Workplace Bullying Within Organizations

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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2025

Abstract

The title of this dissertation is “Workplace Bullying Within Organizations,” and the research problem was that perpetrators of bullying targeted their victims with their harmful behaviors. The methodology was hermeneutic phenomenology which is both philosophical and a method for exploring experiences and meanings. It revealed the importance of linking constructs such as social movements, public awareness, prevalence of bullying and physical/psychological harm. The source of data was derived from four participants who were highly educated professionals, self-directed and assertive. They experienced significant bullying within their first year of employment. Phenomenology is dissimilar from other methodologies because its practitioners seek insights and understanding into human experiences. Researchers used methods from the social sciences to collect experiential material for reflection on experiences and meanings that are based on human science. Data collection/analysis was recorded, managed, organized, analyzed and cohered with phenomenology. The key themes in this study were the following: 1) Retaliation; 2) assertive/outspoken; 3) health-physical and mental; 4) leadership, HR, management, supervision, and 5) reflections/regrets. The recommendation for reducing or eliminating workplace bullying requires an effort to mobilize a social movement on behalf of the victims. The current efforts to protect victims has been well intended but ineffective. However, a social movement presents an opportunity to arouse public awareness of the victim’s devastating encounters with bullies that could inspire a social movement.

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Chapter 1 of the Dissertation
Introduction

This dissertation represents my effort to reveal and understand the lived experiences and meaning structures of professional employees exposed to workplace bullying. I believe that ongoing research on the experiences of victims will depict bullying's detrimental psychological and physical effects on their lives. A desired outcome is that continued attention to this phenomenon will act as a catalyst for organizations to innovate approaches that reduce or eliminate workplace bullying.

The methodology for this research was hermeneutic phenomenology as exemplified in van Manen (1997, 2014). It enabled me to explore the lived experiences of my research participants and helped me to describe the significance of their experiences as expressed by them. Phenomenology is a compelling and evocative methodology because it depicts the victim's lived experiences in their own words that describe their bullying incidents. It is an intense, and surreal experience that immobilizes its victims before they realized what happened.

The phenomenon of workplace bullying is complex, chronic, and detrimental to the physical and emotional wellbeing of employees. It exists in most organizations, and it causes dysfunctional behaviors that negatively impact productivity and diminish employee's morale. This phenomenon has thwarted organizational efforts to acknowledge, reduce or eliminate its existence. Perpetrators of workplace bullying are able to abuse victims with impunity while their victims suffer in silence due to fear of retribution for speaking up.

Chapter one of this dissertation starts with background material that situates the current state of workplace bullying within organizations. It is not inclusive but rather represents my observations and insights from previous literature reviews. The background includes three

frequent topics found in the literature that propagate and exacerbate the existence of workplace bullying. They are the following: 1) Prevalence of bullying; 2) victim's experience, and 3) quantitative research.

Prevalence of Workplace Bullying

The nonprofit Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) commissioned Zogby Analytics to conduct a 2017 online survey of the prevalence of bullying in workplaces. The Zogby survey of 1008 employed adults (random selection, stratified sample) showed about 19% of employees had either been bullied or were currently experiencing bullying. Another 19% had either witnessed bullying happening or knew that it had happened to a coworker. The total was 38% of the 1008 participants that were impacted by bullying (Namie, 2017).

According to WBI the number of employed adults in 2017 were 161,616,000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics). The institute applied 38% to the number of employed adults. This enabled WBI to estimate that 60,347,410 employed adults in 2017 had either been bullied, were currently being bullied, witnessed bullying, or knew a victim. The total number of impacted employees was equivalent to the population of six western states.

Victims of Workplace Bullying

Verkuil, Atasayi, & Molendijk, (2015) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of the association between workplace bullying and mental health. They examined three symptoms: 1) Depression, 2) anxiety, and 3) stress-related psychological complaints such as negative affect and emotional exhaustion. Bullying was found to be positively related and predictive of all three symptoms. Verkuil et al. (2015) stated that bullying changes neuro-endocrine, autonomic, and immune functioning (social emotional/disease). Victims may reproduce their experience mentally after it occurred which extends their stress.

Brewer, Holt, & Malik, (2018) asserted that there is little research on workplace bullying's impact on risk and safety professionals. They investigated its effect on coping skills and its influence and found that bullied professionals were likely to engage in coping strategies e.g., substance abuse. It increased pressure "to make or change a risk or safety-based decision, which may have far reaching consequences with regard to the health and safety of other employees … an important threat to the health, wellbeing, and practice of risk and safety management professionals," (Brewer et al., 2018, p. 132).

MacIntosh, (2012) investigated the impact of workplace bullying on nurse's decisions to stay or leave their employer and examined its effects. The study showed that when women stayed it was because bullying ceased or they adapted to it—if they psychologically "moved on", they recuperated faster. Conversely, women who stayed and did not reconcile their bullying experience became ill, needed leaves of absence, early retirement, or required long-term disability care. MacIntosh (2012) found that the employer provided only four to six counseling sessions, but the nurses suffered negative effects for months or years afterwards.

In the U.S. there were 12 suicides per 100,000 people in 2010 and it was the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. (Nielsen et. al. 2015). Most individuals with psychiatric problems do not commit suicide because a psychiatric condition is not necessary for someone to take their own life. Nielsen et al. (2015, p. 23) investigated and found that, "Among many potential causes, exposure to workplace bullying has been proposed to be a predictor of both suicidal ideation and actual suicide."

There is data that associated bullying with mental health difficulties, but there is little research that has investigated the relationship between bullying and increased suicidal ideation, The Leach et al. (2020) study linked workplace bullying with suicidal ideation and adjusted for

stressors like job demands, employee control and insecurity. It distinguished between passive and active suicidal ideation. Active ideation is associated with suicidal behavior.

There are an abundance of examples of the harm done to victims of workplace bullying. The examples of harm progress from psychological and physical to the extreme of suicidal ideation and suicide. Nielsen & Einarsen, (2018) noted that the majority of existing studies are quantitative even though qualitative methodology has been used since the 1990s. Quantitative research has played a significant role in attempting to reduce and eliminate bullying.

Workplace Bullying: Quantitative Research

Nielsen & Einarsen, (2018) conducted a literature overview of 18 systematic reviews and meta-analyses to assess the effectiveness of quantitative research on the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Systematic reviews enable researchers to decrease bias through selecting, assessing, and integrating only pertinent studies. They used a focused "search strategy derived 'a priori'" to identify the relevant studies for their reviews (Uman, 2011, p. 57).

The researchers synthesized their systematic review data through statistical methods (meta-analysis) and summarized the effect on their topic (bullying). They used 18 systematic reviews for their literature overview to assess the effectiveness of quantitative research on workplace bullying and framed an agenda for the future (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Their overview included the following: 1) Conceptualization, 2) cross-sectional studies, 3) interventions, 4) causality, 5) processes, 6) theoretical frameworks, and 7) mediators/moderators.

Conceptualization

The competing definitions of workplace bullying has created a debate as to whether the definitions cause confusion or provide meaningful theoretical insights. Aggression can be "low intensity" (incivility, social undermining) while bullying is systematic and sustained by one or

more perpetrators over an extended period of time. Nielsen & Einarsen, (2018) asserted that bullying is a unique form of aggression and unrelated to other constructs. Yet in the Hershcovis' S. M., (2011) meta-analysis there were no significant differences between bullying and other constructs. However, Nielsen & Einarsen, (2018) asserted that different types of aggression are initiated and experienced uniquely, and similar outcomes may come from different antecedents.

Cross Sectional Studies

The most often used quantitative method [is] "cross-sectional questionnaire survey design in non-probability (i.e., convenience) sample" (Neall & Tuckey, 2014, p. 233; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018, p. 73). In these studies researchers evaluate the victim's perceptions of mistreatment by assessing their emotional state after being bullied; "self-labeling," method or the researchers evaluate the victim's awareness of being bullied through an inventory of the perpetrator's actions; "behavioral experience" method or a mixture of both methods (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Cross sectional studies provide valuable information on associations between bullying and the negative impacts experienced by victims. However, correlations do not establish causality between variables (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). The "lack of longitudinal research and structured clinical interview studies means that existing literature provides no absolute evidence for or against bullying as a causal precursor of the specific outcome," (Nielsen & Tangen, 2015, p. 17). Furthermore, Neall & Tuckey, (2014, p. 231) asserted that there has been an excessive use "of cross-sectional designs in research on workplace bullying." Also, Hershcovis & Reich, (2013, p. S31), stated that reliance on one point in time (cross-sectional) studies confuses "whether significant correlates of bullying are predictors, consequences, or both."

The work environment and the individual-dispositions hypotheses are explanations for the existence of bullying in organizations. The individual-dispositions cross-sectional studies need longitudinal research to establish if bullying alters disposition or disposition instigates bullying. The work environment hypothesis posits that workplace bullying is the outcome of the organizational milieu. But environmental findings both support and undercut potential correlation. (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018, p. 75) concluded that "it is premature to draw firm conclusions about both the validity of the work environment and the individual disposition hypotheses."

Interventions

The "research on the effectiveness of workplace bullying interventions has lagged behind descriptive studies on this topic" (Escartin, 2016, p. 157). The knowledge needed to improve and assess interventions is inadequate due to a limited understanding of causality, processes, and mediator/moderators. Researchers need to investigate what kinds of interventions are effective in decreasing bullying (Escartin, 2016). This requires examining and analyzing on three levels: 1) Primary—prevention; 2) secondary—handling of cases: and 3) tertiary—rehabilitation (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). They must use established intervention principles that make it possible to assess both process and effectiveness (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013; Nielsen & Randal, 2013). Designs should explain why studies succeeded or failed and examine the psychological structures that enhance or thwart outcomes (Nielsen & Randal, 2013; Nielsen & Tangen, 2015).

Causality

The researchers posit that the ability to link bullying causally to other variables is essential for generating theoretical models and creating successful interventions. For example, do conditions cause bullying or does bullying cause change in the environment or is it a mutual

relationship. Hence, “to understand the causal nature of bullying and its correlates there is a need for more advanced study designs where one also is able to identify contributing factors that govern the development of the bullying process” (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018, p. 77).

Processes

Workplace bullying is a process which begins as aggressive behavior and is initially difficult to distinguish. But over time the aggression escalates and increases in severity while victims experience isolation, shunning, and humiliation (Einarsen, 2011). The conditions that support bullying’s existence require understandings derived from research on bullies and victims. There is little research on how it progresses or regresses over time. Researchers must confirm the role of perpetrators, bystanders, colleagues, and managers. To move forward researchers need to tryout “a priori process models with multiple assessment points” over time (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018, p. 78)

Mediators and Moderators

The emphasis on direct relationships (predictors and outcomes) between variables has caused a lack of solid theoretical underpinnings within workplace bullying research (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018, as cited in Nielsen, 2016). This undermines the contexts, structures and incidents that explain: 1) how and when bullying happens and progresses, 2) how and when it affects the health of victims, and 3) who experiences the greatest negative impact (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018, as cited in Rai & Agarwal, 2018). To advance theoretical progress researchers must include mediator variables that show the processes between the independent and dependent variables. Similarly, moderator variables reveal the strength and direction of the variables. There is a scarcity of moderator models within organizational research, however the importance of these studies is gaining recognition (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018 as cited in Rai & Agarwal, 2018).

Theoretical Frameworks

There is a tendency to treat workplace bullying as a societal problem as opposed to a phenomenon in need of academic and theoretical understanding. This has stifled the development of theory for research, made it difficult to apply theories in practice and caused a scarcity of explanations as to how variables are related to each other (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018 as cited in Hogh & Mikkelsen, 2011), (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018, as cited in Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Potential solutions include borrowing theories from other fields or developing new theories that fit the unique characteristics of workplace bullying. An example would be to build on social psychology theoretical models or develop new models based on the existing knowledge of workplace bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Summary

The academic literature shows that the percentage of employees directly exposed to bullying remains between the high "teens" and low 30%. Victims experience depression, anxiety, and psychological complaints e.g., negative affect and emotional exhaustion. Also, victims are likely to relive their experience mentally. They may cope through substance abuse, leaves of absence, early retirement, or use long-term disability care. Bullying may be a predictor of both suicidal ideation and actual suicide.

The Nielsen & Einarsen, (2018) literature overview was intended to assess the effectiveness of quantitative research on workplace bullying and frame an agenda for the future. Their review included the following: 1) Conceptualization, 2) cross-sectional studies, 3) interventions, 4) causality, 5) processes, 6) theoretical frameworks, and 7) mediators/moderators. The overview is significant because it clarifies the current status of quantitative methods in regard to workplace bullying. Nielsen & Einarsen, (2018) demonstrated that more research needs

to be conducted on the seven methods to ensure that they are effective in reducing or eliminating bullying.

Research Problem, Statement of Purpose, and Research Question

Below are the following: 1) *Research problem*—the need to reduce or eliminate bullying, ameliorate harm, and use a phenomenological approach; 2) *purpose statement*—explore the "lived experiences and meaning structures" of victims and 3) *research question*—framework for understanding the phenomenon of workplace bullying (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Research Problem

The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) stated that bullying includes the following behaviors: … "repeated, health-harming mistreatment by one or more employees of an employee; abusive conduct that takes the form of verbal abuse; or behaviors perceived as threatening, intimidating, or humiliating; work sabotage; or in some combination of the above." In the United States almost all forms of abuse have been denounced i.e., abuse of children, spouses, partners. However, "bullying at work is still considered a normal, inevitable, or even a necessary business practice," (Namie, 2021).

Past quantitative research has shown that workplace bullying is prevalent in organizations, and it causes significant physical and psychological harm to its victims. Extensive quantitative research over several decades has expanded researcher's understanding of the phenomenon but it is still ubiquitous in organizations, and it is resistant to being reduced or eliminated. This suggests that other approaches are needed to ensure that organizations are capable of reducing and eliminating workplace bullying.

