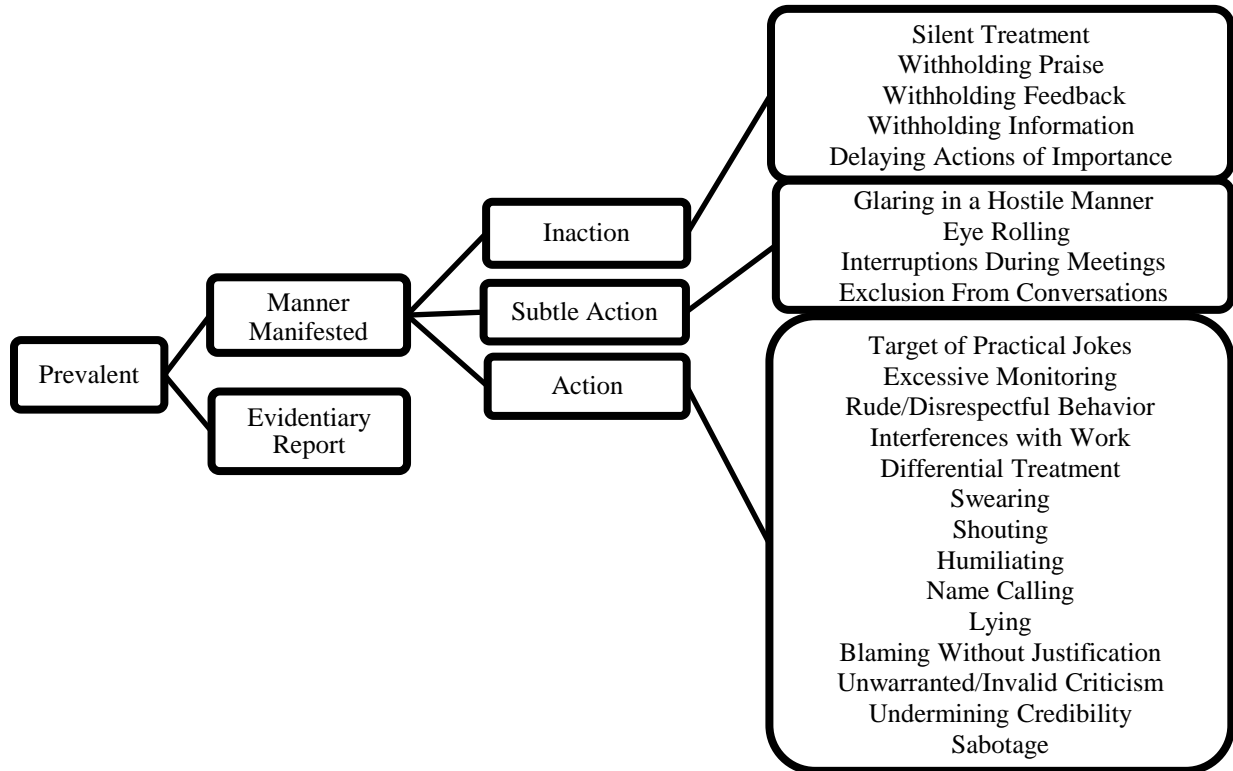
Figure 1: Prevalence of Academic Bullying/Mobbing

