Clarifying My World:
Identity Work in the Context of Workplace Bullying

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Based on a study rooted in van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology, conducted with agents working in international facing call centers in Mumbai and Bangalore, India, this paper describes targets' identity work in the context of workplace bullying. Data were gathered through conversational interviews and were subject to sententious and selective thematic analyses. The core theme of "clarifying my world" captures participants' attempt to reconstruct their identity following the emergence of identity disruptions stemming from the experience of being bullied. Major themes which include building personal security and insulation, recreating equilibrium, maintaining dignity and poise, re-establishing ontological foundations and seeking continuity in one's evolution, represent the goals of identity work which address specific dimensions of identity disruptions. The findings highlight the long-term effects of workplace bullying on targets and targets' attempts to restore their well-being. Key Words: Workplace Bullying, Targets, Identity Work, Phenomenology, India.

The study of interpersonal bullying at the workplace originated in Scandinavia in the 1980s with the work of Heinz Leymann, who used the term "mobbing" to describe the phenomenon (Duffy & Sperry, 2007, 2012; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003; Leymann, 1996). Evolving through research over time, interpersonal bullying at work has come to be defined as "…harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. In order 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" (Einarsen et al., 2003, p. 15). The terms "bullying" and "mobbing" are increasingly being used interchangeably though earlier they signified different foci of the same phenomenon. That is, while bullying and mobbing include a victim orientation and the negative impact on targets, bullying focuses on actors and mobbing focuses on targets (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). In this paper, the contemporary perspective is adopted and the term bullying is used. Bullying is a social stressor (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996) that precipitates strain and trauma in targets with serious detrimental effects on their health and well-being. Low self-esteem, poor self-confidence, decreased self-worth, self-hatred, sleep problems, anxiety, anger, depression, nervousness, insecurity, suspicion, bitterness, concentration difficulties, chronic fatigue and various somatic problems as well as suicidal thoughts are commonly reported (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). Interestingly, the threat that bullying poses to the targets' identity has been largely ignored.

Identity refers to subjective meanings and experiences and dynamic and ongoing efforts around creating a sense of self, addressing the question "who am I?" (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identity is not only characterized by a coherent and enduring distinctiveness but also by an evolving and context-sensitive dynamic, while being largely hierarchically integrated into dominant notions of self, with elements of fragmentation emerging from manifold, simultaneous and shifting notions of self (Alvesson et al., 2008). People are continuously engaged in identity work, that is, ongoing mental activity involving forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions of the self that allow for a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness and existential continuity and security. Identity work proceeds unselfconsciously in stable contexts but becomes conscious during crises and transitions when the routinized reproduction of self-identity is disrupted, triggering uncertainty and self-doubt (Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

To date, Lutgen-Sandvik's (2008) research on intensive remedial identity work remains the only contribution in this area. Framing workplace bullying as a traumatic and stigmatizing experience, Lutgen-Sandvik's (2008) findings underscore targets' struggle to achieve self-narrative constancy in the face of extreme disequilibrium. Identity work proceeds across the pre-bullying, bullying and post-bullying phases, encompassing first-level stabilizing, sense-making, reconciling, repairing, second-level stabilizing, grieving, and restructuring. Identity work entails remedial goals through which targets seek to resolve the identity threats unleashed by workplace bullying. Yet, in some instances, successful resolution does not occur, resulting in failed restructuring.

Two studies coming nearest to examining identity in the context of workplace bullying are Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) and Nielsen, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2008). These studies do not actually look at identity but at factors such as basic assumptions and world-views that can be seen as closely linked to identity.

Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) invoke Janoff-Bulman's (1989, 1992) cognitive theory of trauma to explain why workplace bullying is traumatic for targets. Here, it is posited that post-traumatic stress following victimization may be due to the shattering of basic assumptions including benevolence of the world, meaningfulness of the world and self-worth that target hold about themselves, other people and the world. While these assumptions allow for effective daily functioning and help people maintain a sense of invulnerability, traumatic events disrupt core schemas and may result in an intense psychological crisis (Janoff-Bulman, 1989, 1992). Mikkelsen and Einarsen's empirical research demonstrating that targets of workplace bullying consider themselves less worthy, others as less caring, and the world as less meaningful and just, support Janoff-Bulman's (1989, 1992) conceptualization.

Nielsen et al. (2008) rely on Antonovsky's sense of coherence (SOC) concept to explain targets' post-traumatic stress symptoms. SOC, a global orientation to view the world and the individual environment as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful, operates as a personality disposition in terms of a stress resistance resource and buffer. Nielsen et al.'s (2008) empirical study found that SOC offers most protective benefits when bullying is mild whereas the benefits diminish as bullying becomes more severe. The finding of a reverse buffering effect of SOC could be because negative events such

as bullying may be more salient when interpreted against a backdrop of a positive view of oneself and the world, linked to the emergence of cognitive dissonance and incongruity.

The present paper is based on a study which examined targets' experiences of workplace bullying in India's international-facing call centers. Two core themes captured targets' experiences, namely, "clarifying my world" pertaining to identity work and "protecting my interests" encompassing coping. This paper presents the first theme, describing targets' identity disruptions and identity work tasks across the bullying and post-bullying phases and thereby addressing an important gap.

At the outset, it is relevant for readers to know more about the authors and their interest and involvement in the research inquiry. Both authors are social scientists specializing in organizational behavior (OB). Both authors have worked extensively with qualitative research methods, especially phenomenology but also ethnography and case studies. While both authors share an interest in organizational control, the first author has also been researching workplace bullying while the second author has also been researching industrial relations. For the last six years, both the authors have been jointly studying India's ITES-BPO (Information Technology Enabled Services-Business Process Outsourcing) sector in which international facing call centers are housed (See Note 1 for a brief overview of India's ITES-BPO sector), focusing on employee experiences of work. A phenomenological approach was adopted in which the core theme of being professional linked to socio-ideological control, hard and soft HRM (human resource management) models and inclusivist and exclusivist HR (human resource) strategies emerged (See Note 2 for details). In the course of this inquiry, the first author observed two dimensions of bullying emerging from participant narratives, namely, depersonalized bullying via the presence of an oppressive work regime (See D'Cruz & Noronha, 2009) and interpersonal bullying via victimization of individual agents by superiors. Further research was conducted to uncover both these observations. The present paper discusses participants' experiences of interpersonal bullying.

Methodology

As described above, in the course of a phenomenological study seeking to understand the subjective work experiences of international facing call center agents in Mumbai and Bangalore, India, where the core theme of being professional (Study A) and major theme of an oppressive work regime (Study B) were identified, instances of interpersonal bullying were also observed. Further research was conducted to understand the experiences of this latter group (Study C) and is presented in this paper.

Design

In keeping with the research strategy of Study A from which it was derived, Study C (henceforth also referred to as the/this study/inquiry/research) adopted a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology derives from the Greek word "phenomenon" which means to show itself, to put into light or to manifest something that can become visible in itself (Heidegger as cited in Ray, 1994) According to Bishop and Scudder (1991), "phenomenology attempts to disclose the essential meaning of human endeavors" (p. 5).