Bullying is largely unacknowledged and poorly understood by the public. At least 30% of Americans have experienced it directly or know of someone who did. The recent "Me Too," and

"Black Lives Matter," social movements could serve as a model for reducing or eliminating bullying in that movements capture the attention of the public. Bullying is akin to racism and sexual harassment and its physical and psychological harm could be made public through similar strategies used in social movements. Heinz Leymann, a German psychiatrist was first to document bullying in the 1980's. He founded an anti-bullying movement in Sweden and established a work trauma clinic.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore, interpret and describe the lived experiences and meaning structures of employees who were exposed to workplace bullying. The rationale for this research is that bullying occurs in organizations with impunity due to a lack of scrutiny and public awareness. When bullies target someone for abuse the victim's experience trauma and diminished psychological and physical wellbeing. There is a need to delve into and elicit the lived experiences and meaning structures of victims through phenomenology which is ideal for this research.

The lived experiences and meaning structures of victims would provide a persuasive rationale for public awareness and scrutiny of bullying in organizations. Employees are fearful about termination or retaliation if they speak up due to their subordinate positions in relationship to management. If the lived experiences and meaning structures of victims became known through the media, it could educate the public about bullying. This could energize organizations to initiate concerted and proactive efforts towards alleviating and eradicating its existence.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences and meaning structures of victims of workplace bullying as described in their narratives?

Lastly, chapter one discusses the following: 1) Significance of study; 2) research perspective, and 3) research assumptions.

Significance of Study

Selecting workplace bullying is important because its victims experience excruciating emotional pain and suffering. It causes physical and psychological health problems and undermines organizational performance through lower productivity, poor morale, employee absence and resignations. It is a lose-lose proposition for professional employees, supervisors, managers, and leaders. Also, it is toxic and poisons organizational life and culture while undermining the ability for organizations to adapt and innovate in constantly changing work environments.

The significance of this study is that it would contribute to the body of academic literature that exposes the existence of bullying in organizations, and it utilizes hermeneutic phenomenology as its methodology. Phenomenology has a unique role within qualitative methodologies because it captures the essence of "lived experience," and "structures of meaning." It focuses on those initial moments in which individuals have pre-reflective and pre-suppositional experiences before their thinking takes over and constructs opinions, perspectives, and explanations about what happened.

Lived experiences are instantaneous and can become lost or trapped in a maelstrom of thinking and ruminating. Phenomenologists try to recover these poignant lived experiences through their research, and they share their findings in academic literature on bullying. The research findings are available for the public, professionals, and students to name a few. This presents an opportunity and a resource that would educate and influence organizations, leaders,

managers, supervisors, and employees about what it means to be bullied. The findings from phenomenological research on bullying could be a precursor for organizational change.

Researcher Perspective

I started my career as a social worker and through my experiences I learned about the individual's emotional and physical struggles to survive while trying to maintain a reasonable standard of living and well-being. Later on, I acquired a master's degree and supervised, managed, and administered in positions as a city administrator in local suburban government. Also, I held positions as Manager of Administration in the City of Minneapolis and the Metropolitan Council.

Throughout my career I had experiences in organizations that shaped my perspective on how employees were treated in organizations. I learned a valuable lesson that regardless of a person's position there is always potential to become a victim of workplace bullying. It is endemic to organizational life. This realization provided me with the impetus to not only understand the phenomenon of bullying but to do something about it. Bullies exist in workplaces but are not acknowledged or dealt with until the victim speaks up due to abuse or resigns. Victims feel shame and hesitate to confront the bully for fear of retaliation or may wrongly think that they were at fault. It is time to expose workplace bullying by "calling it out" for what it is and does to victims. Workplace bullying exists in "plain sight."

Research Assumptions:

I approached my dissertation research with several assumptions regarding the existence of workplace bullying within organizations. These assumptions are based on my experience as a social worker, supervisor, manager, and administrator. They are the following:

1. Possessing a professional degree such as a Bachelor of Arts, master's degree, Ph.D., or Law Degree, do not confer protection from workplace bullying. A professional person's experience, knowledge, skill, and ability can be negated by individuals who possess power, authority, a need for control or a desire to "look good" and they promote their personal agenda. These individuals will sacrifice the well-being of professional employees who are motivated to do the right thing regardless of what their colleagues and superiors may think.
2. HR departments are not necessarily the professional employee's ally. No matter how frequent and persistent employees are in reporting their bullying incidents, many HR departments are generally unresponsive. The failure of HR practitioners to respond to victims is due to their precarious position in which departments are situated. Historically, the HR profession evolved from accounting clerks who began handling benefits administration, health care, recruitment/hiring, training, and discipline. Currently HR departments want to "have a seat at the table". In other words, these departments want to be positioned as equals within the top ranks of leadership and have a "say" about where the organization is headed. Consequently, most HR departments would not jeopardize their "seat at the table" by being an ally for bullied professional employees.
3. Employees initially may not recognize that they are being bullied until a colleague pointed it out. Also, the victim's personal fears regarding retaliation, demotion or termination are strong incentives not to speak out. Consequently, victims suffer in silence with unexpressed anxiety, shame, and depression which extracts a heavy toll on the employee's physical and psychological well-being.
4. HR practitioners, supervisors, managers, and leaders may be unaware of the impact that the workplace environment has on its employees lived experiences of being bullied. The victim's

feelings and well-being are unacknowledged which creates a sense that they don't count as real human beings. Also, there is a "gang" mentality among groups of employees where the victim is labeled as the "bad employee" and is scorned and isolated by their peers. Finally, employees who are aware of the bullying within the organization "keep their heads low." In other words, the rumor mill spreads gossip about what is happening, and the employees keep a "low profile" to make sure that they are not the next victim of bullying.

Chapter 2 of the Dissertation

Literature Review

The objective of this literature review was to substantiate the current state of concepts, theories and data that are central to the phenomenon of workplace bullying. The literature enables researchers to identify where the gaps are and compare their findings with what has already been found (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The following five activities were meant to reveal the current status of academic literature on the phenomenon of bullying: 1) Introduction of literature review; 2) literature review process; 3) literature review articles, and 4) thematization.

Introduction: Literature Review

The literature review involved identifying, retrieving, and analyzing substantive academic research articles. My objective was to be grounded in the current state of interventions, concepts and theories that could reduce, alleviate or eradicate bullying. Also, I wanted to find articles that were relevant and conveyed what it was like to be bullied and what it meant to be a victim.

There is a substantial need to explore the lived experiences and meaning structures that portray what it is like to be bullied as described by its victims. It is possible that a deeper understanding of what victim's go through could provide the impetus for social change within

organizations. The aim of this literature review is to further a greater understanding of the victim's experiences and the meanings they create.

Literature: Review Process

The chosen methodology was hermeneutic phenomenology. This methodology emphasized obtaining an understanding of participant's view of the world around them. It is a philosophy and a method for investigating lived experiences and structures of meanings. It supported my interest in investigating what it was like for the participants to be victims of workplace bullying.

The University of Minnesota's databases were used for the literature search. They were the following: Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, JSTOR, APA, PsycINFO, PubMed, Web of Science with different word combinations that included: Hermeneutic phenomenology, phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology, workplace bullying, bullying, lived experience, phenomenology/bullying, and workplace aggression. I continued the search until I found a suitable selection of articles.

I retrieved 24 peer reviewed research articles that used phenomenology as the methodology to investigate the phenomenon of workplace bullying. The average age of all 24 journal articles was 2016 and the age range of articles were between 2008 to 2022. researchers.

Literature Review Articles: Themes and Patterns

There is a substantial need to explore the lived experiences and meaning structures that portray what it is like to be bullied as described by its victims. The aim of this hermeneutic phenomenology dissertation is to further a greater understanding of the victim's experiences and the meanings they create.

Thirty eight percent of employees directly experienced bullying, saw it occur or were aware that it happen to a coworker (Namie, 2017). Victims of bullying suffered from their degraded mental health and diminished physical well-being. This is important because the emotional trauma and bodily harm inflicted upon victims became their inherent lived experiences and structures of meaning that they lived with for the rest of their lives. My perspective was that this was a heavy toll extracted from the victims by their perpetrators.

The literature review articles were thematized for the purpose of revealing relationships that could be grouped into themes and patterns that explicated the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Creating themes from narratives consists of hermeneutic phenomenological methods that reveal lived experiences and meaning structures. Qualitative analysis typically reveals on-going patterns which are themes that extend throughout the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019. Themes are lengthy phrases or sentences that are recognized as a unit of data and represent what it is about and what is meant (Saldana, 2016).

The 24 literature review articles were placed into themes listed below. Also, nine of the literature review articles were cited twice because their narratives addressed two themes. There were a total of 29 citations and 24 literature review articles. I identified five themes in the literature that were associated with bullying. The themes are the following: 1) *Discursive strategies,* 2) *power*, 3) *the role of human resources,* 4) *recognition—awareness,* and 5) *policies—procedures*.

Discursive Strategies: Silencing, Prosody and Discounting

Sedivy-Benton, et al. (2014) in this study explored adult woman educator's lived experiences with *silencing* and bullying. They found that the educators experienced more bullying than the general workforce and the leaders/managers enabled *silence*. The dominant

culture resisted institutional support for deterrence and prevention of bullying. Silencing was enmeshed with powerful individuals who maintained their values, practices, traditions, and behaviors. The lack of holding bullies accountable and leadership's indifference allowed bullying to flourish.

Goldberg, Beitz, et al. (2013) addressed nursing faculty experiences with colleagues, and academic administrators who perpetrated bullying. They described being *silenced* as "squelching" and when they spoke up about unfair practices, the administrators refused to discuss the nurses situation. The bullying was a systemic issue, but the administrator's denied any responsibility because "no one ever bullied someone else in the organization." The researchers said that power and control were pervasive in the organization e.g., autocratic decisions, bullies controlled, administrators were terrorists, and information was withheld.

According to Dzurec, (2014) two-thirds of language is articulated through *prosody* which entails rhythm, stress, and intonation. Antagonistic bullies used this type of language to confuse, humiliate and shame but they often provoked their victims anger. Skilled bullies used nonverbal attributes (prosody) to entrap their targets through shrewd, indirect, and artful speech. Victims did not realize that they were being bullied; they were unaware of being shamed; surrendered control; did not challenge their bully and felt confused. Organizations with a power imbalance and a culture of mistreatment allowed abuse that redefined the victims situation and sense of self.

In this study Donahue (2020) the researchers explored the lived experiences of clinical nurses who felt *discounted*. Feelings of being disrespected were significant given the impact of clinical nurses performance in providing patient care. There were professional standards on respectful behavior, but the prevalence of discounting was largely ignored and unreported. The

researchers found that nurses felt powerless, stupid, discouraged, and broken. Negative behaviors impacted the effectiveness of communication between nurses and the needs of their patients.

O'Neill and Borland, (2018) found that their participants intentionally withheld their feelings of anger and worthlessness. They inferred that their participants had *discounted* their experiences with bullying, and its impact on their health. The participants saw their manager as critical, intruded boundaries, stifled assertiveness and they viewed the organization negatively when it failed to support them. The researchers concluded that the participants discounted their fear, anger, and poor physical and mental health as a result of their managers discounting them. The organization was ineffective, and it gave the impression of ignoring bullying.

Themes and Patterns

Dysfunctional organizations used discursive strategies i.e., silencing, prosody and discounting language to control and suppress assertive employees. Victims lost their voice and became defenseless in the face of aggressive, dominant and powerful management that strove to maintain their status and privileged positions. Bullying and abusive language were systemic and enmeshed in a culture of mistreatment. The victims were unaware, fearful, and felt diminished and angry. The leaders were indifferent, withheld information and were not accountable.

Organizations with dominant mistreatment cultures opposed institutional efforts to protect employees. These cultures established negative norms (systemic) about how employees should be treated. The social environments were unhealthy which hindered communication between professional employees.

There was a pattern of using discourse (silencing, prosody, discounting) to impede employees from speaking up about their concerns. Leadership’s inability to recognize what was happening encouraged bullying and enabled dysfunctional work environments that allowed

bullying to flourish. The leadership protected their values, practices, traditions and they ignored bullying behaviors directed at employees.

The impact of using discursive strategies to bully was that victims became bewildered and disoriented. The perpetrator's used subtle and manipulative language to establish work environments where there was one-way communication or "double speak." Double speak language was used intentionally to disguise, twist and suppress the meaning of words. The result was that the victim's context became altered through language and their lived experiences and structures of meanings existed in their minds unacknowledged.

Power

The D'Cruz and Noronha, (2013) study addressed the relationship between workplace bullying, organizational change and employee lay-offs. The organization used authoritative tactics, abusive behaviors, and depersonalized bullying to achieve their goals. Depersonalized bullying was a feature of capitalist employment designed for profit. Power was used to subsume the HR Department and HR abandoned its role as protector of employees rights and well-being. The researchers asserted that an alternative to HR's unitarist approach was pluralism that was collectivistic through a strong trade union.

Hodgins and Mannix McNamara (2019) investigated the association of power with bullying and management's response to alleviate or eliminate abuse. The sector had a high rate of bullying; women were bullied more than men; bullying was unchecked, and organizational change efforts failed. Power structures prevailed over attempts to protect employees. The organization's milieu enabled bullying and ignored its existence which worsened it's prevalence.

Median et al. (2020) added an ethical perspective on management actions in relation to vertical bullying. Their concept of "line of immunity" showed that particular levels or

classifications in organizations provided special privileges and benefits that exceeded normal behavior. They developed a new concept "*power methods"* that associated bullying with the line of impunity and depicted how managers enacted unethical actions. The researchers found that organizational instability and uncertainty in the managers role affected the line of impunity

In this article Goldberg et al. (2013) recognized that power and control were associated with bullying in a nursing academia that used methods of control, power inequities and tenured status. The researcher cited several examples: Autocratic decisions, unrealistic workloads, withheld information, and administrative interference. Tenured staff and managers were protected by their status and positions while other staff were defenseless. When power relationships became established in the organization bullying behaviors worsened.

According to O'Neill and Borland (2018) power differentials were a foremost condition for the existence of bullying in organizations. Poor leadership, inadequate work design and low morale were precursors to the existence of power differentials. A power differential between the perpetrator and victim always left the victim in a subservient position. Rewards, intimidation, and status were the types of power managers used to influence their victims. Managers withheld rewards as a way to control employees which caused them to feel distressed and powerless.

Themes and Patterns

Power was a means to subjugate and bully employees. However, it was not just manager versus victim but rather abuse of hierarchical power. Leaders failed to see that their policies were ineffective in dealing with complex, interpersonal, interconnected, many-sided, and repetitious bullying that existed in organizations. Institutional practices, processes, and structures promoted bullying, and it was unacknowledged. Capitalism was seen as complicit because it confused the boundaries between lawful/unlawful behavior, labor processes and managerial rights.