SIGNIFICANT

Recognition of the prevalence of bullying and mobbing of professors is the first step at preventing this behavior at institutions of higher learning. Although academic culture does present certain complexities, the physical, mental, and emotional consequences to professors who are subjected to a bully's wrath is in many ways the same as employees in the private sector and therefore literature referencing general workplace bullying is included for illustrative purposes in this section. Similarly, the consequential impact that a bullied professor could potentially have on his or her department and the university at large is in many ways analogous to the impact of an employee working in the industry has on his or her department and organization.
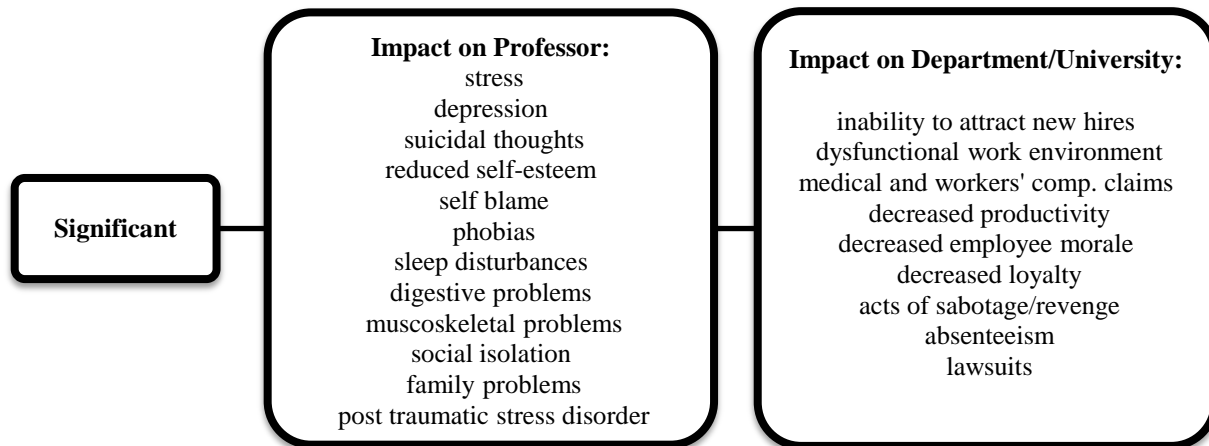
Impact on Professors

The Zogby International survey found that for 45% of bullied targets, stress affects their health with 33% reporting that they suffered for more than one year (Zogby International, 2007). An ABC news story, "When Workplace Bullying Goes Too Far", cited Gary Namie's notion that "bullying is psychological violence" and reported that bullying has "been known to cause stress, depression and suicidal thoughts. And new research suggests that the effects can be worse than those of sexual harassment" (Chitale, 2008)**.** A survey of published research revealed the following as some of the commonly identified consequences of bullying: "severe consequences for employee job satisfaction and health" and "physical, mental and psychosomatic health symptoms," which includes "stress, depression, reduced self-esteem, self-blame, phobias, sleep disturbances, digestive, and musculoskeletal problems," "social isolation, family problems, and financial problems due to absence or discharge from work" and in some cases "post traumatic stress disorder" (Von Bergen, 2006). Depending on the severity, it is clear to see how the personal consequences identified for victims of bullies could negatively impact teaching, scholarship, service, and relations with other members of administration, colleagues, and students.

Impact On Department/University

Published literature has identified the consequences associated with academic bullying including "serious stress, a dip in productivity, an inability to attract new hires, and in some cases, a dysfunctional work environment. In academe, where tenure allows bad apples to stick around longer, bullying can be particularly debilitating" (Fogg, 2008). Similarly, the impact of bullying in the industry context has a deleterious impact including "lost efficiency, absenteeism, sick leave due to stress-related illnesses, high staff turnover, severance packages, law suits, self-defensive paperwork, and wasted time at work involving targets defending themselves and networking for support. In extreme cases, violence may be the tragic result of **workplace bullying**" (Von Bergen, 2006). The research of "Tepper and colleagues (2000, 2004) found that abusive supervisors engendered subordinate turnover, work-family conflict, job and life dissatisfaction and psychological distress. Congruently, Duffy and Ferrier (2003) found that abusive supervision was a significant predictor of subordinate distrust and low organizational commitment" (Burton & Hoobler, 2006). Other costly consequences of bullying include "'a significant increase in medical and workers' compensation claims due to work-related stress and the costs of lawsuits emerging from abusive work situations,' to costs as remote but nonetheless attributable to workplace bullying as 'high turnover, absenteeism, poor customer relationships, and acts of sabotage and revenge'" (Stone, 2009). Research has revealed that "employees who experienced an episode of abusive supervision were lower in self-esteem than those who did not experience this type of mistreatment" which is significant because "people with high self-worth are more satisfied with their jobs and simply perform better" (Burton & Hoobler, 2006).

Figure 2 illustrates the significance of bullying and mobbing of professors as well as the resulting consequences that may arise for the department and the university.