More specifically, the study aimed at grasping the essence of participants' experiences of interpersonal bullying as they were lived. This reflected van Manen's (1998) hermeneutic phenomenology which studies the world as it is experienced pre-reflectively rather than as it is conceptualized, focusing on the structure of meaning of the experience for the individual, and hence this approach was adopted. Van Manen (1998) portrays the methodical structure of phenomenology as a dynamic interplay between six research activities. According to him, the researcher turns to a phenomenon which seriously interests him/her and commits him/her to this abiding concern. The single mindedness of purpose results in full thinking and deep questioning, so that we can understand life wholly. The experience is investigated as it is lived rather than as it is conceptualized. In other words, the attempt is to renew contact with the original experience and to become full of it. The researcher then reflects on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon. A true reflection on lived experience is a thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this experience special. The fourth activity is describing the experience and its essence through the art of writing and rewriting. Language and thought need to be applied to lived experience such that a precise depiction is made. In order to achieve all of this, the researcher needs to maintain a strong orientation to the fundamental question so as to maintain direction and to come out with valid findings. He/she also needs to balance the research context by considering parts and wholes, that is, one needs to constantly measure the overall design of the study against the significance that the parts must play in the total structure.

Selection of Participants and Data Collection

As pointed out before, participants included in Study C were those participants in Study A whose experiences of work indicated interpersonal bullying and victimization. Not only was the first author able to discern this from their narratives but participants themselves referred to their experiences as victimization and/or harassment. Probing further to understand their predicament better, the first author was able to establish that they were indeed targets of interpersonal bullying by examining descriptions of their experiences in the light of Einarsen et al's (2003) definition of the phenomenon. Ten participants from Study A were thus identified as targets of interpersonal bullying. As the first author has a deep interest in the issue of workplace bullying, she sought to understand these participants' experiences more fully. Her endeavor was to explore how participants experienced this phenomenon and how their experiences added to our understanding of workplace bullying as a field of study with particular emphasis on target perspectives and the Indian context as well as to our understanding of workplace dynamics and employee experiences in general, given that paid employment constitutes a significant aspect of an individual's life.

In order to explore the experiences of these ten participants further, the authors requested them to participate in Study C. The authors shared with these 10 participants that since workplace bullying had not been previously studied as an academic subject in India, their participation would not only facilitate a culturally anchored understanding of the phenomenon but would also provide a basis for designing individual and organizational interventions to help targets and to stymie the problem. That trade unions and legal initiatives would also benefit from their experiences was pointed out. Ethical

practices formed part of the research protocol and hence participants' informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality were emphasized. All ten participants agreed to participate.

In keeping with van Manen (1998), the conversational interview was used to explore and gather experiential narrative material that would serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the experience being studied. Though unstructured, the process was disciplined by focusing on the fundamental question that prompted the research. The interview thus centered around participants' experiences of being bullied including the manifestation, frequency, duration, severity and course of bullying, the identification of the perpetrator, the possible reasons being bullied, their reactions to being bullied, their attempts at coping, the role of their employer organization and the contribution of their support systems. The clarity of the research question did not preclude exploring issues that emerged during the interview, since the researcher was aware that they could generate important insights into the phenomenon under study. The mandate of the interview was to capture participants' immediate pre-reflective consciousness of the experience of being bullied as self-given awareness that belongs to and is possessed by the target rather than as something that is perceived or represented or exists apart from the self. In this manner, the researchers explored participants' original experience in its full richness, depth and totality.

A convenient time and place for the interview were set up. Permission to record the interviews on audio-cassette was sought, and since it was explained to participants that recording the interview helped to maintain the accuracy of their accounts as compared to compiling field notes where accuracy could be compromised due to faulty recall later, they agreed. The presence of the tape recorder did not appear to hinder participants' responses. During the interview, observations about the participants were made and written up after the session ended. All interviews were conducted in English and were later transcribed verbatim by the research staff.

Of the 10 participants (six women and four men) included in the study, six were located in Mumbai and four were based in Bangalore. Participants' ages ranged between 21 to 25 years, with two being undergraduates and the rest having completed their graduation. Nine participants were unmarried and one was married. All participants worked at agent level in different international facing call centers (five worked in inbound processes and five in outbound processes; five worked in US processes, four in UK processes and one in an Australian process). It is relevant to mention that for all participants, this was their first job in the ITES-BPO (information technology enabled services-business process outsourcing) sector. All participants described themselves as career oriented. In keeping with this, participants worked hard and emerged as the best performers in their teams and among the best in the process. All participants were being bullied by their superiors, namely, team leaders, process managers and operations managers. None of the participants were members of unions.

Data Analysis

The treatment and analysis of data followed van Manen's (1998) phenomenological reflection which involved reflectively appropriately, clarifying and making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience. Given that meaning is multidimensional and

multilayered, van Manen advocates the use of thematic analyses. According to him, thematic analysis refers to the process of recovering the themes that are embodied or dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the text. That is, themes touch at the core of the notion we are trying to understand, helping us to make sense. Since they may not always completely unlock the enigmatic aspects of the experience, related sub-themes capturing details and nuances may be required to provide a comprehensive picture. Themes may be isolated through three approaches:

> a. Holistic or sententious approach where we attend to the text as a whole and capture its fundamental meaning.
> b. Selective or highlighting approach where we repeatedly read/listen to the text and examine the meaning of statements which are particularly revealing.
> c. Detailed or line-by-line approach where we study every sentence or sentence cluster to determine what it says about the experience (van Manen, 1998)

In the present study, the attempt to isolate themes involved the first two approaches. In following the sententious approach (van Manen, 1998) each transcript was read as a whole to capture the core/essential meaning of participants' experiences. That is, through a careful reading of the transcript, the fundamental meaning of the experience for the participant as emerging from the text as a whole was identified. Two common themes could be observed across all participants. "Clarifying my world" pertained to long-term existentialist questions centering on identity work while "protecting my interests" encompassed short-term practical considerations regarding coping with the situation.

A selective thematic analysis (van Manen, 1998) was undertaken through which categories/patterns that contributed to the core theme were identified. That is, each transcript was read repeatedly and significant statements relating to and illustrating the various dimensions of the essential theme, were identified and demarcated. Labels were assigned to these categories/patterns and later standardized across transcripts. Within each transcript, categories/patterns were examined for their interlinkages. A comparison across transcripts was undertaken to highlight congruence in the patterns/categories and their linkages across participants. Next, across transcripts, those categories/patterns that dovetailed together in meaningful yet distinct ways were developed into sub-themes. At the next stage, transcripts were compared to identify links across sub-themes and those sub-themes that held together were developed into themes. Following the same process, themes were developed into major themes.

The selective thematic analysis process for the core theme of "clarifying my world" is exemplified through excerpts one and two below. These excerpts were seen as statements relevant to the theme of "identifying and tapping sources of strength" (which forms part of the major theme of "recreating equilibrium") as they contained categories/patterns that related to and illustrated some of its dimensions.

Excerpt one
Some team members would tell me not to bother, that I was just over-reacting…once they made fun of me too. Here, I was facing such a difficult situation and they were adding to it. So I avoided them. I wanted to have people who would calm me.