There was a pattern of using power to subjugate HR—absorb it into management and orchestrate HR's relinquishment of its traditional role in advocating for employees. Power overcame efforts to protect employees, the organization allowed bullying, and the management dismissed its existence which exacerbated it's pervasiveness. When power relationships became established in organizations bullying behaviors worsened.

Individuals in organizations who occupied positions that entitled them to hierarchical power and privilege experienced a level of status that far exceeded employee's daily experiences. Consequently, there were two sets of standards; one for employees and the other for executives who felt empowered and saw themselves as worthy of special treatment.

Power differentials were a significant antecedent for generating workplace bullying because differentials establish dysfunctional power imbalances. The imbalances were brought about by incompetent leadership, inadequate work methods and diminished employee self-confidence. Managers used power to reward compliant employees with approval and praise and withheld approval and praise from nonconforming employees to convey their disappointment.

The Role of Human Resources

O'Neill and Borland (2018) found that their four research participants felt negative about their interactions with HR, senior management and the organization. The participants perceived HR as "unhelpful" and they lost trust in the organization due to bullying, unethical behavior, lacked interest in employees, felt used and were cruel.

Medina, et al. (2020) found that manager's abusive behavior occurred when the victims of bullying scheduled meetings with HR. Bullying incidents occurred when victims received positive feedback from stakeholders and problems occurred when victim's had personal events outside of work. HR was supportive, listened, conducted fact finding and informal counseling.

But despite the victim's documentation HR conducted no interventions or investigations regarding the bullying situation.

In this study Kendrick (2017) found that HR was the source of academic librarian's low morale. The librarians tried to decrease or eliminate bullying through meetings with HR and with campus administrators. They documented behaviors and gathered information. But HR's limitations hindered efforts to improve morale due to decentralization and it dealt exclusively with faculty staff. There were multiple grievance procedures and conflicts between policies. HR did not respond to non-faculty needs which exposed librarians to abuse.

LaSala et at. (2016) found that nursing academic administrators sought support from administration, but their requests were denied, and they were ignored. The nurses felt thwarted and discarded and feared that the organization lacked the willingness to face up to bullying. There were concerns that policies and procedures to protect employees did not exist. HR advocated efforts to deal with conflict but allowed bad behaviors and did nothing. Individuals who challenged bad behavior were terminated and the nurse academic administrators became scapegoats

Hodgin and McNamara (2019) investigated workplace bullying of academic staff in Irish Higher Education Institutions. The researchers discovered that processes and procedures to protect employees from bullying failed even when staffed with HR professionals. HR defended employees and was a neutral mediator while being a strategic partner with management. But HR's partnership with management became a priority while its mission to protect employees languished. The notion of a professional organization where power was dispersed and delegated to technical experts was well established.

Goldberg, et al. (2013 delve into the experiences of nursing faculty who were bullied by colleagues and academic administrators. The nursing faculty discussed their perceptions of HR as ineffective and said that they felt that they were treated unfairly and pointed out the lack of due process. They complained about students remarks that were accepted as facts without an investigation. The nursing faculty filed complaints with HR but found out that it increased their frequency of being bullied.

D'Cruz and Noronha, (2013) investigated bullying during the 2009 financial recession layoffs in India's IT sector. They focused on change as an antecedent of bullying, and they examined HR's role in relation to bullying and change. The researchers discovered that management used depersonalization as an impersonal way of achieving effectiveness. Changes exposed employees to a new regime that was abusive, autocratic, authoritarian, controlling and cruel. HR discarded its role of protecting and advocating for employee's (pluralism/unionism) and was co-opted into a capitalist ideology (unitarist/managerial).

Roter (2016) discovered that registered nurses were exposed to dysfunctional leaders that ignored problems, and the leaders hoped that the problems would disappear. Complaints were filed with the HR department, but HR did not follow through and it tolerated bad behaviors or was incapable of addressing them. Psychological safety was a key element in reporting errors, learning from mistakes and prevention. Strong backing was needed from the leadership and HR, but the nurses felt that the organization did not provide support.

D'Cruz & Noronha (2010) depicted victim's coping skills in dealing with bullying at international call centers in Mumbai and Bangalore, India. The researchers identified an employee theme of "protecting my interests" and found two processes that involved victims stages of recovery and HRM's relationship with bullying. The victims experienced confusion,

sought options, moved inwards and exited the organization. HRM's inclusivist/exclusivist strategy was one-sided managerialism that benefited employers in contrast to a unitarist approach that engaged employees.

Themes and Patterns

In several of the articles there was recognition that HR had abandoned its traditional role of protecting employees. HR would act as if it was concerned about employee's well-being, but it failed to initiate investigations and interventions on behalf of employees. The close professional relationship between HR and management was particularly troubling for employees who saw this as threatening their job security.

Organizational change was recognized as a precursor of bullying because it exposed employees to new leadership and management that threatened them. The supervisors and management routinely abused and intimidated employees through depersonalization, a detached and impersonal way of achieving organizational goals. HRM's one-sided support of management benefited employers but not employees.

HR had a pattern of espousing the veracity of its efforts to protect employees from workplace bullying. But, in actuality organizational responses were either circumvented or dismissed and victims continued to be exposed to bullying. The organizations had policies and procedures in place to protect employees, but they were not used in helping the victims.

Another pattern entailed depersonalized bullying which was linked to organizational change and unitarist HRM. Depersonalized bullying subjugated employees and unitarist HRM became enmeshed with management while trade unions became irrelevant. This brought about a capitalist approach to employee management and HRM's advocacy role was undermined in favor of performance management that focused on financial value and competitive advantage.

Recognition and Awareness

Skarbek et al. (2015) investigated nurse managers (NM's) perceptions of bullying; their effectiveness of interventions and, the types of environments that supported well-being. NM's were aware that bullying occurred, it was ubiquitous and needed to be supervised. They recognized that bullying undermined patient care, degraded the work environment and should not be tolerated. The nurses were aware that mandatory training would be ineffective compared to NM's interventions within units.

The Lindy & Schaefer, 2010 study explored nurse managers (NM's) insights into staff's experiences regarding bullying. When NM's became aware of bullying, they felt responsible and took action to correct the behavior and they became upset when staff expected them to be aware of incidents even when no one filed a report. They followed up on incidents, advocated for standards of acceptable behavior, and promoted ongoing education to help them recognize and correct behaviors.

Medina et al. (2020) investigated the association between the line of impunity and its relationship with downward/vertical bullying. The line of impunity granted executive's privileges that empowered them to exceed normal restraints. When executive's expertise increased their accountability decreased; they did not fear punishment and were unaware of being "out of touch." Medina et al. (2020) asserted that there were organizational cultures where individuals became "unwilling or unable to grasp the magnitude of their wrongdoings."

Kendrick, (2017) explored the low morale of information science librarians experiences of being bullied. Their awareness of bullying grew slowly over time, but its negative effects hindered their ability to protect themselves. It was contagious and it spread throughout the librarians, however, they engaged in positive activities to reduce their harm "The recognition of

negligence as a form of workplace abuse highlighted the idea that factors once thought of as 'low morale,' may be only a piece of a much larger puzzle," Kendrick, (2017 p 875).

According to Rosi et. al, (2020) horizontal violence was rarely recognized by new graduate nurses even though they had experienced it. New nurses were victimized, experienced a lack of courtesy and were not treated as peers. Senior nurses used criticism, excessive workloads, no support and gave them patients with overly complex needs. They assigned new nurses to difficult situations to test them. The senior nurses had low awareness, extreme expectations, did not see themselves as aggressive and did not realize that they were bullies.

Themes and Patterns

There was a lack of academic studies on nurse managers (NM's) involvement with workplace bullying, the scale of bullying and the efficacy of their interventions. The dearth of academic literature deprived NM's of insights and perceptions that would help them to integrate effectively with victims and perpetrators. They needed to increase NM's recognition, awareness and understanding of the negative behaviors they witnessed daily. Some NM's approached negative behavior with confidence and others had ethical dilemmas.

Newly graduated nurses did not recognize bullying even though they had experienced it. There was a need to provide undergraduate degree courses that supported and protected new nurses and addressed the lack of policies and procedures. Also, academic librarians were not aware of bullying and their fear undermined their attempts to protect themselves. They had physical/psychological maladies, withdrew from work, avoided the library, disengaged from their colleagues and questioned their career choice.

In the nursing studies above there was a pattern of NM's being unprepared psychologically to deal with bullying, and they lacked professional training and education to

intervene on behalf of bullied employees. The poor treatment of nurses in hospitals and medical facilities was ironic in that nursing professionals exemplify compassion, caring and healing.

There was a pattern of organizational unpredictability and ambiguity that provoked leaders to misuse power and instigate unethical and abusive behaviors. The leaders became hyper aware of employees who could be potential threats to their status. There was a need to research the organizations ethical values within the context of the culture that supported values such as, "power distance." Values and cultural issues could be precursors to workplace bullying.

Policies and Procedures

Sedivy-Benton, et al. (2014) asserted that bullying of women adult educators had become increasingly prevalent. Convoluted, arbitrary and overlooked policies and procedures exacerbated their situation and undermined interventions. The harsh political context allowed poor leadership, no accountability, manipulation of structures and demands for political favors. Power structures flourished due to "tenure, seniority, gender and fear of political correctness." The existing policies and procedures did not address bullying behaviors and conflicts.

Kendrick, (2017) posited that there was scant literature that documented library information science (LIS) staff's low morale that was linked with bullying. Organizational policies and procedures were antecedents that caused LIS staff's low morale. They tried to alleviate their situation, but there were separate grievance procedures that exacerbated conflict. LIS staff were not supported or protected even though they documented bullying, approached leaders, attended campus groups, asked for assistance, or filed grievances.

In this study the researchers explored nurse academic administrator's lived experiences with bullying and its impact on their wellbeing. The administrators sought support and shared their incidents but also felt exasperated and deserted when support was absent, or they were

disregarded. The administrators worried that policies and procedures did not exist, or management would not investigate. The academic administrators needed the support from the institution to ensure appropriate policies and procedures were enforced (LaSala, et. al., 2016).

Hodgin and McNamara, (2019) investigated bullying in Irish Higher Education Institutions where academic staff were bullied despite existing anti-bullying policies and procedures. Power structures and senior staff did not allow academic staff to participate in anti-bullying efforts. Bullying incidents were brought to senior staff but there were no interventions initiated to correct the perpetrators behavior even when the incidents were extreme. There were no investigations, no reprimands, and no requirements for eliminating inappropriate behavior.

In the Farrell et. al. (2014) study twenty-two Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) clinicians experienced bullying and none of the perpetrators were sanctioned, disciplined or reprimanded by their organizations. The twenty-two participants knew that the organizations had formidable policies and procedures in place, but they said many of the organizations did nothing. Most of the participants stated that their bullying experiences took place in work environments where silence and censorship was prevalent, and bullying thrived.

Themes and Patterns

In the research articles each organization was uniquely dysfunctional, which undermined the veracity of their policies and procedures and intensified employee's exposure to bullying. Consequently, the research participants suffered through the leaderships dysfunctional behaviors and their incompetence. In each research article there were unique and discernable patterns which demonstrate the dysfunctional nature of each organization.

There was a pattern where adult women educators were targets of bullying and the organization's leadership allowed inadequate policies and procedures. The leadership condoned a hostile work environment and permitted detrimental power structures.

Low morale was linked to a pattern of workplace bullying, ineffective organizational policies and procedures and multiple grievances that caused conflict. Staff were not supported or protected.

Administrators dealt with a pattern where they suspected that policies and procedures did not exist, and management would not conduct investigations into bullying incidents. They needed support from the institution to ensure appropriate policies and procedures were enforced.

In an Irish Higher Education Institution, a pattern of bullying was allowed by the power structure and academic staff could not participate in anti-bullying efforts. Incidents were brought to senior staff but there were no interventions, investigations, reprimands, and no efforts to stop bullying.

Clinicians were aware of a pattern in their organizations where there was effective policies and procedures, but nothing was done to prevent bullying. None of the perpetrators were disciplined or reprimanded and the work environment silenced and censored victims.

Chapter 3 of the Dissertation

Methodology and Research Approach

Overview of Research Design

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach differs significantly from other qualitative methodologies in that researchers seek insights and understanding into human experiences that are pre-reflective and presuppositional. Its practitioners do not analyze, classify, or create abstractions. Phenomenological methods offer credible insights into the "lived experience" and

"meaning structures" of everyday people and it avoids advancing explanatory theory or technology (van Manen, 1997).

Researchers strive to comprehend the essence of what makes "something" into the "thing" that it is. The essence of the "thing" is made visible through the researchers investigation into the meaning structures of the lived experience. They describe and interpret the essence to unveil the significance of the experience in its fullness and vividness. Phenomenologist study everyday life experiences and then interpret and articulate them in narratives (van Manen, 1997).

Introduction: Purpose, Rationale for Approach

Purpose:

The purpose of my dissertation was to explore the "lived experiences" and "meaning structures" of mid-career professional employees who were victimized by the phenomenon of workplace bullying. I believe that the exploration of victim's experiences and a serious effort to further the public's understanding and insight regarding bullying could make a difference. It is conceivable that increased public awareness would draw enough attention analogous to existing social change movements. This may unveil the shroud of silence that hides workplace bullying in plain sight.

Rationale Approach

The rationale for using a qualitative phenomenological approach is that it allows researchers to do something that they cannot do with other qualitative methodologies. It enables researchers to portray lived experiences and meaning structures and avoid victims predisposition to create opinions, thoughts and explanations regarding their encounters with bullies. The other qualitative methodologies such as sociology, psychology and ethnography provide explanations while phenomenology interprets and describes lived experiences and structures of meanings.

Phenomenology presents plausible insights that stimulate our thinking and develop our competence. It enhances moral consciousness, interpretation, kindness, and tactfulness. It does not presume that lived experiences or structures of meaning are rational, logical, contradictory or scientific (van Manen, 1997, 2014).