Impact on Professor:
stress
depression
suicidal thoughts
reduced self-esteem
self blame
phobias
sleep disturbances
digestive problems
muscoskeletal problems
social isolation
family problems
post traumatic stress disorder

Significant

Impact on Department/University:

inability to attract new hires
dysfunctional work environment
medical and workers' comp. claims
decreased productivity
decreased employee morale
decreased loyalty
acts of sabotage/revenge
absenteeism
lawsuits

Figure 2: Significance of Academic Bullying/Mobbing

INCESSANT

A Labor Day survey conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute found that only 1.6% of bullies lost their jobs, whereas 31.3% of victims lost their jobs as a result of layoff, termination, or quitting and an additional 12.3% of victims suffered psychological injury resulting in lost work time (WBI, 2009). The results are indicative of the unceasing tolerance of workplace bullying. Among the many other factors, three factors that are significant to the incessancy of bullying and mobbing in higher education will be reviewed: insufficient legal recourse/deterrent, leadership, and the nature of academe.

Insufficient Legal Recourse/Deterrent

The fact that "there are no laws in the United States that specifically protect victims of workplace bullying" has spurred significant research in the area of legal recourse (Stone, 2009). Professor Yamada, the drafter and an

advocate of the Healthy Workplace Bill which if adopted would make bullying an unlawful employment practice, discussed his research in a Letter to the Editor published in The National Law Journal stating "[s]everal years ago, I studied hundreds of state court decisions on intentional infliction of emotional distress claims brought against employers and co-employees by bullied workers and found that courts regularly turned a blind eye to even severe, malicious cases of bullying" and "concluded that existing common law and statutory protections were inadequate to protect severely bullied workers" (Yamada, 2007). Yamada has reviewed potential legal claims for victims of bullying and commented on the shortcomings of each including intentional inflectional of emotional distress, intentional interference with the employment relationship, assault, battery, false imprisonment, defamation, federal and state discrimination statutes, federal and state labor and collective bargaining statutes, protections provided by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), court enforced contractual agreements for employer policies addressing harassment and bullying, and employee benefits (Yamada, 2007).

"While some scholars have suggested that tort law is a better avenue than legislation for the redress of affronts to one's dignity through bullying in the workplace, other scholars, like Professor Susan Harthill, have noted that due to 'enduring deference to the at-will rule,' among other things, this avenue has not proven fruitful because 'the tort of outrage has remained static and has historically been of limited value,' and because 'use of existing tort remedies might not be an option in states that provide that workers' compensation as the exclusive remedy for intentional emotional distress injuries'" (Stone, 2009). To date, legislators in 20 states have introduced versions of Yamada's Healthy Workplace Bill (Healthy Workplace Bill, n.d.). Recent scholars have been less than optimistic concerning the introductions of the bill stating, "these efforts, however, have been to no avail, as no state has ultimately adopted the legislation" (Stone, 2009). Results from the Zogby International survey revealed the reluctance of victims to resort to the legal system. The survey found that 37% of American employees (54 million people) have been bullied at work while only 3% of victims file lawsuits and a stunning 40% never even file a complaint (Zogby International, 2007).

Leadership

The author of <u>The Survival Guide for College Administrations</u>, C. K. Gunsalus, addresses the fact that "bullies learn quickly who will tolerate their antics and who will shut them down. Often no one has ever told them that their actions are unacceptable in the first place" (Fogg, 2008). In academe, it is the responsibility of individuals in leadership positions within the administration to introduce, communicate, and enforce policies to eradicate the campus of bullying. Two broad causes of abusive behavior in the workplace have been identified, 1) personal (narcissism, fear, outcome uncertainty, power motives, object beliefs, negative life themes, and lack of self-regulation) and 2) situational (alienation, nonsupportive family, negative role models, life stressors, competitive pressures, exposure to negative superiors or peer groups, and financial need of the individual) (Harvey et. al, 2007). Those in leadership positions do not always have the ability/know how to recognize and deal with the culprits. "Deans and chairmen, who often start their careers as faculty members rather than managers, are not always trained to handle such issues" (Fogg, 2008). Gunsalus further observed that department heads "usually serve in that capacity for only a few years and thus have little incentive to deal with problem employees" (Fogg, 2008).