Excerpt two
I kept my mother's voice at the back of my head always. So that when I was provoked, I never fell for it. Even if I felt crushed inside, I showed composed behavior on the outside. What also helped was my career focus. I was a good performer and I wanted to do well – so keeping that in mind helped me…this should not destroy my career. If not for this, I would have lost my mind.

Labels were assigned to these categories/patterns. Excerpt one was given the following labels: "source of support", "nature of support", "reaction to support", and "valuing calmness". Excerpt two was given the following labels: "source of support", "nature of support", "displaying composure", "career focus", "self-evaluation", "career goals", and "loss of peace and balance".

In undertaking standardization of the labels across transcripts, some labels were renamed while others were retained as they were. Among the former were "self-evaluation" and "loss of peace and balance" which were renamed "self-perceptions" and "distress" respectively.

Further examination of categories/patterns within and across transcripts led to identifying interlinkages and congruence such that some categories/patterns could be subsumed under other categories/patterns that were more encompassing in scope and could be developed as sub-themes. Thus, "source of support", "nature of support" and "reaction to support" were included under the sub-theme of "social resources" while "career focus" and "career goals" formed part of "career commitment" which along with "self-perceptions" and other related categories/patterns were developed into the sub-theme of "personal resources".

A closer examination of the above sub-themes highlighted their interrelationship as the singular entity of "sources of strength" and this was developed into the theme of "identifying and tapping sources of strength".

An overarching set of categories/patterns that were interwoven throughout and recurred repeatedly within the theme on identifying and tapping sources of strength was that of "seeking calmness", "maintaining composure", "alleviating distress" and "eliminating discomfort". As these categories/patterns could be similarly observed in the theme of "banking on the predictable and anticipating and facing the unpredictable", both these themes were further developed into the major theme of "recreating equilibrium".

Finally, as brought out in the findings section below, the core theme and its constituent major themes along with their themes and sub-themes were joined into a text that captured participants' lived experience in its completeness. As noted earlier, writing is a critical element of the research process, being fused with data analysis and text development. In this study, writing was guided by three elements, namely, the need for accuracy and sensitivity, the focus on the fundamental question underlying the research

and the link between parts and wholes such that lived experience was captured fully but realistically in its context. In this manner, "the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation" (van Manen, 1998, p. 127) were retained.

The present paper puts forth the core theme of "clarifying my world" (Readers are referred to D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010 for a detailed description of the other core theme of "protecting my interests"). It is relevant to point out that while the core theme highlighted by this paper focuses on identity work, the processes of identity work and coping (the focus of the other core theme "protecting my interests") overlap. Conceptually, coping which seeks to address the demands of the situation in question embodies practicality whereas identity work which involves working through the impact of the situation in question on the self embraces existentialist issues. Temporally, identity work continues even after coping has addressed the demands of the situation, though there is a phase when both proceed concomitantly. Due to the overlap, some references to and examples of coping may be found in the elucidation of the core theme of "clarifying my world" in this paper.

Methodological Rigor

Methodological rigor in the study was maintained through prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), investigators triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1999) and consensual validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1999). In terms of prolonged engagement, the authors visited the field every two to three months for about two to three weeks per visit over a two year period, allowing for a deep and accurate understanding of its subtleties and nuances to develop. In relation to the use of interviews, particular importance was given to rapport building with the participants – it was opined that making the participants feel comfortable and establishing their trust would play a critical role in helping them to share their stories. During the course of the interviews, the authors used probes and cross-checks to further their understanding of participants' narratives. Investigators' triangulation ensured that each author kept the other one "honest" (Lincoln & Guba, 1999,p. 412), adding to the credibility of the findings. That is, both the authors shared and preserved the details of their data, observations, analyses, etc., notwithstanding the complexities and contradictions these contained. Neither author attempted to simplify or gloss over the data, observations, analyses, etc., but instead facilitated the research process through probes, alternate viewpoints, cognitive restructuring, etc. Immersion in the data during the process of analysis helped the authors gain insight into participant experiences and perspectives and ensure the rigor of the findings.

van Manen (1998) proposes formal or informal hermeneutic conversations with other researchers on core themes and themes in order to generate deeper insights. Themes are examined, articulated, reinterpreted, added, omitted and reformulated. The attempt is to derive a common orientation to the experience and to help the researcher see limits in his/her present vision and to transcend them. A collaborative rather than competitive stance is indispensable here. Realizing the significance of this process for incorporating methodological rigor in the research, the authors followed it in all the data analysis phases. Core themes, major themes, themes, emerging conceptual categories and patterns

were discussed and critiqued with two research colleagues and two experts in qualitative research.   Once the authors had identified the core themes, they asked these four colleagues (also referred to as experts henceforth) to read the transcripts and describe the structure of participants' experiences. Authors' and experts' views were consistent in terms of both the number and essence of the core themes. Authors' and experts jointly refined the core theme labels which were initially put forth by the authors. The authors then proceeded to identify patterns and categories and join them into themes and major themes. This three stage process involved the experts at each stage in that at the end of every stage, the authors would have the experts' view on their analyses. Based on the emerging discourse, reformulations were made till a consensual validation was achieved.

Findings

"Clarifying my world" captures participants' attempt to reconstruct their identity following the emergence of identity disruptions stemming from the experience of being bullied. That is, bullying threatened participants' sense of self precipitating fragmentation, disconnection and insecurity that persisted in the post-bullying phase, and "clarifying my world" represents participants' attempts to restore existential self-narrative integration, constancy and comfort across the bullying and post-bullying phases. The core theme encompasses five major themes, namely, building personal security and insulation, recreating equilibrium, maintaining dignity and poise, re-establishing ontological foundations and seeking continuity in one's evolution. Representing the goals of identity work, each major theme subsumes the various tasks of identity work which address specific dimensions of identity disruptions. The temporal aspect of both identity disruptions and identity work as well as the nature of stabilizers over time are also indicated (Table 1).

Before discussing the major themes that are subsumed under the core theme of "clarifying my world", participants' experiences of being bullied are briefly described in order to contextualize the findings (See D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010, for details).

The Experiences of Being Bullied: Understanding Participants' Context

Participants worked in India's international-facing call centers where SLAs (service level agreements) between employers and offshore clients created oppressive work environments which privileged targets and controls. This hard HRM (human resource management) model was couched in soft terms through employer claims of concern for employee well-being operationalized via the notion of professionalism. While employers described employee redressal opportunities (among other processes) as proof of their commitment to professionalism and employee interests, they also cultivated a professional identity in employees which led the latter to prioritize work over personal needs such that compliance and optimal performance were emphasized and the organization's agenda was furthered. Moreover, employer espousal of professionalism and employee well-being precluded agents' engagement with collectivization attempts which were seen as redundant. These workplace dynamics had important implications for participants' bullying experiences.

The bullying experience spanned four phases. Phase one was described as one of experiencing confusion. Participants maintained that it was only in retrospect that they were able to identify when the experience of bullying began. During the initial onset period, being immersed in their work, they did not realize that they were being bullied. While the persistence of the bully's behavior caused them to notice it, they attributed it to the oppressive work environment. Responding to it professionally, in keeping with their internalized professional identity, participants stepped up their performance. In their view, the bully had no reason to victimize them, given that there was no conflict between them and their performance was outstanding. Moreover, they did not believe that there was room for any irrational behavior in a professional environment.