Research Sample: Participant Criteria, Purposeful Sampling

Participant Criteria

The research sample consisted of participants that met the relevant requirements: 1) Mid-level career professionals in public, private or non-profit organizations; 2) supervisors, managers, or directors; 3) mid-level career professionals without supervisory experience but possessed specialized skills and knowledge e.g., engineers, accountants, nurses; 4) age range between 35 to 65 years; 5) no preferences regarding gender, race, and ethnicity; 6) participants must possess at a minimum a bachelor's degree; and 7) participants experienced at least six months of bullying. All of the participants were required to meet the appropriate criteria unless there were justifiable extenuating circumstances.

Purposeful Sampling

I chose a purposive sampling strategy for my dissertation because it was the most appropriate method for my qualitative phenomenological research. The strength of purposive sampling is that it elicits deep and rich narratives from the participants. These narratives are compelling because they delve into heuristic implications with the goal of attaining insight into the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Rich descriptions of lived experiences and structures of meaning go beyond the obvious by probing into the depth of our existence as human beings (van Manen, 1997).

There are eleven variants of purposive sampling. I utilized four of these in my sampling approach because they fit with my perception of deep, and rich narratives that explain our everyday existence (van Manen, 1997). They are the following: 1) *Typical case sampling*—average or standard, no extremes; 2) c*ritical or crucial sampling*—participants that support and substantiate the rationale for the study; 3) s*nowball sampling*—participants identify/refer other potential participants; and 4) c*riterion sampling*—participants are selected based on criteria determined by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Quantitative research was not an option because it reduces the complexity of life to attain substantive statistical results. In doing so it relinquishes capturing the essence of lived experiences and meaning structures.

Information

What follows below is the information that I needed to conduct my research on the phenomenon of workplace bullying. This information included the following: 1) Participants; 2) demographics of participants; 3) organization context, 4) perceptions of participants and 5) theoretical orientation.

Participants

I was concerned about finding potential participants for my research. Contacting employers to identify their bullied employees was not an option. However, I had collected several newspaper articles about organizations where bullying was prevalent. The victims revealed some of their experiences in the articles which indicated that they could be excellent participants. I began contacting them and provided detailed information about my study. Initially there were two individuals interested in becoming participants and were open to identifying other potential participants. I sent either personal letters or detailed emails tailored to the individual's

situation. A total of nine individuals were identified and four of them volunteered to be participants (including the first two). Each participant received an information packet that contained the following:

1) Consent Form
2) I sent a personal letter that described the research process.
3) Key Participant Information – "What Will it be Like to Participate in This Study?"
4) Research Protocol for Participants

I encouraged each participant to select a location for their interviews (research site) where they would feel comfortable disclosing their lived experiences of being bullied. My goal was to ensure that the participants would feel psychologically safe, and I wanted to support trust between myself and the participants. The sites included two public libraries, one restaurant and two Zoom interviews at the participant's homes. The criteria for the sites was that they would provide confidentiality, privacy and would be quiet.

Organizational Context

The mission of the organization was to help their clients improve their health, support well-being and assist them in attaining their potential. It provided educational opportunities and human resources for all of its clients.

Participants

All four participants had definite expectations of the organization they would be working for. They were highly educated career professionals with substantive work experience, and they expected to be treated respectfully. The participants possessed exceptional knowledge, skills, abilities and they anticipated a high degree of self-direction and discretion. They conveyed a sense of knowing how to get things done and would speak up when needed. All of them were ethical and wanted to do things right, "by the book."

The participants ranged in age from the middle 40's to the middle 60's and were seasoned career professionals. However, within their first year of employment all four of the participants had significant negative experiences with the organizations leaders and managers. These negative experiences were indicative of the themes found in my literature review i.e., discursive strategies, power, human resources, recognition/awareness, and policies/procedures.

Theoretical Orientation

The purpose of utilizing phenomenology was to explore lived experiences and meaning structures as expressed by the victims of workplace bullying. Phenomenologists examine the significance of phenomena but avoid scientific theories, concepts, values and controversies. The difference between phenomenology and other types of research is that it does not construct abstractions but rather investigates the world as presented in ordinary experience and consciousness. Phenomenologists bypass the use of theory as a framework for building their interpretive structures (van Manen, 2014).

Research Design: Methods in Social Sciences, Reduction/Epoché/Bracketing, Thematizing

Methods in Social Sciences

Phenomenological researchers use methods from social sciences to collect lived experiences and meaning structures for the purpose of reflection and transformation into themes. When researchers incorporate social science methods into their phenomenological studies, they distinguish their methodology as "human science phenomenology" (van Manen, 1997, 2014).

Epoché, Reduction, Bracketing

Phenomenology is unique in that its researchers adopt a phenomenological point of view that includes epoché, bracketing and reduction to eliminate their preconceived assumptions. Epoché means to avoid, suspend, withhold, and shun scientific attitudes and taken for granted

beliefs. Bracketing (mathematics) means putting parentheses around assumptions that would otherwise block access to lived experiences and meaning structures. Reduction in phenomenology is meant to oppose *reductionism* that theorizes, categorizes, and condenses phenomena (van Manen, 1997, 2014).

Thematizing

Thematizing and meaning analysis are reflective methods and are merged with the methods of epoché and the reduction. Human science methods are focused on vivid and powerful themes found in a phenomenon being investigated. When the researchers analyze their texts, they reflect on how it represents a particular phenomenon. The reflective method serves as a precursor that results in phenomenological writing. Themes are like a road map in that they facilitate the process of writing phenomenological texts (van Manen, 1997, 2014).

Data Collection

What follows below are the data collection methods used in this dissertation to conduct research on the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Phenomenological researchers use methods from the social sciences to collect experiential material for reflection on lived experiences and meaning structures. However, descriptions of lived experience are not identical to the pre-reflective original lived experiences because descriptions are recollections that are inevitably different. The purpose of collecting lived experiences is to reflect on meanings that exist in the experiences. The data collection methods included the following: 1) Phenomenological interview; 2) hermeneutic interview; 3) theme analysis; 4) conceptual analysis; and 5) insight cultivators.

Phenomenological Interview

The phenomenological interview is a method for investigating and collecting experiential information such as descriptions, narratives, and stories that enhances phenomenological reflection. This method facilitated a deep and rich understanding of human phenomena. It provides pre-reflective experiential descriptions while circumventing personal viewpoints, outlooks, assessments, and explanations. The researcher must possess a sense of curiosity and authenticity towards the phenomenon which stimulates the dialogue between the researcher and participant. The rationale of the phenomenological interview is to collect tangible stories of circumstances and incidents for reflection and writing (van Manen, 2014).

Hermeneutic Interview:

The hermeneutic interview is meant to be an exploration into phenomenological ideas and methods so that they can be understood. This type of interview is very different from qualitative interviews in psychology or ethnography that pertain to biographic meanings, personal accounts, and culture. There are two types of hermeneutic interviews: 1) The data-interpreting interview; and 2) the methodological interpreting interview.

The data-interpreting interview approach is intended to provide resources that support the interpretation of lived experience descriptions (LED) that are found during data-collection. The data-interpreting interview is used by asking other researchers for their interpretive insights regarding materials like poems, and art objects etc.

The methodology-interpreting interview is typically used when interpretative insights are sought out from phenomenological peers regarding themes, assumptions, and methods. This can be achieved through published authors, podcasts, and videos etc. In addition, the hermeneutic interview may be used to provide support for phenomenological interviews (van Manen, 2014).

Theme Analysis

Themes in phenomenological inquiry are used differently from the ways that themes are used in the other qualitative research approaches. Theme analysis in grounded theory consists of classifying and advancing theory. In ethnography theme analysis is about seeing and creating classifications that depict a cultural group's, customs, and traditions. Researchers conducting content analysis select themes and investigate the repetition of them to reveal characteristics within texts. Grounded theory and ethnography use constant comparison as means for surfacing participant's themes in their narratives. However, in phenomenology there is a certain way of being (attitude) that allows for phenomenological insights to arise. Consequently, there are no abstractions, concepts, taxonomies, or procedures (van Manen, 2014).

Theme analysis using a phenomenological research approach is a "process of recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience and represented in a text" (van Manen M., 2014, p. 319). Phenomenologists do not use frequency counts; the coding of terms in texts; categorizations of procedures/documentary materials or computer analysis. Accordingly, "analyzing thematic meanings of phenomenon [a lived experience] is a complex and creative process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure …is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing meaning'" van Manen M., (2014 p. 319). In a phenomenological research approach texts are seen as sources of meaning at three levels as follows:

1) **Wholistic reading approach:** The researcher captures the whole, original, and powerful phenomenological meaning. Then the researcher articulates the meaning in a phrase (van Manen M., 2014).
2) **Selective reading approach:** The researcher identifies statements and phrases that are important and divulge an experience that can be described. Then the researcher transforms

the phenomenological meanings into a thematic expression or a longer reflective, descriptive, and interpretive paragraph. Phrases that are evocative and emblematic and are saved for further developing text (van Manen M., 2014).

3) **Detailed reading approach***:* The researcher examines every sentence or sentence group and focuses on what they uncover about the phenomenon or experience being described. The researcher is pinpointing thematic expressions, phrases or narrative paragraphs that uncover the phenomenological meaning of experience (van Manen, 2014).

Conceptual Analysis

Conceptual analysis is a way to distinguish the differences between meanings through how they are used in everyday language. It is the process of separating conceptual features into useful and accessible parts and exploring how they are used in different contexts. Conceptual analysis is useful because it reveals how individuals uniquely understand their milieu. This enables researchers to comprehend and know the meanings that are named by a concept and were created from lived experiences. However, there is a danger that lived experiences could lose their richness and depth due to conceptualization. It is not enough for the researcher to superimpose a concept onto a lived experience and explain how it is used. Adroit researchers can thoughtfully explore the meaning derived from a lived experience as if the meaning and lived experience are alive (van Manen, 2014).

Insight Cultivators

Insight cultivators are intended to simulate the phenomenological researchers thematic perceptions of a phenomenon that they are investigating. The researcher collects cultivators from sources such as philosophy, humanities, human science, or the arts. Cultivators are meant to invigorate the researchers process of interpretation, reflection, recall of events and creativity

regarding phenomena and lived experiences. They can inspire the researchers to go beyond the obvious and have an "Ah-ha" moment (van Manen, 2014).

Researchers can unexpectedly discover an insight cultivator in an unusual circumstance or situation. Consequently, it is important that researchers are open to new sources and novel ideas that challenge their ways of perceiving phenomena and lived experiences. Some words have lost their original meanings but still reverberate their past in current use. These words can provide nuanced insight into phenomena and lived experiences. In addition, some words have semantic relationships with other words that could provide a broader insight into a phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

Method of Data Analysis: Collection of Data

My process of data analysis was consistent with the data collection methods discussed in the previous section. The data collection methods were based on human science phenomenology, thus how the data collection analysis is recorded, managed, organized, and analyzed should cohere with phenomenology (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Workplace bullying was the phenomenon under study which required a sensitive approach to participant's lived experiences and structures of meaning.

Data Collection

I decided to tell my participants that I had experienced bullying while working in two different organizations. My intention was to put them at ease knowing that I could relate to their experiences. In the words of van Manen, (2014, p. 314), "one's own experiences are the possible experiences of others and also that the experiences of others are the possible experiences of oneself." I allowed participants to speak freely, even if they were off topic (bullying). In most

instances the participants returned to the topic on their own and provided me with substantive lived experiences without redirection.

My intention throughout the data gathering process was to ensure the participants felt safe and comfortable. I sent each participant a copy of the research questions in advance of their interviews, so they knew what to expect. Also, they received information that explained how phenomenology differed from the other qualitative methodologies i.e., lived experience and structure of meanings. After the narratives were transcribed, they received copies of their interviews and were encouraged to contact me if they had any questions or concerns.

I conducted nine interviews from September 25th, 2021, to February 13th, 2022. Three of the participants had two, one and half-hour interviews and one participant had one three-hour interview. As a precaution I purchased two audio recorders in the event of an unexpected malfunction—one primary and one backup. After completion of the interviews, I had amassed 217 pages of text.

The nature of phenomenological research is the antithesis of software programs. My preference for processing the data was to manage it manually as opposed to a computer software program. This approach increased my familiarity with the data and facilitated awareness and insight into participant's lived experiences and meaning structures. The process of interviewing, transcribing, correcting errors, repeated readings, reflection, and writing comport with phenomenological methodology.

Validity in Phenomenology:

Phenomenologists do not use quantitative validity measures such as content, criterion and constructs nor do they use qualitative methods like coding, labeling, and classifying types of procedures. Quantitative and qualitative methods are inconsistent with phenomenological

methodology. The legitimacy of phenomenology has been interrogated by concepts like sample size, sample criteria, member checking and generalization but these fit with other qualitative methodologies and do not comport with phenomenology (van Manen, 2014).

When a phenomenological concept such as “lived experience” is used with the wrong methodology it loses its original meaning. Researchers maintain its veracity by imposing the criteria of “strength” to assess the suitability and authenticity of their studies. In addition, “reduction/epoché” requires that the phenomenological researcher abstain from presuppositions, biases, and assumptions regarding the phenomenon under study. Phenomenologists are expected to possess a degree of knowledge and academic expertise as exemplified in the quality of their research (van Manen, 2014). The validity methods included the following: 1) Validation criteria; 2) reliability; 3) evidence; 4) generalization; 5) sampling; and 6) bias.

Validation Criteria

Appropriate phenomenological research questions delve into an individual’s experiences and are not empirical and should not be confused with populations, cultural group studies, causal questions, or theoretical explanations. Phenomenologists perform analysis only on experientially descriptive narratives that identify themes found in their research on a phenomenon. They avoid unreliable, subpar, ancillary sources and reject validation criteria from non-phenomenological methodologies (van Manen, 2014)

Reliability

Qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned about reliability in relation to the repeatability of their studies. A test for the repeatability of a researcher’s study is reliable if each time it is used it obtains the same result. But phenomenologists are not interested in this type of

measurement because research on a phenomenon can generate dissimilar results. Different researchers can obtain different outcomes on the same phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

Evidence

Empirical evidence can be physically observed, and we can generalize about the effectiveness of a Covid 19 vaccine when it repeatedly prevents illness or death. However phenomenological evidence is an internal, insightful, and spontaneous event that is grounded in the eidetic reduction. Conversely empirical evidence is founded in knowledge, generalizations, observations, and quantification. Phenomenological evidence is inevitably elusive in that it can never be totally known because it is meaning based and directed toward the pre-reflective experiences of human beings. Nevertheless, a phenomenologist's sensitive and compassionate understanding can make a difference (van Manen, 2014).