A Chronicle of Higher Education article entitled "Mob Rule" gives the account of Dr. Jerry Becker, a professor of mathematics at Carbondale for 27 years. In November 2003, "colleagues signed a 12-page complaint against him, charging him with bullying, buttonholing professors to talk about union issues, and multiple other offenses, as well as calling him 'toxic' to the work environment" (Gravois, 2006). The administration cleared Dr. Becker of all charges after his submission of a point-by-point rebuttal. Unrelenting in their determination to bring Dr. Becker down, colleagues accused him of sexual harassment a few months later and once again, he was exonerated. Dr. Becker was further bullied when his office was moved to an area of campus where he would be the lone professor working (Gravois, 2006). This case illustrates an inapposite response by administration. Although Dr. Becker was exonerated twice for allegations made against him he was victimized by having to spend time to rebut the claims and then again by having his office moved away from other members of the professorate. The inference from the fact that all complaints against Dr. Becker were unwarranted, as is apparent from the exonerations, and that the reportedly subsequent move resulting in Dr. Becker's isolation is that the leadership was less than effective in dealing with the behaviors and actions taken against Dr. Becker.

The article "Mobbing Can Damage More Than Careers, Professors Are Told at Conference" cited the research of Friendenbert, Schneider, and Westhues and reported:

victims should not assume that notifying an administrator will help. Evidence suggests that administrators may find it easier to become part of a mob than to try to stop one, Mr. Schneider said. That's because administrators are likely to think it's better to have one person upset with them than a group. And faculty associations, he said, can't really "confront and expose mobbing unless they are very strong." Ms. Friedenberg added that administrators should be forewarned that mobbing can have a boomerang effect on them: Some victims are "driven by detail and an intense need for justice," she said and may launch a "significant counterattack" (June, 2009).

Nature of Academe

A review of the book <u>Faculty Incivility: The Rise of Academic Bully Culture and What to Do About It</u> reveals the author's contentions that "much of the blame for academic incivility is directed toward the very nature of the culture of the academic workplace. Particularly for junior faculty members who lack the job security of tenure, resistance to 'the way things are done' can lead to backlash from more established, typically tenured colleagues" (Southern, 2008). The concern for non-tenured faculty members is equally expressed in the Chronicle Review article entitled "Academic Bullies," which states that "the growing use of adjunct professors, who often lack influence and the protection that tenure can offer, may also encourage academic bullying: Part-time faculty appointments now count for more than 40 percent of the academic work force, and 65 percent of recent appointments, according to an article in the magazine Academe, published by the American Association of University Professors" (Fogg, 2008).

Figure 3 illustrates the three factors identified to explain why bullying in academe is incessant.
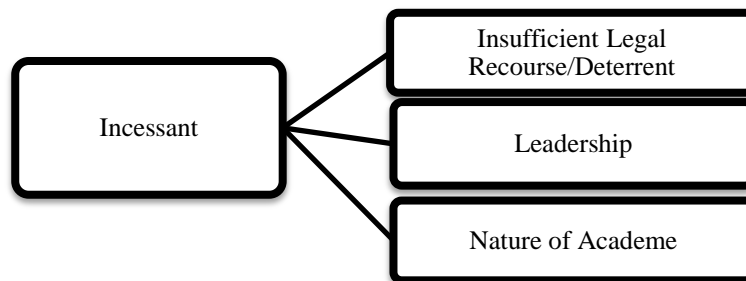
Figure 3: Factors Contributing to the Incessancy of Academic Bullying/Mobbing

Others have commented on the role of the structure of institutions of higher education to bullying. C.K. Gunsalus, adjunct professor and special counsel to the University of Illinois College of Law, has noted that "colleges may provide a particularly ripe environment for bullies because campuses are so decentralized" (Fogg, 2008). The notion that professors may not be quick to voice complaints has also been expressed. "Some faculty members prefer to hole up with their books rather than interact with colleagues, an aversion to conflict is not uncommon. Those who have been bullied will often elect to keep quiet rather than risk a nasty public battle" (Fogg, 2008).