Yet, over time, the continuation of the bully's behavior made it hard for participants to ignore the situation. Based on careful observations and discussions with their intra-organizational and extra-organizational support systems, clarity emerged, resulting in the situation being labeled as "bullying".

Participants described a range of bullying behaviors including isolation, personal attacks, verbal threats and task-related difficulties. Some participants highlighted how bullies, being unable to find fault with their work-related performance, would subject them to personal criticism and ridicule in front of the whole team or by spreading false rumors and allegations about them to various colleagues at the workplace. For a few participants, over time, exclusion from colleagues formed part of the process.

Participants believed that their experiences were at odds with the employer organizations' espousal of professionalism. Moreover, as per the latters' exhortations, there were always intra-organizational avenues to redress their grievances. Participants therefore approached the HR (human resource) department. This marked phase two where participants' engaged organizational options.

During the initial interactions with the HR department, participants were reassured that their problem would be sorted out. But participants observed over time that the HR department neither reverted to them nor intervened in the situation. Actively following up with the HR department resulted in participants' further victimization. HR managers would express disbelief at participants' experiences and blamed participants for the situation, insinuating either that the participant had done something wrong to invite such behavior from his/her superior(s) and/or that the participant was unable to cope and adjust. HR managers would also point out to participants that their assessment of their situation was wrong given the professional orientation of the organization and the thrust on employee well-being. Participants' professionalism and commitment were questioned.

Few participants reported that during a couple of meetings with the senior HR manager, the bullies were called in. Tacit as well as obvious support between HR managers and bullies were discerned by the participant. Over time, the collusion between HR and the bullies created a situation whereby the participant was known as a trouble maker, a maladjusted individual, a difficult person, a misfit and a burden to the organization. Consequently, coworkers did not wish to associate with the participant for fear of being victimized. Not surprisingly, participants felt extremely isolated at work.

After four to six weeks of their repeated interactions with HR, participants felt that they were going around in circles and recognized that the absence of extra-organizational third-party intervention such as legal mechanisms or employee

unions/associations, as per their knowledge, left them completely alone in their quest for justice.

Participants' experiences towards the later part of phase two resulted in severe emotional strain, causing participants to withdraw into themselves. Moving inwards, phase three of participants' experiences was a period of meaninglessness, confusion and uncertainty during which participants were unable to relate to the world around them and struggled to make sense of the new order of things. Notwithstanding their withdrawn and introspective demeanor, participants' social support networks rallied around them making them feel loved and valued and serving as a link of continuity and stability.

As participants grappled with their experiences, they realized that there were alternative ways in which the situation could be reviewed. They began to look at the options available to them and realized that moving to another organization was the best alternative. That the booming job market in India's offshoring-outsourcing sector (of which international-facing call centers form a part) provided them with a flood of alternatives without compromising their financial position and career interests played a critical role in influencing their decision.

Following their decision to exit the organization, all participants were able to move to new jobs, largely in keeping with their preferences such that their long-term career interests were protected.

After their exit from the bullying situation, three participants heard about UNITES (Union for ITES [Information Technology Enabled Services] Professionals), an association that represents employee interests in India's offshoring-outsourcing sector. That there were extra-organizational avenues to help them fight injustice made participants feel stronger.

Clarifying my World: Participants' Identity Work

Below we describe the five major themes that make up the core theme. After elucidating the identity disruptions experienced by participants, their identity work is elaborated upon.

Building personal security and insulation. Participants highlighted that bullying precipitated a heightened sense of vulnerability and naiveté in them which continued during the bullying and post-bullying phases. In contrast to self-perceptions that they were capable of looking after themselves, participants recognized flaws in their perceptual abilities, realizing that they had glossed over cues that highlighted their predicament. While a few participants attributed this to being very busy with work, two participants considered their high propensity to trust people as a critical filter that influenced their perceptions of the situation. Others mentioned their tendency to take their experiences at face value rather than reflecting over them and picking up their complex yet subtle nuances. That all participants began to see themselves as gullible people, who were easily deceived, came through clearly from their narratives.

Table 1. *Clarifying My World*

Identity disruptions	Identity disruption dimensions	Identity work	Identity work tasks	Bullying phase				Post-bullying/post-exit phase
				Experiencing confusion	*Engaging organizational options*	*Moving inwards*	*Exiting the organization*	
Heightened sense of naivete and vulnerability	Accuracy of one's perceptions of one's experiences and environment Relevance of one's habitual problem solving repertoire Encountering unanticipated experiences Gaining new self-understanding/insights	Building personal security and insulation	Absorbing cues, being vigilant, cautious (and often collective) sense-making, postponing conclusions Enhancing coping versatility and flexibility Cultivating preparedness and harnessing resilience Capitalizing on strengths and rectifying weaknesses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chronic uncertainty and discomfort	Lack of predictability about work day and work week/about bully's behavior/ about HR personnel's behavior Perennial sense of distress	Recreating equilibrium	Banking on the predictable, anticipating and facing the unpredictable Identifying and tapping sources of strength	Yes	Yes	Yes during initial part of the phase		
Public scapegoating and sullying of image	Being framed by bully and HR personnel; Creation and perpetuation of a negative portrait of oneself throughout the workplace by bully and HR personnel Feeling of being trapped and isolated at work	Maintaining dignity and poise	Reaffirming one's authentic self Finding solace in stabilizing influences		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Deepening ontological insecurity	Destabilization of one's beliefs about Self Others Work and workplace Society World	Re-establishing ontological foundations	Restoring one's belief systems		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pronounced sense of discontinuity in one's life story	Being confronted with an unanticipated yet total life change experience	Seeking continuity in one's evolution	Restructuring, integrating the experience and moving on			Yes during later part of the phase	Yes	Yes
			Stabilizers	Goal of self preservation Support network Career focus Professional identity	Goal of self preservation Support network Career focus Professional identity	Goal of self preservation Support network Career focus Altered professional identity Job market	Goal of self preservation Support network Career focus Altered professional identity Job market	Goal of self preservation Support network Career focus Altered professional identity Extra-organizational redressal options

No participant had anticipated being bullied during the course of their lives. While none of them had earlier encountered bullying, some maintained that they had no reason to expect this because of their personality and abilities while others indicated harboring Elkind's (1967) personal fable that such a thing would never happen to them. Participants in the last group opined that perhaps they had been subject to emotional abuse in the past but their personal fable and perceptual abilities may have clouded their identification of the situation, adding that had the situation persisted, they would have discerned it. Not surprisingly, participants lacked the requisite coping repertoire to handle the situation.

I realized how simple I was…and how unprepared.

Identity work took various forms. Training themselves to be sharper and more cautious, participants became more alert towards the cues embedded within their experiences and contexts. Instead of reaching conclusions quickly and single-handedly, participants began to engage in inter-subjective sensemaking with their significant others in order to cross-check their own observations.