Generalization

Phenomenological generalizations differ significantly from quantitative generalizations that are based on conclusions originated in a sample from a large population. Empirical generalizations are verifiable and used primarily in the social sciences and quantitative research. Most qualitative researchers generalize outcomes while phenomenology researchers do not. Phenomenologists are challenged in that they must somehow generalize in context of a distinctive and uncommon phenomenon.

Despite their situation they differentiate between two kinds of phenomenological generalizations. First, existential generalizations are images that are visually rich that relate to crucial understanding and speak to what is ubiquitous and indispensable about a phenomenon in an existential awareness. This makes it possible to recognize a phenomenon's meanings. Second,

singular generalizations focus on what is remarkable and unusual and they make it possible to distinguish what is universal about a phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

Sampling

Phenomenology does not use empirical sampling to create a subgroup from a larger population for the purpose of creating generalizations. Conversely it is acceptable to collect and investigate experiential phenomena from individuals in the sense of sampling for the purpose of identifying rich and deep narratives. This approach does not involve saturation, frequency counts or statistics. Phenomenologists do not search for uniformity and repetition but rather find a theme or idea that is only perceived once in experiential data and is totally unique. The point is to collect enough experiential rich data for the creation of compelling narratives that permeate lived experience (van Manen, 2014).

Bias

The concept of bias is associated with the validity of quantitative instruments that include the correctness of measurements, accurate results, appropriate logical arguments and whether a study provides useful insights. Measurement bias and confounding bias applies to outcomes in quantitative studies where dependability is paramount as compared to qualitative studies. In phenomenology epoché is the critical maneuver that addresses bias from assumptions, personal/intentional prejudices, a lack of openness—conversely self-reflection can be the antidote for prejudice (van Manen, 2014).

Chapter 4 of the Dissertation

Analyzing Data and Reporting Findings

Purpose

The purpose of my hermeneutic phenomenological dissertation was to reveal, explore and interpret the lived experiences and meaning structures of participants who had been victimized by bullies (see Data Collection, page 37). The section below is intended to uncover the experiences of the participants through their own words that conveyed the daily distress of being victimized. The participants descriptions (narratives) of their bullying incidents were the source for findings and themes.

The impetus for the participant interviews was to initiate an inquiry process that spoke to what "it is" and what it is "really like" to be bullied. I wanted to know what it meant to them and understand the impact on the victims physical and psychological well-being. Capturing the essence of lived experiences and structures of meaning through phenomenology sets it apart from all the other methodologies (van Manen, 1997).

Themes

Themes provide a structure for gathering findings and understanding narratives which provide a framework for interpretation and writing. Identifying a theme is experimental without boundaries and researchers discover structures of meanings based on participants lived experiences. Researchers write phenomenological descriptions based on narratives that exemplify the characteristics of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1997).

Participant's Interview Questions

The interview questions were intended to elicit lived experiences and structures of meanings. The purpose was to stimulate a variety of responses that were presuppositional, pre-reflective and insightful. There was no one-on-one match between questions and findings. The questions were written for my dissertation proposal and were intended to stimulate participants insights into their experiences and meanings—but not meant to align with a specific question.

1) Think back to an especially poignant bullying incident that you experienced. What do you recall about it, what was it like and how did you feel during and afterwards?
2) How did you feel physically in your body? Can you recall and describe any physical sensations that you experienced during the incident?
3) What did the experience of being bullied mean to you? Do you remember how you perceived yourself during and after the incident?
4) Have you changed since being exposed to a bully's behavior? How and in what ways have you changed?
5) In what ways do you experience the memories of being bullied. What is it like when you think about what was said or done to you by the bully?

In the analysis below are my understandings of the lived experiences and meaning structures that originated from the participants descriptions of their workplace bullying incidents. I used van Manen's approach (see Data Collection, p. 37) to theme analysis as follows: 1) Wholistic reading (meaning of the entire text in a phrase); 2) selective reading (statements/phrases about phenomena or experience as described), and 3) detailed (single sentence or sentences phenomena or experience as described), (van Manen, 2014).

I identified five themes in the four participants narratives. They were the following: 1) Retaliation; 2) assertive/outspoken; 3) health-physical and mental; 4) leadership, HR, management, supervision and 5) reflections/regrets:

P1 Analysis of Findings-Retaliation

P1 said ... *"the person who doesn't do the group think and says wait a second, what about this?* ... [and its] *not straight out ostracized, but they do get different treatment ... rolling of the eyes ... did you have to bring that up ... we had a consensus."*

"All of a sudden, I went from doing a really good job … my reviews … to being a terrible employee … I started to raise issues about a particular RFP" …" P1's colleagues said, "you're not doing it right—*as a matter of fact you're not doing your job because you're incorrect. It just snowballed very quickly."*

… "and boom I was the problem because I pointed it out … it was a shoot the messenger kind of thing … it moved into mostly personality stuff. Then I became labeled like this resistant employee—all these other things."

When P1 identified contract irregularities colleagues said, *"no, that's not correct* [P1] *that's not correct, you're wrong …* [she said] *look at this GM policy, it says we actually can't do that … So, to fix it, what we* [are] *going to* [do] *here" …*

P1 felt like the … *"problematic employee because … of persisting in it …* [auditing]. *First, you were just kind of stupid. Now you are stupid and problematic."* She said, *"I guess that I was supposed to accept those shutdowns because my job was to do that, so I probably stupidly just kept doing it … there would be eye rolling and smirking by the managers … taking notes in the meeting was perceived as something weird or attention seeking."*

Wholistic Reading: P1 was insistent about adhering to the organizations standards for legal contracting while her colleagues resented her persistence and adroit auditing. The statement "*shoot the messenger"* captured the crux of her lived experience. P1's phenomenological meaning structure may have been that she became perceived as the department's troublemaker.

Selective Reading: P1 said, *"I guess that I was supposed to accept those shutdowns because my job was to do that, so I probably stupidly just kept doing it …* [co-workers said] *you're not doing your job because you're incorrect.* P1's lived experience would likely be that her co-workers

were stifling (*shutdowns*) her and challenging the accuracy of her work. The phenomenological meaning structure could be that no matter what she did someone would find something wrong.

Detailed Reading: P1 felt like the *... "problematic employee because ... of persisting in it,"*— accurate audits. P1's lived experience was immersion in a bullying environment that demanded conformity at the expense of principled conduct. Her likely phenomenological meaning structure was "I don't fit in; is there something wrong with me?"

P1 concluded*, "there was nothing I could do right ...* [employees] *keeping their heads low ... my friends at work talked about* [it] *... there targeting you know that's pretty clear um."*

P1, found out a coworker said *"she was so attention seeking. She's sitting there crying. She was just trying to seek attention ...* [however P1 was] *desperate to try to hide."* P1 also learned that there *"was actually* [a] *smear campaign and at one point there was a belief that—I was bugging offices now ...* [and] *"I ... just seemed really unstable ... mental illness that could be dangerous in the workplace. You know postal office shooting kind of person."*

... "when you are moved [forced to change position] *... you did something bad. So, I came into a new job with ... suspicion ... I will never know ... who believes what."* P1 heard coworkers talking about contracts that *... "I needed it if I am going to fulfill my job ... there had been meetings ... I was never invited to ... the exclusion ... you are excluded from your actual job tasks."*

... "I guess [they had] *... to give* [me] *... something, so they would be giving me these like secretarial duties.* P1 said I was*, "begging* [them] *to let me in on these meetings so I can do my job ... money going all over the place ... there was like just this real isolation. But this is demeaning."*

When she used FMLA management would comment, *"well* [P1] *are you actually going to make that meeting tomorrow?"* And she would say*, "I don't know, I'm going to do my best. And then I later saw* [investigation] *that was interpreted as I was sabotaging work."*

According to P1*, "a short time later there were emails …* [P1] *refused to do these contracts. Well, I technically refused to do that. That's right, but subsequent investigations showed of course, they should have not been done."*

Wholistic Reading: P1 said there is— "*nothing I could do right*— [friends said] *there targeting you*— [she was] *desperate to try to hide*— [felt] *excluded—real isolation*— [a peer said], *"she was so attention seeking"*—P1 was victimized by a *smear campaign* and there was a rumor that she bugged offices. Her lived experience may have felt like all her colleagues were coalescing against her and P1's meaning structure could have been, "how could this be happening to me."

Selective Reading: P1's coworkers said, *"I … just seemed really unstable … mental illness that could be dangerous … You know postal office shooting …* [also] *when you're moved* [forced to changed position] *… you did something bad. So, I came into a new job with … suspicion … I will never know … who believes what."* P1's lived experience was the constant barrage of negative statements that impugned her character. From a structure of meaning perspective P1 could have been "scapegoated" by her colleagues because they were hiding contract irregularities.

Detailed Reading: According to P1*, "a short time later there were emails …* [P1] *refused to do these contracts. Well, I technically refused to do that. That's right, but subsequent investigations showed of course, they should have not been done."*

Ironically P1's lived experience demonstrated that her unwillingness to approve deficient contracts was the right thing to do despite her colleague's pressure to ignore regulations. P1's

meaning structure was vindication for enforcing the regulations and feeling positive for being courageous.

P1 found out that a fellow auditor had been forwarding her confidential audit information to two directors without her knowledge [and P1] told the auditor [that the] ... *"*[director] *had been targeting me, and you just gave her* [director] *this information? How could you do that to me … I am making complaints about her* [director]*; I mean talk about revealing the reporter. So, talk about a set up for retaliation."*

A friend told P1 that *"there was a rumor that you* [P1] *and I are having an affair and the result of that is I* [friend] *had to be removed from contact with you." Three employees "had gone to a director and* [made allegations]*."* P1 said *"I felt horrible, and he is like a married man, … where in the world did this rumor come from?"* She realized, *"what are the chances that the day before I am going to testify* [State Legislature] *about scandalous things, three people would go to a* [director] *and say, she is having an affair."*

P1 said *"everybody laughs at me, nobody believed it. Everybody laughed well," …* It turned out that, [P1's] *"friend was actually demoted and … another thing that happens is … secondary retaliation and I feel so bad about it because that demotion cost him probably $10,000 a year, which he needed. I did suffer salary wise."*

Wholistic Reading: P1's fellow auditor violated her confidential findings. Also, a friend (and coworker) told her that there were rumors that the two of them were having an affair. P1's lived experience with her fellow auditor was betrayal and her experience with the rumors were slanderous. Her phenomenological meaning structure likely had a nightmarish and surrealistic quality.

Selective Reading: P1 asked the auditor "*How could you do that to me — I mean talk about revealing the reporter … a set up for retaliation."* Also, P1… "*felt horrible*, about the rumor—*he is like a married man, …* [and] *that demotion cost him probably $10,000 a year."* The lived experience for P1 was that she confronted her fellow auditor, and she was sympathetic towards her friend's monetary loss and demotion. The phenomenological meaning structure could be, "no one cares enough about me to stop these bad things from happening to me."

Detailed Reading: P1's lived experience was exasperation in regard to her fellow auditor's violation of her confidentiality, and she felt dumbfounded about the rumors regarding an alleged affair. Her phenomenological meaning structure may well have been bewilderment—how could these things really happen?

P2 Analysis of Findings-Retaliation

P2 said *"Three months into it,* [the supervisor] *told me 'I'm going to lose my job and it's your* [P2] *fault. I want you to go to my director and say that you support me being your boss.' And I was aghast that she had said that."*

"In a follow-up meeting … the supervisor said, *"I wish I'd never hired her* [P2]*."*

The supervisor … told P2 that, *"I am so well, I'm very well protected."* P2 concluded that the supervisor felt *"free to do whatever she pleases."*

She believed that her supervisor used … reviews as a way to*, "practice retribution after I complained the first time, she gave me a really horrible review which I did not deserve, and I appealed it and she had to change it hugely."*

P2 experienced a volatile incident … in the supervisor's office … *"She took her fist like this and there was a picture hanging on the wall … pounding it as she was talking, and it was bouncing on the wall … she takes her hair like this* (twisted) *and goes I don't know what I'm*

going to do to make you understand." Given the situation, P2 said, *"I just stared at her, anyone would."*

P2 said *"there was one time when she* [supervisor] *did something similar to the above."* P2 told her supervisor that *"I brought my phone and asked, 'do you mind if I record our meeting.' In response the supervisor got up and ran out and went to complain to her boss … it is like going and telling Mommy … she's not a well person."*

She asserted that the *"supervisor lied on my performance review that I had dropped a project. I read that … and went what."* She offered to help … *"I told her I could do it and now she's got my performance review saying I dropped the project."*

… "we were having a conversation, I was discussing, and I was supporting my position about … [the] LOE. *"You know that I do not deserve the LOE, it was inappropriate. The supervisor turned her back to the deputy director and looked at me while making a gargoyle face. And she did, she did it twice."*

… the supervisor would talk, "*over me, interrupting me. In one meeting … She gave a long narrative … and then she said to me, P2 do you have any questions?*" And then looking directly at P2 … said, "*I want to make sure that you understand … ask your questions" …* P2 replied … "*I said yes … she's calling me out by name in front of two colleagues … got really quiet … kind of stunned* …[and] *I'm fed up. She should not be managing people. Absolutely not."*

P2 noticed that "*My boss had a pattern … Friday afternoon meeting* [s] *… she would criticize me … give me things to think about over the weekend so it would ruin my time off an I mean I got wise"* … the next meeting for a "check-in" … P2 was prepared when the supervisor asked, *"well how was your weekend,"* and P2 said, *"I thought it was wonderful,"* the supervisor probed further … *"I'm sure you can't stop thinking about things over the weekend" …*

P2 said her supervisor, "*pegs people because she would ask me personal questions about my family life where I grew up."* She [supervisor] *"was looking, searching for ammunition for her manipulation.* Yes, *looking for vulnerability … she wanted me to be dependent … that gives her more control*." The supervisor "*pegged me for somebody who knew … about a lot of things … she saw me as a threat … then you bully the people"* … P2 said "*people are fearful … especially if their supervisor or manager practices retribution. They can lose their jobs* [if] *… they challenge their boss."*

Wholistic Reading: P2 said, "*Yes, looking for vulnerability … she* [supervisor] *wanted me to be dependent … that gives her more control*." P2's lived experience of her supervisor probing her for vulnerability and dependence engendered the phenomenological meaning that her supervisor would pursue control without regard for P2's well-being.