CONCLUSION

It is axiomatic that bullying and mobbing in academe is prevalent. At present, research is inconclusive as to whether bullying can be found at every university or consistently throughout universities. However, it is irrefutable that some professors have and continue to experience bullying and mobbing by members of administration. Research also indicates that many professors have similar experiences with their colleagues.

Figure 4 illustrates the overview of the research process on academic bullying/mobbing.

Based upon this research, it is clear from the potential significant impact on professors and the department/university that administrations of institutions of higher education must have an interest in the creation and preservation of academic cultures free of bullying and other hostilities. Universities should be a place for active and rigorous academic debate, research, and other scholarly endeavors. Sustaining a tolerant culture for abuse in any form undermines the very essence of a university. With the recognition of the appeal and benefits of dealing with matters internally, and the admittedly less than satisfactory recourse for professors whose cases do not trigger legal recourse, the author recommends that higher education administrations (including institutions that have encountered problems in the past as well as those that have not as a proactive measure) adopt the framework suggested, or a similar one, to create a culture and environment of civility. Figure 5 provides a suggested framework to address bullying/mobbing in academe.
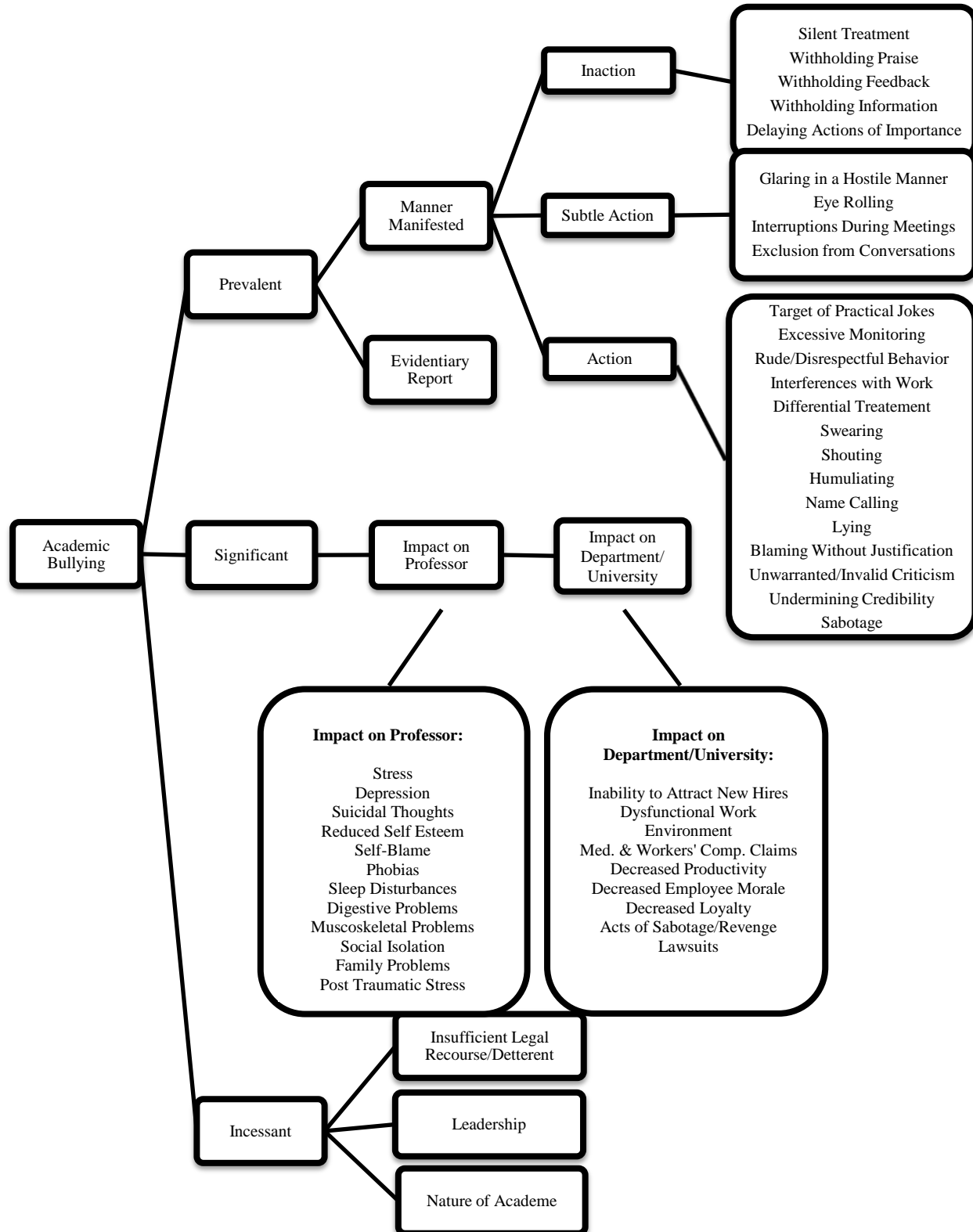
Figure 4: Overview of Academic Bullying/Mobbing