The need to be prepared for any eventuality and to expand their ability to cope became important. While participants' discussions with significant others were relied upon to facilitate these processes, a few participants spoke of learning about and from others' experiences as well as using mental imagery whereby they would think of series of drastic events and of how to cope with them. Participants' focus was on how to emerge from these situations with minimal damage to the self.

Three participants stated that such anticipated cognitive practice need not translate into appropriate action at the required time. They expressed doubts about both internalization and execution of their expanded coping repertoire because of dispositional and situational factors.

It is hard to predict whether all this effort at strengthening myself will actually work. When one is in the situation, one has to deal with it. And then, one may not be able to do so. But one must be prepared.

Recreating equilibrium. Participants realized that the only thing predictable about their work life now was that they would encounter bullying in various manifestations, degrees and frequency. This knowledge helped them steel themselves in anticipation of bullies' and HR managers' behavior, and they would come to office mentally ready to face bullying. Forewarning and forearming themselves helped them maintain their equilibrium.

Notwithstanding their preparedness, the experience of being bullied perpetuated distress in participants. Participants' spoke of being in a perpetual state of emotional strain which they attempted to offset by tapping various sources of strength such as their personal resources and their social support network.

Professional orientation and career commitment were cited by all participants as one of their most significant personal resources. Focusing on their work, with a long-term view of their careers, provided participants with direction and meaning. Participants would maintain their superior performance not only in order to meet expectations and

ensure consistency in the current workplace but also keeping in mind their long-term skill development and professional growth.

The importance of optimism, self-efficacy and an internal locus of control was acknowledged by all participants, though their maintenance was a struggle for some. Participants who described themselves as positive in their outlook found this easier than others who were more pessimistic and externally-oriented.

> I survived because I focused on my career. That and my family support which made me strong.

Some participants cited their inner strength as crucial. Referring to their earlier personal crises and adversities such as bereavement, illness and poverty, these participants believed that their resilience would see them through these difficult times.

The support of workplace-based informal social networks played a pivotal role in helping participants keep calm and focused. Participants' workplace friends would be overtly supportive towards them away from the workplace, during the work-related commute and during breaks. This included listening to them, admonishing them and providing them with courage. But on the call floor, these friends relied on nonverbal communication to show their concern, as overt support held the risk of inviting victimization upon themselves. Participants derived comfort from their presence, pointing out that even though their support was muted, it made a world of difference in reassuring them that they were not alone.

Episodes of inappropriate and negative support from workplace friends were reported by four participants. Here, friends would either question participants' claim that they were bullied, hold participants responsible for their predicament or suggest that they were overreacting to the situation while simultaneously providing participants some comfort. Since friends' responses aggravated participants' emotional distress, they slowly dissociated themselves from the former.

> Harassment means such acute loneliness, one is just struggling to stay afloat. You want people to help you, validate you, not pull you down. So I just avoided her.

The support of family and friends outside the workplace served as an anchor. Participants spoke both of how they would seek out members of their support systems to share their experiences, solicit advice and gain a sense of connectedness as well as of how members of their support systems constantly rallied around them with love and concern.

The positive and calming influence of the support network permeated work time through the continuous mental replay of reassuring conversations and useful advice. Participants described how as they left home for work and as they completed the work-related commute and entered the call floor, their families and friends would repeat words of support, encouragement and guidance. Apart from boosting their morale at the time of hearing these words, invoking these words during the shift especially when interacting with bullies and HR managers and when encountering bullying provided participants with comfort and direction, helping them survive the difficult workday.

I kept my mother's voice at the back of my head always. So that when I was provoked, I never fell for it. Even if I felt crushed inside, I showed composed behavior on the outside.

Spiritual leanings contributed, with participants relying on prayer and/or meditation to remain calm. All participants reported spending time reflecting on their experiences. While some saw their experience as *karma* where they were being made to atone for past sins, others held the view that this was a part of a larger plan of their lives whose purpose was still unclear to them. One participant remained extremely perplexed, stating that she had always been of the view that 'what goes around comes around' and hence was not sure how to view her experience. She elaborated that she had never harmed anyone and hence did not know why this experience had come her way. The alternate explanation she had was that perhaps the bully had to be taught a lesson in his life and this was a precursor to setting the stage for what was to come. Interestingly, she did not see herself as the one who would teach him the lesson. Another participant, citing the cycle of rebirth, opined that the sufferings of her current birth were probably means gaining release from earthly life and attaining *moksha* (salvation).

The notion that life consists of ups and downs, being divided into good and bad phases, was put forward by almost all participants. That the good and bad phases balance each other was stressed.

I am not sure why this has happened, it is part of some larger thing. Anyway, one has to take the good with the bad.

All participants were preoccupied with the larger meaning of life, grappling with numerous existential questions such as the purpose of life and humankind, the reason for suffering and so on. Four participants mentioned exploring religious answers which provided them with comfort and allowed a more positive and balanced perspective to prevail. One participant saw the experience as a test of faith, another considered it to be a means of developing an orientation of detachment which included a lack of expectations, self-reliance and fortitude, a third looked at it as a lesson in forgiveness while a fourth participant believed it to be a part of the cycle of rebirth and salvation.

Three participants trained their minds to emphasize the good things they had received in their lives such as a supportive family, dependable friends, good intellect and a principled approach to life, all of which were instrumental in seeing them through this difficult situation. They concluded that positive energy forms the essence of life and must be nurtured and preserved.

Three participants' bewilderment was mingled with anger and slight bitterness that good people like them should go through this experience. Strong feelings of unfairness surfaced repeatedly, adding to their emotional distress. Struggling with these feelings through prayer, meditation and social support was key to gaining a sense of equilibrium.

Once participants decided to quit their current organization and seek employment elsewhere, their sense of distress abated and they felt more composed and optimistic. In participants' view, knowing that the present predicament would continue only for a short

span, being replaced by a fresh and positive start, made it easier to bear and allowed a sense of mastery to emerge.

Maintaining Dignity and Poise

Participants reported that their persistence with the redressal process resulted in public scapegoating and image sullying. HR managers, whose intervention was sought for redressal, framed participants as responsible for the situation. They colluded with bullies in furthering this view. Both HR managers and bullies portrayed participants as problem people within the organization, closing all avenues of support for them and ensuring their social exclusion. Participants described their predicament as that of being doubly victimized and cornered.

Notwithstanding their extreme emotional strain which subsumed a strong sense of injustice and unfairness, maintaining dignity and poise took precedence and directed identity work. Maintaining dignity and poise was operationalized by reaffirming one's authentic self, aided by finding solace in stabilizing influences. Preserving their integrity, especially by continuing to work with sincerity and to behave with propriety as they had always been doing, ensured that participants remained true to themselves.

Two participants emphasized that their principles would never permit them to stoop to bullies' or HR managers' levels. Three participants stressed that nothing bullies and HR managers did would destroy their integrity which would eventually stand out as contrary evidence against the ongoing character maligning and false allegations.

In participants' view, reaffirming their authentic self contradicted the untrue image being spread about them within the organization. Instead of openly challenging their difficult predicament, participants' covert contrarian stand served as falsifying evidence.

> I decided to be myself. It was all that I had. Being honest, hardworking…decent seemed to be the only way to manage.