Selective Reading: P2 said her supervisor— "*practiced retribution, I complained … she gave me a really horrible review—She took her fist … pounding it as she was talking."* She said to her supervisor *… "looked at me while making a gargoyle face, did it twice —* would talk, '*over me, interrupting me.'"* P2's lived experience was that whenever she was assertive her supervisor would retaliate against her. A phenomenological meaning could be that P2 was in a lose-lose situation. P2 was an innately assertive person which meant that she would be exposed to retaliation on a regular basis from her supervisor.

Detailed Reading: P2 knew that her lived experiences of retaliatory performance reviews, and her age could make finding another job difficult. Her phenomenological meaning structure may have been that she was trapped in a miserable job with no way out.

P3 Analysis of Findings-Retaliation

… *"*everybody was happy*, and* everybody was okay *with what I was doing and … the supervisors said I was important … giving me compliments and he* [supervisor] *said you are doing great you are doing wonderful."*

However, the director of licensing confronted P3 and said, *"why are you requesting data,"* P3 replied, "*I see it as doing my job*," the director responded, "*why don't you just* [expletive]." Then the director asked, *"why are you doing that, who told you to do that, you should not be doing that*." P3 said, "*I'm doing my job*," and the director responded … *who permitted you to do that data*."

> P3 realized that "*she's looking down she's talking down to me, she is in the sky and I'm below ground, underground and I should be receiving instruction from her and in every single step I do, I will do what I will do, and she is succeeding doing that and she's practicing being a terminator of employment*."

P3 said, *"I should have been part of the strategic meeting. It's not my assumption, it is not my demand, it was in my job description. Except me. Never allowed … everybody is attending the strategic meeting. But I was prevented and excluded."* P3 saw this as *"just another kind of bullying and discrimination … my job description said that I am the lead and the consultant … I was supposed to be one of them … But I was never allowed the opportunity when I asked … I was told 'no.'"*

He asserted, *"they blocked me; they blocked my way completely and in all the directions. I wanted to speak with employees, they told me no, do not speak to employees about equity*." I said, "*I want to list a hotline for equity for both internal and external to report … their experiences.*" Employees … wanted to file complaints about their experiences. But P3 said, "*I did not have any ability to help them. And when I, requested data, they blocked my way.*"

I was "*doing all the activities that I am supposed to do but they never allowed me anything. I am also a data analyst; statistical analyst and I like to make detailed informed decisions and data driven strategies and plans."* P3 stated that, *"No one ever responded to any requests for data, and they looked at me as a threat when I was making requests … they looked at it as a threat to them."*

P3 … *"met with the director of workforce development. I met with her twice. I told her what I am thinking about and what I want to do. She promised that she would see what she could do … Ah, I asked and expected the data on the workforce development and planning. She never came back to me."* According to P3 … *"she was stopped because her upper management told her to ignore him and don't provide him with anything."*

The supervisor told P3 *"now we have to change gears and undo everything you are trying to do."* I said, *"okay what do you mean?"* He said, *"the list of activities you have been doing — we have been through it, and he threw it on a table like this and said, 'forget about it.'"* P3 asked, *"what will I do."* The supervisor said, *"you will do what the OET will be telling you to do."*

P3 told the supervisor that, *"I'm supposed to be one of these OET members and I have met them, and I have been excluded all the time, and it is time to ask you to include me. These people should be talking to me on a parallel level, not vertically up-down."* P3 asked, *"Why are you asking me to stop doing my job and only doing what you want me to do? I am doing what is in my job description."* The supervisor said, *"we are the ones who designed this job description."* I said *"okay, so what.*" He said, *"and we revised it completely"*. P3 concluded that, *"they did not want me to do my job ... That was the moment when I discovered that they decided to get rid of me."*

He said *that the revised version was for an administrative assistant …* and [P3] requested an *"explanation and guidance to what I am expected to stop, why you are stopping me and what activities to do."* P3 said, *"they started to give me tasks basically that were completely worthless … I tried not to explode but I was very frustrated. I did a recap because this was one of their tricks that they do all the time … speak verbally and never leave any written evidence."*

Wholistic Reading: The director turned the department against P3 and halted his efforts to do his job. He felt that she was … *talking down to me, she is in the sky and I'm below ground, … I should be receiving instruction from her and in every single step I do … she's practicing being a terminator of employment*." P3's lived experience was like having a door slammed in his face there was no way to move forward. His meaning structure may have been that he had become disposable.

Selective Reading: P3 was faced with resistance from his peers and management—*they blocked my way completely … upper management* [said] *… don't provide him anything … excluded all the time.* P3's lived experience became isolated i.e., withholding data, banned from meetings, and no collegial relationships. P3's meaning structure was likely rejection.

Detailed Reading: Two statements captured P3's lived experiences, *"they did not want me to do my job ... That was the moment when I discovered that they decided to get rid of me.*" His experience felt like being thrown into the jungle and his phenomenological meaning structure could have been—lost in a wilderness.

P4 Analysis of Findings-Retaliation

… "all of a sudden, my boss got pressure from management as to why my work was lacking, why I am not moving forward … I felt in my heart that my boss had panicked … they're going to cut her or cut me and look—It had to be me."

"My review was excellent, and I actually exceeded in one area. Yet in October, P4's supervisor said, *"why are you making these mistakes, why are you doing this … and I was like where is all this coming from?"*

She said, *"I used it* [flex-schedule] *to take care of my son for … his doctor appointments and to do all of that stuff. What she took away really impacted me with life and work balance."*

"I don't want to share this with my boss [son's mental health issues] *there was no trust."*

P4 thought that "*her* [supervisor's] *ego got hurt a little bit … so she felt that she needed to put a leash on me, and just spiraled out of control" …*

… "like. an up-hill battle and just got to the point where … P4 got *"like five, six or seven tasks to complete by the next week … And then all of a sudden, she wanted me to complete 15 to 20 tasks in a week."* (retaliation).

… "it was their tactic of overwhelming me to do my job and she was constantly like messaging me and she was" …

… the supervisor was, "going on the path of making me look incompetent like, 'well you didn't do this right,' you know it was like some administrative stuff … I was supposed to investigate stuff. Why are you asking me to do administrative stuff?"

P4 had an investigation that, *"required some time to study up on it to learn what it is and know what it does. And she's like* [supervisor] *'that's not needed you don't need to do that,' and I am thinking, I am the one that testifies in court."*

We, *"butted heads on that … it was part of her effort to make me feel incompetent … bullying me to say—you do what I tell you to do."*

P4 would not "*take a pay cut* [at organization] *… I got almost five dollars* [in] *raises … highest paid employee … close to the five-year mark … fully vested … they started looking at me*

budget wise … I am [a] *huge percentage."* P4 said, *"there* [was] *nothing they can do about* [salary] … [but] *they bully people … to push me out and other nice people out" …* [P4 resigned].

She stated, *"I just started in January of 2020, but my boss certified and said that I did everything really well and they were going to keep me in July, —so, what happened in May 2020, that I didn't know about?"*

P4 said "*now I am … trying to recover at this time to understand … I'm supposed to be getting vested in organization, um one of the highest paid investigators, um I would say probably 90% of my time was administrative stuff and 10% … in investigations."* P4 concluded that for *"most people, it's all about pay. They didn't want to* [pay at] … *organization*." According to P4, *"It was just like, okay all right, you know I was not surprised but I was like wow is this really happening you know like happening."*

[P4] … She concluded that it was about, *"power you know um. They don't want people like us who are truly, truly trying to make a difference you know and for me it's like thinking to myself … that no matter what I did* [it] *was not going to be good enough."*

P4 … had a copy of HR's personnel file and said … *"I just had a review in September, I did really well and then all of a sudden in January I got a letter because I wasn't doing work fast enough."* P4 knew, *"that these are the mistakes* [the supervisor/manager were] *supposed to judge and catch and they didn't catch them either … so you know I mean if I can't find the mistakes that happened, and* [they] *didn't either."*

P4 asserted that, "*I didn't do anything different. My work tasks didn't change.*" However, she received a letter [HR] that, "*painted this picture of me being such a horrible employee and I am incompetent um you know and it's just like 'oh my goodness,' seriously—you know like I was a little bit upset."* She said, *… "I am applying for unemployment … I tried to rescind it*

[resignation]. *There was plenty of work to do. They didn't want to take me back."* P4 said, *"All I ask is just fairness and all the things I asked for." They didn't care to look at it. I was already their target, and they were going to do* [it], *it was just a waste of their time."*

She told colleagues, "*It takes a lot to fire somebody so they are not going to fire you … they are just going to make it unbearable if* [you] *can't stand it then you leave … but if you have other options then you leave and if you don't … we just stay."*

P4 said, *"it was difficult to describe and … a combination of everything … forcing people out—like blame and not creating an inclusive space … but no action … it's completely opposite."*

Wholistic Reading: P4's status abruptly and unexpectedly changed— *"all of a sudden, my boss got pressure from management—my work was lacking."* P4 said, "*the supervisor was overwhelming her with work, making her look incompetent."* Consequently, her lived experience was futile and frustrating—P4 wanted to do her best. A possible phenomenological meaning could be … *"no matter what I did* [it] *was not going to be good enough."*

Selective Reading: P4 said, *"I used it* [flex-schedule] *to take care of my son for … his doctor appointments … What she* [supervisor] *took away* [flex-schedule] *really impacted me with life and work balance* (retaliation). P4's lived experience may have been that the supervisor used her son to punish and control her. The meaning structure could be that P4's supervisor and management would use any scheme to achieve their objectives.

Detailed Reading: P4 told colleagues, "*It takes a lot to fire somebody, so they are not going to fire you … they are just going to make it unbearable."* P4 said, *… a combination of everything … forcing people out—like blame and not creating an inclusive space … but no action."* P4's lived

experience was that her supervisor made her work life unbearable, and her phenomenological meaning structure may well have been … *All I ask is just fairness—they didn't care to look at it.*

P1 Analysis of Findings-Assertive/Outspoken

P1 said, *"I come from a big family … of big mouths … I was comfortable, just playing the devil's advocate …my background … to see some* [things] *slightly different. So, I could say, 'what about this you know.'"*

"I made the decision early on … [to] *start raising some of these issues … was going to do it … secretively? … anonymous complaints* [and] *never get connected to you … Or are you going to be loud and proud … it was better protection."* P1 said, *"I don't know if I was right … when I was going to speak at the legislature, I put it on my calendar, and I put the notice … up on my wall."*

"*I had issues about a particular RFP that had not gone according to law and …* [there was an] *investigation of it. I was right when I was speaking out.* [There] *was a violation of law* [and] *policy, just everything."* …

According to P1, "*I was not pointing out really outlandish things, it normally would have been resolved … we got to watch that in the future … I did not ever set out to be like a whistleblower or to draw any attention to myself when I first started talking"* …

In a meeting there was a discussion of $150,000 … P1 said, *"what 150 are we talking about? I guess I don't know … I think I missed some information — yeah, what's up with the 150."* She viewed it as *"not a big deal … I didn't feel pressured at all … let's deal with 150 cause I was gonna jot down the 150, right?"* The director said, "*that's information you don't need to know."* She said again *"I'm still sort of clueless about this part and I go … you know I*

have to account for all of this money so … tell me so I can make sure that it is fine with the feds that we use 150." She [director] said *"no, you don't need to know that information."*

"Yeah, persistent, I know when I testified [P1], *I said something like you know I am a persistent woman, I don't know if that's good or bad, I just know it's me and so. I will kind of dog something."*

P1 said, *"I always thought that my speaking out was allowed … And then when you read the code of ethics, it is actually required, … when you're in public service … paid by tax dollars. None of us actually have a choice … I was actually obligated."* She asserted that, *"Nobody else was getting that, so nobody else got that message, so the treatment towards me didn't change."*

She had a group of contracts [that] violated the law … gave them back and said "*I can't say they were taken away from me because I gave them back and … I've got a bar license, I can't. I can't be doing that, right?"* P1 said, *"I just don't feel right about doing this. I know that this is against the law. They were given to a brand-new employee who was still on probation."*

P1 was told to charge … her salary to the feds … [but P2 said] *"I can't charge salary to the feds … they had taken it all away … I was now doing my secretarial duties. And so, I had warned management a couple of times."* She wrote an email, and said, "*I can't fill it out anymore and then I wrote a separate email to our internal auditors — I just want to put you on notice that I can't fill* [salary] *out. I don't know …* [about] *my salary, but I can't do it*." P1 said, "*I had confidence in* [unbiased auditor] *and to my horror … Well, he wasn't at all … I did successfully make a huge deal out of that; they are no longer allowed to do that—the policy was changed.*"

Wholistic Reading: P1would unabashedly speak-up about contract irregularities regardless of management and peers who tried to silence her efforts. She said, *"I come from a big family … of big mouths … I was comfortable, just playing the devil's advocate …* P1's lived experience was

that her assertive nature enabled her to conduct thorough audits on the departments contracts. Her phenomenological meaning structure of being "*loud and proud*" served the demands of her auditing responsibilities.

Selective Reading: … P1 asked, *"what 150,*[000] *are we talking about? … I think I missed some information* …" the director said, "*that's information you don't need to know."* She [P1] said again *… I have to account for all of this money …* P1's persistence drove her lived experience, and her phenomenological meaning structure embodied her ethical tenacity.

Detailed Reading: P1 said, … *speaking out was allowed … the code of ethics, it is actually required, … I was actually obligated."* She said, *"Nobody else was getting that, so nobody else got that message, so the treatment towards me didn't change."* Thus, P1's colleagues ostracized her for complying with the code of ethics. Her lived experience became social isolation while her phenomenological meaning structure supported P1's unyielding ethical and moral standards.

P2 Analysis of Findings-Assertive/Outspoken

[Third day, new job] P2's "boss wanted me to sit [with her] and she was going to show me how to fill out a [computer] PDF form. P2 asserted *"I know how to create those and that I'm happy to fill it out without your help* … [but] the supervisor insisted, and we [sat] side by side, …

[First week, new job] In another incident, the supervisor was giving P2 instructions "and switched topics … [several] times … then said, now I want you to tell me what I said, so *I* [P2] *paraphrased, and she got upset and she said, no I want you to tell me what I said the instructions were."* P2 asserted that, *"I understood what you said. I don't believe that I can repeat back to you word for word exactly what you said*."