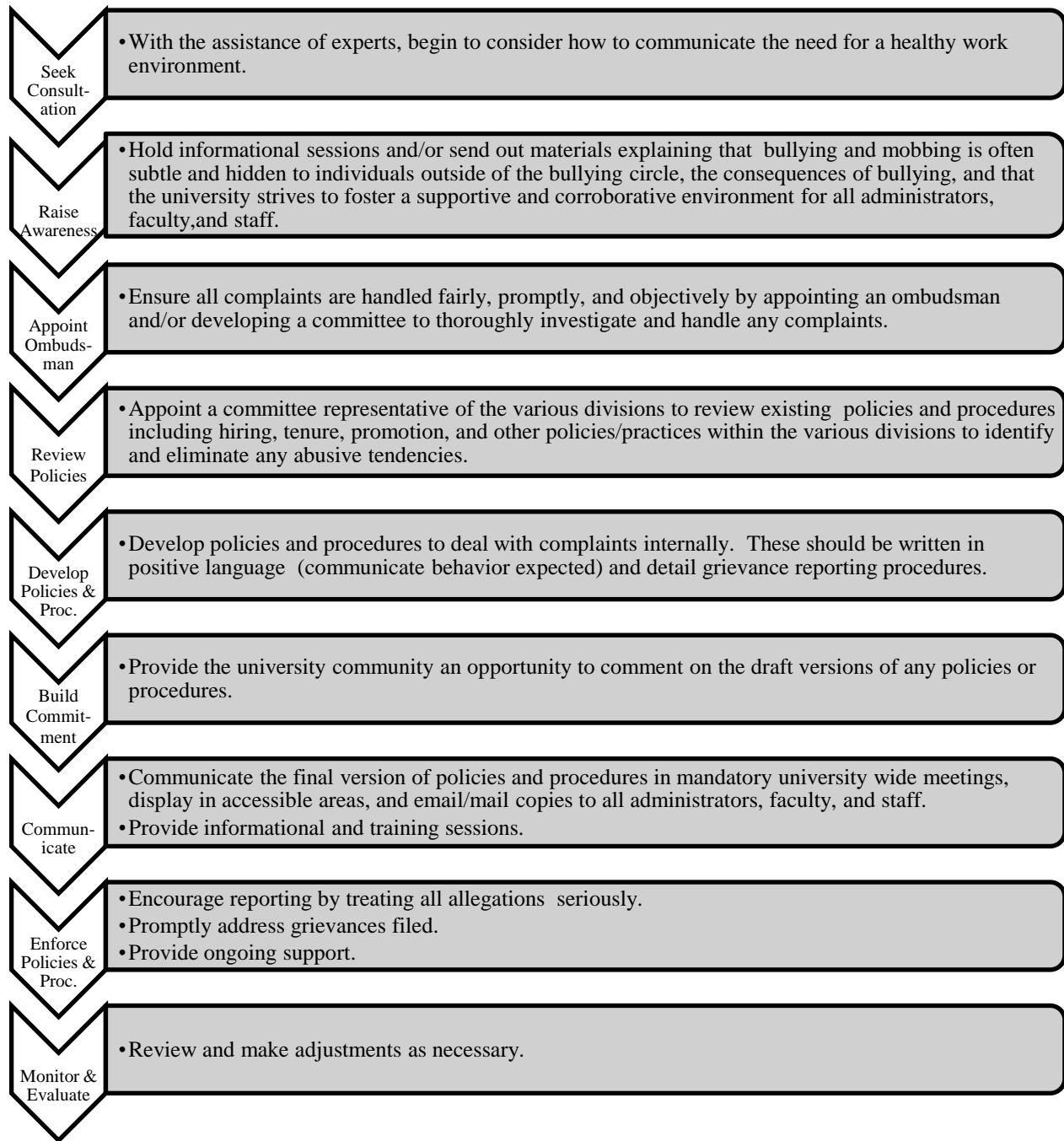|	
Seek Consult-ation	• With the assistance of experts, begin to consider how to communicate the need for a healthy work environment.
Raise Awareness	• Hold informational sessions and/or send out materials explaining that bullying and mobbing is often subtle and hidden to individuals outside of the bullying circle, the consequences of bullying, and that the university strives to foster a supportive and corroborative environment for all administrators, faculty, and staff.
Appoint Ombuds-man	• Ensure all complaints are handled fairly, promptly, and objectively by appointing an ombudsman and/or developing a committee to thoroughly investigate and handle any complaints.
Review Policies	• Appoint a committee representative of the various divisions to review existing policies and procedures including hiring, tenure, promotion, and other policies/practices within the various divisions to identify and eliminate any abusive tendencies.
Develop Policies & Proc.	• Develop policies and procedures to deal with complaints internally. These should be written in positive language (communicate behavior expected) and detail grievance reporting procedures.
Build Commit-ment	• Provide the university community an opportunity to comment on the draft versions of any policies or procedures.
Commun-icate	• Communicate the final version of policies and procedures in mandatory university wide meetings, display in accessible areas, and email/mail copies to all administrators, faculty, and staff. • Provide informational and training sessions.
Enforce Policies & Proc.	• Encourage reporting by treating all allegations seriously. • Promptly address grievances filed. • Provide ongoing support.
Monitor & Evaluate	• Review and make adjustments as necessary.