A few participants who harbored anger over their experiences spoke of the self-control they had to exercise. While they wished to publicize their experiences to their colleagues in order to dispel false organizational images and forewarn colleagues about similar predicaments, they held back anticipating backlash from management and indifference from peers.

Participants underscored that retaliation was ruled out, though condescension was apparent in a few. This latter group described feeling sorry for bullies and HR managers whom they described as lacking integrity which would ultimately be their downfall. These participants believed that retribution would come to their tormentors but from sources other than themselves.

> They (bullies) will be punished definitely, but when and how - I don't know.

Stabilizing influences in participants' lives such as their support systems, career focus and professional identity as well as the vibrant offshoring-outsourcing job market

helped participants to stay true to themselves. These factors worked constructively to give them comfort, overcome the distress and loneliness of their situation and provide them with positive energy and a sense of connectedness and direction, ensuring that their spirit did not get broken to the point of losing their dignity and poise.

Re-establishing ontological foundations. The experiencing of being bullied resulted in participants questioning many values and beliefs that they had so far taken for granted including the goodness and fairness of the world around them and the benevolence, humaneness and rationality of people. Being bullied destroyed these beliefs, causing participants to ponder over the extent of malevolence permeating the world.

> I had to re-think so many things that I had taken for granted earlier. What is life? Why are we here? What should we live for? How much evil is there?

Some participants acknowledged that their world-view had been too simplistic. They were now forced to accept that the world was peopled with good and bad individuals and one had to protect oneself from the latter. A couple of participants stated that protecting oneself from malevolent people did not imply becoming like them or reciprocating their behavior.

Other participants stated they had always approached life in a positive manner, but now they were no longer sure if their perspective was correct, nor did they know what stand they should adopt. Doubts flooded their minds about the purpose and meaning of life and about the nature and intentions of humankind.

> I always saw the good in everything but that was too naïve. Badness exists and one has to face it. But why is badness there, why are we here…lots of questions, no real answers.

Two participants here described how all religious beliefs emphasized benevolence and goodness and while people professed these beliefs, they did not practice them.

All participants reported grappling with the question of why people are evil. Here, the issue of whether people harm others for mere sadistic pleasure or whether they have a justifiable reason crossed a few minds. That participants were unsure what the justifiable reason could be in this instance came out strongly.

Participants expressed strong feelings of injustice that evil often goes unpunished as had been their experience. A few participants opined that the evil ones had power networks that shielded them which meant that there were a considerable number of evil people in the world. These participants were troubled by the fact that good people had limited options available to them. Interestingly, no participant took the position that they should counter evil with evil.

> I was victimized for no reason and I could not get justice. They (bullies) went scot-free because they had the right connections. I guess that is how the world works. Should I be like that? I don't think so.

Three participants shared that their sense of injustice had been accompanied by anger and slight bitterness because that they were victimized for no reason while the bullies were protected. Yet they felt unable to defend themselves, given the power dynamics within the organization. The discrepancy between their espoused values and behavioral choices added to their distress.

The extreme position of a few participants was apparent. That is, these individuals emphasized that while they would remain good people, they would henceforth only trust their social support networks.

I trust my family and friends, but others? I don't know.

Participants' value systems were rooted in the Indian ethos. Spirituality stood out as a key defining ingredient for all. According to participants, valuing spirituality means valuing humanity such that truth, honesty, fairness, integrity and harmony receive primacy and the non-material and metaphysical dimensions of life are emphasized. Moreover, some participants highlighted the paternalistic nature of Indian society which stood for protectiveness and nurturance. In participants' view, the growing individualism pervading Indian society contradicted these values. Individualism, coming from the West, was fuelling an unhealthy competitiveness among people, causing them to become more self-centered and materialistic. People were losing sight of Indian values, setting the stage for various injustices and inequities to flourish. One participant mentioned that it was alright to be competitive at a group or societal level but not at an individual level. Another participant pointed out that Indians would do well to pick up 'good' Western values such as hard work, civic sense, discipline and punctuality.

Participants' long-standing notion that workplaces are rational and objective favoring integrity and diligence was shattered. Participants realized that organizations are complex entities whose espoused culture and enacted practices are poles apart.

Organizations are interested only in their survival. So employees do not matter beyond that. How you do is your luck. The organization may say anything – employees come first, people-centric – all that is eyewash. Only money matters.

Some participants asserted that they should consider this to be true not only of their former employer but keep this in mind as a cautionary stance for all organizations. Others expressed grave disappointment over their experience, opining that such behavior could be expected traditional old economy companies but modern new economy firms, synonymous with a progressive era, should promote better practices.

The notion of professionalism espoused by employers had been earlier seen as furthering the view that organizations are just and fair and cohering with the Indian ethos in terms of spirituality and paternalism. Apart from putting work and employer before self, honesty, objectivity, merit, fairness and well-being, the essential features of professionalism, appealed to participants as familiar and desirable. Professionalism also appealed because it appeared to herald the inclusion of positive Western values into Indian society, by which progress was possible. Three participants pointed out that

professionalism was valued by the Indian middle class as the only means of upward social mobility.

> Indian values have so much to offer – we seem to be losing sight of that with globalization. Combine the best of India and West –that's the way forward.

The experience of being bullied and of being unsuccessful in redressing their grievance destroyed participants' views of professionalism. Participants realized that professionalism was a ploy being used by employers to control them. That reciprocity was not part of this deal was emphasized by some participants.

As they strove to come to terms with the challenges to their values, participants appeared to combine the spiritual with an individualized professionalism. Their value for truth, goodness, honesty, integrity and harmony coexisted with their desire to excel and rise up at the workplace. In the latter quest, professionalism was valued as a personal quality in terms of being a useful work ethic and a means of facilitating career mobility rather than as a source of identification with employers who did not reciprocate their commitment. The place of materialism in this upward mobility attempt seemed obscure, with some participants emphasizing that their rise was a natural outcome of their professional and spiritual orientation where materialism was on the sidelines and other participants pointing out that materialism would be a reward for their professional and spiritual orientation and its resultant effect on their performance and progress at work.

> It has taught me to think about myself. Work, yes, but for myself rather than for the company.

Seeking Continuity in One's Evolution

The experience of bullying and of redressal constituted a major life change event for participants who spoke of 'life before' and `life after'. These experiences were disruptions in participants' life stories, operating as ruptures that brought in instability and discontinuity. A few participants tried to put these negative feelings and thoughts aside and move on with their lives, in keeping with the advice of their support systems. But none of them could leave the experience behind.

> One may compartmentalize and say that it is in the past. But it is such a life turning experience that one cannot just walk away like that. Because it destroys everything…so one has to find a way of living again in spite of this.

Participants considered working through this difficult experience unavoidable for overall well-being. Refusal to work through the experience would conserve emotional energy in the short run, but would take a heavy toll on their adjustment in the future. Participants emphasized the significance of a coherent, integrated and balanced sense of self that embodied direction and focus and provided the basic foundation for an individual's life. Thus, even though the identity work required to address such an

experience was mentally draining, given the restructuring it entailed, engaging in it was unavoidable for healthy long-term adjustment.

> One's trust is shattered and one has to start over. But from where? One just does not know from where.