[One month] P2 said that there had been several situations, and she [supervisor] complained to her boss [director] that, *"I, ah didn't understand hierarchical authority."*

Consequently, the director scheduled a meeting and asked [P2] whether "*I believed I was in charge, I said no, of course not."* P2 asserted*, "I understand the hierarchy of authority very well and she* [director] *said are you making decisions,* I said*, absolutely not."* Apparently, the supervisor was saying, "*I* [P2] *made a decision about something, and she was in trouble because of the decision I had made."*

P2 realized, "*I was dealing with somebody who felt threatened by me because she would say I want to create this document in Excel and we're going to do this.*" I said [P2] *"just give it to me, I'll do it. I can have it for you tomorrow or the next day, right?* And the supervisor said, "no, no we're going to do it together." P2 concluded, "*I mean I've never been micromanaged at that level in my whole life.*"

The supervisor, *"didn't understand how to validate invoices between the … financial system, email, and hard copies we got."* And I asserted, *"all we need to do is run a report and do a checklist against any other copies you have. I can do that; it won't take very long."* The supervisor said, "*Oh no, print off every invoice, every email. And then print off the report that you have and we're going to go through them one by one."*

P2 said that *"when the supervisor and I were attending the same meeting she would walk over to my desk and say, 'okay, let's go to the meeting now' and I'd say, 'I'll go in a bit,'* [supervisor would say] '*No, no, I want you to come with me now we're going to go together*.'" This behavior is called the "*with."* P2 said, *"The with* [is] *a person with* [someone]. *Where a person needs to have an entourage so that they can feel comfortable, popular, and noticed and feel like they are valued in the organization that they have status."*

P2 described an incident when walking to a send-off meeting for a commissioner. *"And so, they started calling us into the meeting room … we were walking and chatting together … my*

boss walked up to me and grabbed me by the elbow, pulled me back and said let the leaders go in first." P2 said, *"I mean. I just couldn't believe it. I turned to her and said we're having a conversation. I don't remember what happened after that, but I was disgusted."*

P2 entered a conference room for a meeting and saw, "there was a square table at the one end and walked around to the side of the table and sat down." She [supervisor] went, *"no, no, no slapping her hand on the chair next to her and said, come here and sit next to me.*" I said, *"I'm fine here, and she goes, 'no, no come here and sit here next to me.'* So, I got up and walked and I sat down next to her."

[My supervisor] called me [P2], she said, … "I want you to meet me at the car dealership [car repair], bring your laptop and we can work together [on an RFP]. They have rooms there." I said*, "I am not comfortable with these private contracts until they are fully executed. I am not comfortable in doing that, so I'm going to decline."* P2 said, *"Boy she didn't like that, because she wanted me to meet her there so she could conduct a meeting there in the side room at this big dealership in full view of everybody … so she could look like she had high level status."*

P2 had created a process/procedure, and the supervisor wanted P2 to present it … she [supervisor] covered everything, then she turned to me and said, *"okay ... go ahead"* … I said, *"well, that covers it in a nutshell,"* and everybody laughed … She was livid cause; well what else was I going to say? … [The] supervisor had already said it. I could have just said, *"well,* [supervisor] *covered it all. If you have any questions let me know."* But I just said *"well, that's it in a nutshell,* … but then of course she *was really angry."*

"The last time she was yelling at me was when we had a meeting, just her and I, a check in, she yelled at me. P2 sent her *"a follow up email and let her know that I'm willing to do whatever she wants me to do but I did not appreciate the yelling. Boy that kind of set her off."*

Wholistic Reading: P2 consistently asserted that she could complete her duties without her supervisor sitting next to her. She would say, *"I know how to create those and I'm happy to fill it out without your help … just give it to me … I can do that; it won't take very long …* But the supervisor exhibited constant vigilance and control. P2's experience involved sitting next to her supervisor while completing work. Her phenomenological meaning structure could be "why does my supervisor need so much control—I'm trustworthy.

Selective Reading: P2 said, "I *was dealing with somebody who felt threatened by me because she would say I want to create this document in Excel and we're going to do this* [together]. P2's lived experience was that the supervisor restricted her ability to work independently which diminished her expertise. A phenomenological meaning could be that P2 worked in an environment that felt like psychological incarceration.

Detailed Reading: P2 said, … "*I mean I've never been micromanaged at that level in my whole life."* The supervisor said [P2] *"come with me now we're going to go together* … [she] *needed to have an entourage …* [to] *feel comfortable, popular, and noticed."* P2's lived experience may have been that her supervisor stifled her engagement in the organization, and her phenomenological meanings were deep resentment, anger, and frustration.

P3 Analysis of Findings-Assertive/Outspoken

P3 said, "*The problem with me is that … I am a person who can speak up and I don't fear the consequences.* And *I was an advocate already because I experienced bullying and discrimination for a very long time*." Accordingly, P3 … *"decided not to play the role of victim. I decided to be a strategic player and have a seat at the table—I can help victims*."

… *"not everybody comes in the job with a passion ah, or ah come with the mentality of an advocate and purpose, this was my* [P3] *biggest mistake in that I came on board with*

purpose, enthusiasm, and ah, advocate mentality and I balance my role as a governmental official."

P3 said, "*I made it clear from the first moment that I am here to work on equity not to talk about it and I said—a statement* [I'm afraid] *that I used* [too many times]." P3 asserted that. "*We had been talking about equity since the beginning of when I came. Now I am here to take it into action.*"

He "*met with all these directors … one on one and talked to them about who I am, what I must do, my initial plan and* [gave] *them a list of* [current activities]". Also, P3 said*, "I met with all of them and some of them invited me … to their team meeting*."

P3 discovered that … *"equity operations were not equitable. So, we are underwater, we are not equitable and that's why you hire people, and you tell them they are the lead, you are the advisor, you are the consultant."* However, in a meeting P3 was confronted by directors who said, *"we are directors, we are in a higher level, we are in a higher class."* But P3 asserted that, *"it's not about what class you are in even if you are the commissioner in their second term in office and the head of the organization you … hired me as a subject matter expert on equity."*

Wholistic Reading: P3 declared that "*I am a person who can speak up—I don't fear the consequences—I was an advocate already."* P3's lived experience involved dealing with directors who resisted his assertive advocacy for equity. His phenomenological meaning structure could be his *passion, purpose, and enthusiasm.*

Selective Reading: Accordingly, P3 … *"I decided not to play the role of victim …* [but] *a strategic player and … a seat at the table … take it into action.*" P3's lived experiences entailed confrontations with directors who challenged his assertion that, *"equity operations were not*

equitable." The meaning structure for P3 was that they *hired me as a subject matter expert on equity* and he intended to fulfill that role.

Detailed Reading: P3 knew that in his new position he would be, *"the lead, … the advisor, … the consultant."* But the directors told P3 "*we are in a higher level; we are in a higher class"*. But P3 asserted that, *"it's not about what class you are in even if you are the commissioner in their second term in office and the head of the organization.* His lived experience was that the directors would usurp his role in equity. P3's phenomenological meaning structure was his sincere desire to help people.

P4 Analysis of Findings-Assertive/Outspoken

P4 said, "*And I asked for specific instructions, and she* [supervisor] *looked like—well if you need help then you need to reach out to me* [supervisor] *and schedule the time.* However, she thought … "*I don't need help*. *I know how to do my job; I just need a little more support from you.*" P4 asserted that "*if there is something in my work that you feel is lacking … it is a two-way street when you ask me to schedule time with you and you say*, '*let me show you how to do that,' It's what I expect*."

… "*it was just unbearable*. Then I went to the manager *'hey look and I said, I feel that this is not working … I am just asking you to listen to my concerns and questions and … bring us together to resolve the issue.*'" P4 was *"looking for more, … when the manager intervenes …* [but] *most of the time the* [manager] *was there she didn't do anything, and I feel like she added more to the stress*."

P4's supervisor said, "*I don't understand … all this time … you have like 24 hours … you can't get this … done?"* I asked her … "*there just has to be a way to do this because you have to show me because I don't know, and I am trying my best. I am doing everything I can."* Then P4

asserted, … "*I am not doing anything differently from the first day … is there a better way to do this*? *Because if there is you have to let me know*."

P4 said, "*this is not right … when you ask questions* [they should] *say, this is what they expect of you … this is what I need" …* P4 thought that … "*management is there to say, 'okay yeah let's do this, let's do that*. *Nothing was offered to me*. *The only thing they did offer …* [was] *training and I said no, I know how to do my job*.'" … "[what I] *needed was support … somebody who is approachable … and say*, '*I can't find this information to do my job and how do I get it*.'" P4 said, "*The only thing that they had an issue* [with] *was I didn't do it fast enough. So, I asked them, 'how can I do it faster?' Show me, teach me, and they weren't willing to do that.*"

P4 asserted … "*I have been a rebel all my life. I ask questions when I see things are not right you …they didn't like that about me; too … equity focused, I'm too inclusion focused. But that is my agenda you know and that is the mission of the organization*."

Wholistic Reading: P4 said, "this is not right … *when you ask questions* [they should] *say, this is what they expect of you … this is what I need."* P4 thought … "*management is there to say, 'okay yeah let's do this, let's do that'*. *Nothing was offered to me*." P4 was assertive and asked for guidance but her lived experience was that the management ignored her. Her phenomenological meaning structure could have become, "am I unworthy of being helped?"

Selective Reading: P4 tried to get help but nothing happened— "*Then I went to the manager … this is not working … asking you to listen to my concerns and questions … to resolve the issue* … [the manager] … *didn't do anything, … she added more to the stress*." P4's lived experience of asking for help culminated in nothing happening. Her meaning structure may have been the feeling of "impending doom" because she bypassed her supervisor and met with the manager.

Detailed Reading: *"The only thing they did offer …* [was] *training and I said no, I know how to do my job …* [what I] *needed was support … somebody who is approachable*." P4 said, "they *had an issue … I didn't do it fast enough. So, I asked them, 'how can I do it faster?' Show me, teach me, and they were not willing to do that." P4's lived experience was that management constantly gave her, "the cold shoulder" and her meaning structure was "I'm being stonewalled?"*

P1 Analysis Health-Physical and Mental

P1 said, "whenever I am in a meeting … I don't know what they know about me. I have to question the worst. I guess that there was more widespread information out there. I think it is pretty negative." She wondered, "how many of those [employees] have heard absolutely crazy stuff about me, absolutely untrue stuff about me. I don't know who does and who doesn't—so you are always uncomfortable, you're always a little bit nervous you're never relaxed in a work meeting."

She would notice, "myself um talking nervously is how—you know, like I can feel my heart sort of racing a little bit and then I start talking nervously." P1 found, "it's embarrassing because they say they've heard something strange about me. My behavior kind of affirms it because I do seem a little bit weird—I'm not some smooth professional anymore."

There were times when P1 said, "I'll never know if I'm overreacting on something … I was in a discussion … with my new supervisor … [She] *said something, and I kept thinking … why did she say that now." Consequently, P1 wondered, [was there] "something not OK about what she said … I thought about this, could I go back to her and say … what did you mean?" P1 said, "in a weird way I don't want to draw attention … I don't want her to then start thinking wow … why is she so paranoid?" She said, "You know it just completely changes your*

relationships with everyone … [in the] vast majority of … work interactions now, after two years I still am as anxious—almost as anxious as day one."

She said, "Yeah, it takes away from the subject of the meeting because my mind keeps wondering … are they not talking to me about something because they heard something. Or oh why did I not just say that." … [it] "could easily be construed as blah blah blah … you second guess everything. The confidence is just gone, and it so impacts the actual work." P2, concluded that, "it's like the scarlet letter it's always still there and I don't imagine a time when it's not going to be there because if it's still there now."

P1 declared, "I can't do my job … the horrible thing is I have to go into another meeting … and I remember the next meeting I kept looking down because I would start crying." P1 said I was, "trying to type notes on my laptop and … cover my face because I didn't want people to see me crying … I didn't want the meeting to be influenced by me balling."

P1 said, "during 2019 when I started to really have a hard time, I was using … sick leave and I thought, ah, they're going to fire me for my use of sick leave. So, I went and got FMLA … and a Xanax prescription." Accordingly, she would, "sit at work, and I'd take a Xanax … took a Xanax on the way here… [when] I talk about [bullying] … It helps a lot. When I testified at the legislature, I took a Xanax." P1 said, … "but a calendar year [later] wow it just sticks around my discomfort in meetings is basically the same anxiety."

She would not work on contracts with violations until they were rewritten. However, P1 said, "you think I would feel better about determinations that find me correct." P2 asserted that "But it doesn't because once people's impression of you is tainted … Yeah, it's like … that first impression sort of thing you don't get beyond that." I mean, "I can wave around these reports that say basically [I] was, right? It doesn't do anything."

P1 said, "Most of the time it was much more crying. I would have to leave a meeting cause I was crying." She described a time when, "we were in a meeting … and I emailed one of my coworkers saying … I don't think I can do this anymore; I'm just worried about throwing up … how embarrassing that would be." She mused later on "it would have been interpreted as bulimic and she has significant mental illness … [there] was no sympathy whatsoever." According to P1 people used the word "manipulative" rather than acknowledging she was "like just seriously breaking down" She said it was … "weird that … if you have cancer and people are … like, oh, wow. Yeah, ah it's terrible … I had nobody besides two friends. Who were sympathetic, everybody else really kind of thought it was funny."

P1 said, "You just feel so alone … very seldom would a day go by that I wasn't crying at work … if I would cry … on the way to work, I would have swollen eyes all day, … I couldn't really hide my distress." She thought about wearing, "sunglasses I suppose but that's about the only way … [but] 'Who does she think she is?' Oh, she's on drugs so she has to wear sunglasses. It was just … nothing I could do, right."

She saw cops from, "the capitol security doing a search of the building … the bugs, yes, every time I walked by those guys afterwards, I would think about my God, what they must think of me." P1 concluded that … "They think there was a chance that I was bugging somebody's office. It's so embarrassing. It's so humiliating."

P1 said, … "you definitely don't expect to have to go on FMLA, get a Xanax prescription and spend almost every-day crying … not able to go to work, you certainly don't expect that." According to her, "The worst of it was two years ago … 25% of my time was on FMLA and you think that would be great … wash clothes and clean your house. No, I would be home lying in bed crying."