Figure 5: Suggested Framework

Implementation of the above will begin to develop a non-tolerant culture towards abusive behavior and provide professors with a caring, respectful, and safe environment to engage in their teaching, scholarship, and service. It is the author's belief that the failure of administrations to acknowledge the prevalence and significance of bullying and mobbing of members of the professorate will further contribute to the incessancy of these behaviors and actions. Figure 6 represents a stream analysis for combating academic bullying/mobbing.
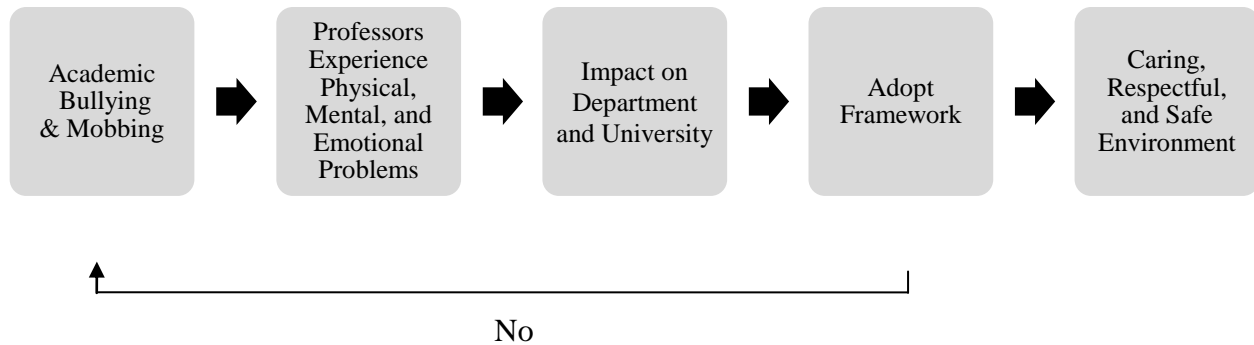
Figure 6: Stream Analysis Process

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