Participants reported spending a lot of time reflecting on their experience, its purpose and relevance and its implications for their life. Searching for explanations, looking for positive dimensions and finding a perspective within their life trajectory were important activities that helped participants work through the experience. The attempt was to blend in this disruptive experience with their life such that it did not adversely alter the path they had already set out on.

Participants were unsure why this experience had come their way. Their reactions included a complex mix of injustice, unfairness, sadness and disappointment (tinged, in some cases, with anger and slight bitterness) combined with images of self-growth, inner strength, renewed integrity and resilience. Yet, strangely, a few participants said that they considered themselves privileged to go through such an experience as it helped them discover and develop themselves without compromising their values. Regret was evident among all participants stemming from their inability to successfully fight injustice. While participants acknowledged that they had no choice in the matter, given the organizational dynamics, their self-esteem was nonetheless dampened by their sense of defeat. At the same time, that they did not retaliate or stoop to the bullies' level was a source of pride. Preserving one's goodness constituted an important dimension of working through their experiences.

> I often wonder why this happened to me…so unfair. I could not fight it also. But still, it has taught me a lot – about myself, the world, life…it has made me grow up, become strong, make choices about who I want to be.

Two themes that formed part of this major theme of "seeking continuity in one's evolution" were those of remaining good and realizing self (See Table 1).

For two participants, that they should remain good people retained primacy. Negative elements present in the world had to be processed within this framework, being considered as aberrations that should be corrected. A sense of superiority emerging from one's perceived goodness was apparent, being accompanied by a combination of forgiveness, tolerance and condescension for those who did not measure up.

For five participants, being a good person remained pre-eminent. But they emphasized that that did not imply glossing over evil. Hence, being wary and vigilant to the point of being distrustful and suspicious seemed to be the path of choice. Self-interest and self-protection were important watchwords along with priority for one's support system above the rest of humanity.

> One has to decide for oneself who you want to be. All this has happened but I still think goodness and integrity count the most. But I am aware that there are bad, wicked people. One has to protect oneself from them but not be like them.

Three participants went beyond emphasizing the need for them to remain good people for their own sake. These people underscored that they would fight injustice when they saw it so that goodness pervaded the world.

Participants aimed at realizing self by excelling at work, drawing on their spiritual and individualized professional orientations. Notwithstanding the turmoil in their lives, participants did not lose their career focus. Participants were clear that they wished to remain within the offshoring-outsourcing sector. That they had felt suited to these types of jobs, had enjoyed their work and had planned their future here sealed their decision. The bullying and redressal experience, according to them, could occur in any sector and organization and did not warrant any radical or hasty career shifts.

While three participants' earlier personal crises helped them tide through the bullying and redressal experiences, they reported being existentially shaken. Facing recurrent crises was emotionally draining due to short-term coping and long-term adjustment demands. Personal energy and resources had to be channelized into dealing with the accompanying challenges and discontinuities, taking one away from developmental tasks and disrupting the normative life-cycle.

> So much turmoil all the time in my life. After my father passed away, I had to struggle to find my feet. Then I felt settled and began to think long-term. Now this happened…so again, struggle, adjust, come to terms. It's tough, though the earlier experience tells me that I will come through.

Overall, as participants worked through their experiences, they took pains to get off to a good but careful start in their new jobs. While working diligently and honestly, participants ensured organizational interests without compromising their own. While being wary of their colleagues and superiors and vigilant about their experiences and surroundings, participants planned their careers in terms of educational qualifications and skill enhancement, choosing to be self-reliant rather than organizationally anchored in their quest for career mobility.

Discussion

Through its focus on identity work, the present study goes beyond current emphases of the impact of bullying on targets in terms of psychological disturbances, dysfunctional coping and powerlessness (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003) to underscore that workplace bullying is a traumatic life-change experience (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) which threatens targets' sense of self and triggers the struggle for existential continuity, stability and security. Identity disruptions emerge, causing targets to strive for comfort, meaning and integration against a backdrop of turbulence, ambiguity and fragmentation (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Targets experience a heightened awareness of the constructed quality of identity and engage in concentrated identity work (Alvesson et al., 2008) to re-story their self-narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1997) and re-establish a quasi-stationary equilibrium (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Together, Lutgen-Sandvik's work (2008) and this study show that bullying is experienced in markedly similar ways across the globe, notwithstanding some individual differences and cultural variations. Nonetheless, this study has highlighted the contribution of national culture, the influence

of macro and micro organizational imperatives and the role of support networks, addressing gaps raised by Lutgen-Sandvik.

Targets' identity work in the present study demonstrates that in spite of the deeply damaging effects of workplace bullying, they strive towards well-being. Indeed, conceptualizations of well-being subsume emotional/subjective well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999), psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) and social well-being (Keyes, 1998) and are considered to be determinants of mental health (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). The foci here include positive affect, life satisfaction, happiness, self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relationships, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization, social coherence and social integration (Snyder & Lopez, 2007), all of which accrue to various dimensions of the self such as self-concept, self-continuity, self-regulation, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-enhancement, self-actualization, self-growth, personal identity and social identity (Bernd, 2004). These together provide important frameworks for conceptualizing human adaptation and adjustment (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). The identity work undertaken by our participants leaves no doubt that they wish to "flourish" rather than "languish" (Keyes & Lopez, 2002) and remain fully functioning/optimally functioning individuals (Linley & Harrington, 2006).

Bullying is generally referred to as a social stressor. While stress has been largely conceptualized in negative terms as precipitating strain (Cooper, Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2001), our findings cohere with emerging attempts at retheorizing this reified perspective. That targets strive towards well-being illustrates that well-being and strain coexist in differing proportions as two sides of the same coin being the outcome of various types, combinations and degrees of stressors and the attempt of coping in the short run (See D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010 for details on the core theme of "protecting my interests" which deals with target coping) and identity work in the long run is for well-being to outweigh strain. This insight adds a new dimension to other contemporary viewpoints that seek to incorporate a positive element into the phenomenon of stress including, among others, Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) who discuss positive outcomes of stress such as personal transformation and growth and Hart and Cooper (2001) who advocate an organizational health framework which includes employee well-being.

Workplace bullying has been associated with counteraggression (Ireland & Archer, 2002). Thus, while identity work could have resulted in our participants becoming either malevolent or benevolent, they remained good people. Notwithstanding their altered self, participants continued to emphasize benevolence, which appeared to be the outcome of a spiritual orientation. The focus on spirituality is not surprising, given its strong association with the Indian cultural context (Hofstede, 1980). Yet, the interplay of materialism, individualism, paternalism and professionalism in participants' narratives speak of the complexities of the Indian social structure which have been present regardless of contemporary Western influence and which have implications for workplace bullying. Thus, while Indian society is known for its collectivist, humanist and spiritual orientations (Hofstede, 1980; Kakar & Kakar, 2007; Sinha & Tripathi, 2002; Verma, 2004), in reality, individualism and collectivism, spirituality and materialism and humanism and a hierarchical plurality coexist (Beteille, 2006; Kakar & Kakar, 2007; Sinha & Tripathi, 2002). People are simultaneously self- and other- oriented (Sinha & Tripathi, 2002), their relational approach being characterized by personalized and

identity-based interactions where social networking and exchanges, power distance and ingroup-outgroup distinctions based on kinship, caste, class, occupation, region and religion play a major role (Kakar & Kakar, 2007; Sinha, 1982, 1994, 2008; Verma, 2004). While power distance combines with the spiritual notion of 'giving' to promote paternalism (Sinha, 1982, 1994), favoritism, nepotism and interpersonal and intergroup conflict also thrive. Indian society is therefore plural but not liberal (Beteille, 2006). While spirituality embodying love, selflessness and renunciation forms part of the Indian way of life, the need for security, status and success fuels materialism, accentuated by the scarcity of resources that characterizes Indian society (Sinha, 1982, 1994, 2008; Verma, 2004). Individualism and materialism have received a fillip in recent times under economic liberalization, resulting in a growing preoccupation with wealth (Fernandes, 2004). Destructive behavior, stemming from competition and rivalry, increases (Sinha, 1982, 1994, 2008; Verma, 2004). Going by our findings, national cultures have implications for various dimensions of workplace bullying and this needs to be systematically investigated. That spirituality is also linked to religious beliefs is borne out by our data and this is another important dimension for study.

The critical contribution of the informal social support network is not surprising given the familistic orientation of Indian society (Lannoy, 1971). Yet, while earlier research has cited seeking help/support as an important avenue of target coping, referring largely to formal organizational/extra-organizational avenues and informal colleague sources (Hogh & Dofradottir, 2001; Rayner, 1997; Zapf & Gross, 2001), social support has not been the focus of workplace bullying research. Social support is a multidimensional concept subsuming formal and informal sources that provide material, emotional, appraisal and informational support, either voluntarily or solicited, in negative/inappropriate and/or positive/appropriate ways (Cohen & Syme, 1985). Issues from this study calling for attention are in the informal realm (that is, organizational and extra-organizational significant others) including the effects of providing support on support system members (who vicariously go through targets' experiences), the complexities faced by supportive colleagues who must double up as apathetic bystanders at the workplace as well as negative and inappropriate support. Other potential research areas are the interface between formal and informal support, the relevance of different types of support, cultural factors that impinge on support seeking and provision, the differences between informal support within and outside the workplace and the role of temporal factors. Findings emerging from such inquiries would provide insights into developing more effective support systems.

While the study findings reconceptualize targets' experiences of workplace bullying beyond only adverse effects, they neither purport to trivialize the targets' experiences nor imply that working through the experience is an easy, linear process. Yet they embody an important message that traumatic life-change experiences change people drastically but do not always defeat them.

In conclusion, it is relevant to point out that apart from its academic contribution to the field of workplace bullying in particular and to the areas of organizational misbehavior, work stress, employee well-being and stress and coping in general, this study had applied relevance that would benefit therapeutic practitioners, organizational practitioners, HR managers, trade unionists and labor activists as well as corporate leaders and lawyers specializing in workplace issues.

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Notes

1. India's ITES-BPO (information technology enabled services-business process outsourcing) sector encompasses the offshoring and outsourcing of such processes that can be enabled with information technology (NASSCOM/National Association of Software and Service Companies, 2005) including in its ambit both call centers and back office services. While the Philippines, South Africa, Latin American and Eastern Europe states are emerging locations, India remains the pre-eminent location for offshored business activities, accounting for 46% of all global offshoring (NASSCOM-McKinsey, 2005) and offering "an unbeatable mix of low costs, deep technical and language skills, mature vendors and supportive government policies" (Walker & Gott in NASSCOM, 2007, p. 29). While the key catalyst for this has been globalization, aided by India's liberalization and various central and state government initiatives (NASSCOM, 2006), India provides significant labor cost arbitrage. The large English-speaking and technical talent pool available in India is a critical component of this process (NASSCOM, 2006). Direct employment in India's ITES-BPO sector is calculated at 553,000 in the financial year 2006-2007 (NASSCOM, 2007), the sector having become an important avenue for employment especially for the country's youth. The ITES-BPO sector in India comes under the purview of the labor laws though the popular view held in Indian society (and maintained and promoted by ITES-BPO employer organizations, aided by government apathy) is that this is not so (See Noronha & D'Cruz, 2009). While call centers account for about 60-65% and back offices for about 35-40% of the services provided (Taylor & Bain, 2006), the key service categories, namely finance and accounting, customer interaction and human resource administration, account for 89% of industry revenues. Services are housed in MNC (multi-national corporation) captive, MNC 3rd party, Indian 3rd party (all of which are international facing, i.e., serving overseas clients and customers) and domestic service provider organizations (NASSCOM, 2005), located principally in Tier 1 but now expanding to Tier 2 and 3 cities (NASSCOM, 2005 & 2006). Though there has been considerable diversification in the range of processes delivered from India and there certainly has been growth in higher-value and professional knowledge process outsourcing (KPO), the evidence strongly suggests that, in overall terms, the ITES-BPO industry in India still tends to provide largely standardized and routinized services of low complexity, emphasizing mass production and customer service (Taylor & Bain 2006), in keeping with the mass customized model (Batt & Moynihan, 2002; Frenkel, Korczynski, Shire, & Tam, 1998).

2. The study of employees' subjective experiences of work in international-facing call centers in Mumbai and Bangalore adopted van Manen's (1998) hermeneutic phenomenology, focusing on lived experience. With organizations denying access to their employees, snowball sampling initiated via personal contacts and contacts with various associations representing employee interests in India's offshoring-outsourcing sector (which houses international-facing call centers) put us in touch with 59 agents (34 from Mumbai and 25 from Bangalore). Data generated via conversational interviews were

subject to sententious and selective thematic analyses which yielded the core theme of being professional and the major theme of an oppressive work regime (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2009; Noronha & D'Cruz, 2009).

Socioideological control refers to efforts to persuade employees to adapt to certain values, norms and ideas about what is good, important, praiseworthy, etc., in terms of work and organizational life (Alvesson & Karreman, 2004). Hard HRM, indicating utilitarian instrumentalism, stresses HRM's focus on the crucial importance of the close integration of human resources policies, systems, and activities with business strategy, requiring that they are not only logically consistent with and supportive of business objectives, but achieve this effect by their own coherence. From this perspective, employees are regarded as a headcount resource to be managed in exactly the same rational, impersonal way as any other resource, i.e., to be exploited for maximal economic return. Soft HRM, indicating developmental humanism, while still emphasizing the importance of integrating HR policies with business objectives, sees this as involving the treatment of employees as valued assets, a source of competitive advantage through their commitment and adaptability of skills and performance. Employees are proactive and resourceful rather than passive inputs into the productive process. Rather than exploitation and cost minimization, the watchwords in this model are investment and value-added (Legge, 2006). Inclusivist HR strategies involve the use of employee involvement schemes and human resource initiatives that emphasize employee identification with, loyalty towards and complete reliance on the employer. Exclusivist strategies include transactional psychological contracts that privilege dismissal, closure, retrenchment, layoffs, casualization and outsourcing as well as the outright refusal to recognize and negotiate with unions (Peetz, 2002).

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