... She said "Yeah, you just can't figure it out ... you keep thinking I must have done something wrong ... for the longest time—I don't actually think that anymore." P1 asserted, "Now I am confident I did the right thing ....

P1 was, "curious if ... every time I'm right ... still—you can't un-ring that bell ... I am this unstable, volatile person who people should be scared of ... who doesn't know how to do a job". She is ... "that person—I will never overcome [it] and except for ... my friends who actually know me ... so it does keep you unstable because you don't know when you enter a room, who thinks what."

Wholistic Reading: *P1 said it (bullying) "completely changes your relationships with everyone ... after two years, I still am as anxious ... you second guess everything." The "confidence is just gone, ... impacts the actual work." P1 said "I don't imagine a time when it's not going to be there." P1's lived experience of bullying had lasting negative impacts on her relationships, increased anxiety, reduced confidence, self-doubt, and diminished performance. Her meaning structure was a "scarlet letter" it's always still there.*

Selective Reading: *P1 found ways to cope. She said, "I was using ... sick leave and I thought, ah, they are going to fire me. So, I got FMLA ... and a Xanax prescription." She said, "sit at work, and I'd take a Xanax ... I testified at the legislature—I took a Xanax." P1's lived experience of a likely termination caused her to obtain FMLA and Xanax. Her meaning structure was to deal with the possibility of termination and cope with her situation.*

Detailed Reading: *P1 knew that the staff had negative perceptions of her ... "every time I am right ... you can't un-ring that bell ... I am this unstable ... volatile person who people should be scared of ... who doesn't know how to do a job." She said, "I will never overcome [it] and except for ... my friends who actually know me ...when [I] enter a room, who thinks what." P1's lived*

experience could be knowing that there was nothing she could do about the staffs perceptions of her and P1's phenomenological meaning structure could have been "you can't un-ring that bell."

P1 Analysis Health-Physical and Mental

P1 asserted that I, … "thought after two years that I would not be feeling this way ... I got angry about it. Because I think — I can really tell it in work situations that my IQ is just not where it used to be." But she thinks, "OK, I will retire in five or six years … my lack of concentration and focus. Whatever is pressing my IQ … It's not just related to work … I just notice my driving." She thought it was, "like you're impaired by alcohol you're just not paying attention … last Wednesday … I was just spinning on this and I'm going to meet my friend for lunch … I'm thinking I shouldn't be driving. Because at the worst. You are really immobilized."

P1 said, "I can watch a TV show and re-watch it a month later … how can I not notice that … my brain processing used to be so much faster." She thought that "negative things — it does something different to your brain … [bullying]*, it does impact my ability … I feel sometimes my brain is shriveling." She said … "I was having some difficulty with the basic function of a secure job … and all of these experiences just prevent me from doing the higher things now."*

P1 said "I'm divorced … when things go bad in my life, I'm really all alone … But I have great friends … [if] things go really bad, … You don't want to sit down [with friends] and ... discuss … I think I'm actually going to get fired." According to P1, "I'm not gonna be able to get employment when you get fired from the state … If you truly get fired, that means your pension is done, right? … I'm not going to talk to my friends about that."

She concluded that, "I don't know what the right way is … some people would say just put it in a compartment … Just quit thinking about it, quit talking about it." Alternatively, P1

said "however many stages of grief there are … you gotta go through them, right? I mean that's what they say, who knows, do I just have to go through this."

Wholistic Reading: *P1 recognized the lasting impact of bullying on her intellect. P1 said … "I get angry … my IQ is just not where it used to be … lack of concentration and focus … not paying attention … I shouldn't be driving." P1 said, "I can watch a TV show and re-watch it a month later … my brain processing used to be so much faster." P1's lived experience of anger was a result of knowing that her functioning was diminished. Her phenomenological meaning structure could be the shock of knowing that she was no longer, "the person she used to be."*

Selective Reading: *She thought — "it does something different to your brain … [bullying], it does impact my ability … my brain is shriveling …having some difficulty with the basic function of a secure job … These experiences just prevent me from doing the higher things." P1's lived experience of potentially losing her job thwarted her ability to function normally as she had done in the past. Her meaning structure may be the awareness of losing an important skill that she needed to perform her job.*

Detailed Reading: *P1 said "some people would say just put it in a compartment … Just quit thinking … quit talking about it." P1 said "however many stages of grief there are … you gotta go through them, right? She could not compartmentalize, quit thinking, and stop talking about bullying. P1's lived experience would be to go through stages of grief towards recovery. Her meaning structure was that the impact does not disappear but rather "work in progress."*

P2 Analysis Health-Physical and Mental

P2's supervisor would start a meeting, "20 minutes before quitting time and keep me in her office for about an hour and a half lecturing me … and I would leave in tears." An

investigator with the Office of the Inspector General saw P2 "leaving the supervisor's office in tears and reported it. After the incident P2 said, "it got bad from there."

P2 stated, "I felt belittled, well, ah—she, her approach was very hypercritical. And I felt humiliated and ah … I mean, there were times in the first couple months … that I cried in her office because of the way she was treating me." P2 described "feeling out of breath … flushing of tears, attacked, feeling emotionally exhausted—I would leave work and feeling regretful that I had accepted the job … torn between needing the money … just quitting, just walking out."

In the beginning P2 said, "Oh yeah, I was excited—I wanted to contribute—I wanted to be part of the team—I wanted to show what I could do—But she dragged me down to kindergarten because she was a teacher … that was her comfort zone." P2 knew that "when people are under stress, they go back to their comfort zone … her comfort zone was being a teacher of young people, and I don't think she knew how to manage people who had a lot of experience with a master's degree."

P2 said, "there was a person to handle the SharePoint functions." P2 said, "we're both women of an older age group similar to my boss [and] I think she feels the real need to control us … because we both didn't have history at the organization. She has been able to diminish us as employees, repeatedly."

P2 said that her competence and confidence, "varies from day to day depending on how tired I am [and] how beaten-up I'm feeling … I never had an FMLA for work related stress before in my life—I have one now I have for this third year." P2 said, "so I can take a day off, I get to the point where it's really hard to function because I'm constantly being bashed by her."

P2 asserted "She [supervisor] *never asked me what I think never, never, never, ever. She uses humiliation and shame and um, extreme criticism. I mean a spelling error or a margin that*

doesn't line up perfectly is a catastrophe." P2 was unequivocal in stating, "She is an extreme case. I've never worked with anything like her. I worked with people who have been mean before or who are on power trips, but she's extreme … Well, she's a control freak."

She said that "the impact on my health has been pretty significant. Like I said, I have an FLMA, and I see a therapist once or twice a week. Which is not something I've done in the past. Yeah, my sleep is disturbed, a lot of anxiety." In addition, P2 disclosed "ever since I got my performance review, my face has been red and I think it's, I'm getting this flushing you know. I think that I would never recommend that somebody work at this organization—never."

P2 asserted that it was, "so demoralizing and it makes you second guess your own abilities — under that much stress — feel so criticized, it hurts. It makes it difficult to focus. It is a distraction and then you make more mistakes." P2 said, "All my mistakes that I make are—like a misspelled word or some stupid little formatting error. She picks up on every damn one of those—it's a darned crisis—She yells—you know it's like, you get a big lecture." P2 said, "That's why I go to a therapist once or twice a week because the stress is what's gonna eat me up. I am done for the year but I kind of decided not to fight too much cause I'm tired.

Wholistic Reading: *P2 said, "the impact on my health has been pretty significant e.g., belittled, attacked, exhausted, hard to function, shame, criticism, sleep disturbed, anxiety, demoralizing, it hurts, no focus, and mistakes." The lived experience for P2 was an extreme level of bullying that diminished her health. Her meaning structure was that the stress is what's gonna eat me up and she decided not to fight too much cause I'm tired.*

Selective Reading: *P2 stated, "She is an extreme case. I've never worked with anything like her. I worked with people who have been mean before or who are on power trips, but she's extreme … well, she's a control freak." P2's lived experience was the supervisor's "over the top"*

controlling behavior—excessive bullying—psychological torment. Her meaning structure could be that the supervisor was a malevolent person who felt satisfaction in ruining the health of others at work.

Detailed Reading: *"I mean, there were times in the first couple months … that I cried in her office because of the way she was treating me. I would leave work and feeling regretful that I had accepted the job … torn between needing the money … and just quitting, just walking out." The lived experience for P2 was that she regretted accepting the job, but she knew that she needed the money or resigned. Her phenomenological meaning structure could be described as being trapped in a miserable work environment with no viable options.*

P3 Findings Health-Physical and Mental

P3 said, "Yes, you are right, it was my dream job turned out to be my nightmare experience. So, when anyone files a complaint … they are taken over and must give up." According to P3, "they get traumatize twice; one time when they first face discrimination and bullying and the second time when they sought justice and did not find it, and this happens all the time."

P3 was told "you are not going to be a director 11 [and] we will never consider you for director 11 and this topic is not on the table." According to P3, "just another kind of bullying and discrimination that I was subjected to." He asserted "the directors were looking down at me … [because] I'm a coordinator. They are higher in class … [and] pay but in terms of line of duties we are the same level." P3's job description said, "I am lead and consultant. But they… [said] that they would be telling me what to do, and how to do it." P3 said … "the traumatic part the directors told P3 'they don't trust me,' because they don't want anyone from outside."

P3 affirmed that "It happened because "I came to a point where I was about to be homeless. So, I went into a kind of homelessness. I was very, very, very, very depressed and I am going into major mental health issues." P3 said, "I couldn't believe that I would be exposed to that. A mental health doctor advised me to get up because you're fine, but twice she literally me to live through this mental health situation."

P3 stated that, "It was a nightmare, a nightmare in that I wanted to protect my children and my family from going through this and at the same time I was struggling with my mental health. I felt … I put my family in this situation." Thus, P3 asked himself, "Why? —well because I stood up for values. So, when you stand up for your values, when you are a persistent leader, when you are passionate to serve, want to lift-up your job and leverage your community." P3 was faced with an incongruity and said, "you see that just ah two-sided struggle because that's why, you struggle and then inside myself—what could happen with my family?"

Wholistic Reading: *P3 said, "when anyone files a complaint … they are taken over and must give up … they get traumatize twice; one time when they first face discrimination and bullying and the second time when they sought justice and did not find it, and this happens all the time." P3's lived experience entailed discrimination, bullying and he found no justice and his likely phenomenological meaning structure could be a sense of abandonment.*

Selective Reading: *P3 said that he came to, "a point where I was about to be homeless. I was very … depressed and I am going into major mental health issues." The lived experience for P3 was that he became deprived of his purpose, mission, and passion for being the director of the equity program. P3's phenomenological meaning structure was, "just another kind of bullying and discrimination that I was subjected to."*

Detailed Reading: *P3 stated that, "It was a nightmare, I wanted to protect my children and my family, I put my family in this situation." Conversely P3 thought that you should … "stand up for your values, … a persistent leader, … passionate to serve, … lift-up your job and leverage your community." P3 said, "By accepting this kind of job...I felt guilty with my family." His lived experience may well be that life presents unexpected paradoxes that cannot be resolved. P3's phenomenological meaning structure could be that life presents inevitable conflicts that can only be dealt with by accepting, "this is the way it is."*

P4 Health-Physical and Mental

P4 said that "my son was home during Covid … he [told] *… his teachers and counselors that he wanted to take his own life. This kid is only ten … I* [made] *appointments for him to see a mental health therapist … I will try everything I can."*

She asserted, "I just feel … it just deteriorated [supervisor]. I think I gave her two months and it just deteriorated. And it just got to the point that it was just unbearable."

P4 realized that it, "got to the point where it just got really toxic. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, … I would be just mentally broken. My son was not getting well, not doing well at school, … just getting really hard." P4 said I, "talked to my husband, and I started talking to people. It just seemed like I should get out of there, just get out, there is nothing you can do."

She said, "I never bothered [union] *because I knew it was never going to go anywhere … what I did was I turned in my two weeks' notice; I couldn't handle it anymore." P4 said, "I was losing sleep … my son was dealing with some mental issues … he was just walking around me like eggshells. And that was not good … I knew for my own sanity—so I turned in my two weeks' notice."*

"Well, I "never had a job where I was so exhausted at the end of the day. You know I was so exhausted at the end of the day; I didn't want to do anything. You know I was just exhausted."

Wholistic Reading: *P4 became physically and emotionally worn down. "And it just got to the point that it was just unbearable … I would be just mentally broken … I was so exhausted at the end of the day." She had no energy left for home life and "I didn't want to do anything." P4's lived experience was that her job became unbearable, and she decided to resign. Her meaning structure could have been that the organization was not a good fit for who she was as a person.*

Selective Reading: *P4 had reached the point where she could no longer struggle with her manager and supervisor because it "just got really toxic, I knew for my own sanity, so I turned in my two weeks' notice." The lived experience for P1 was that the conflict between her and the supervisor/manager would never end. P1's phenomenological meaning could have been that in order to end the conflict it would be wise to resign.*

Detailed Reading: *Before P4 made any decisions regarding her resignation she sought feedback from her husband and friends. P4 said I, "talked to my husband, and I started talking to people. It just seemed like I should get out of there, just get out, there is nothing you can do." P4's lived experience was that she received support from her family and friends. Her meaning structure would likely be that she did the right thing by resigning.*

P1 Findings-Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision

P1 stated, "*There was an investigation of me … the results are 300 pages, and I was given the unredacted* [version unknowingly] *by HR. And I still don't know if they know that*" … She said, "*within 24 hours I was freaking out calling HR who had become involved …* [previously] *complaints which never went anywhere. HR* [is] *very management focused, but I was calling them, crying, saying what am I supposed to do*."

She said, "*I have learned … These things the can happen in isolated incidents, but the stop gap, the checks and balances is supposed to be HR … I think the people who treated me this way are terrible. I have more of a problem with HR who endorses it*." Consequently, P1 concluded that, "*HR was the real culprit in my case because … the two, those two leaders,* that happens — those people exist, but you just cut them off … HR just needed to cut them off and … prevent it from going further … Not only was that not done … but it is also actually endorsed."

P1 supported the Collaborative Safety Program (CSP) that enabled employees to identify problems, think critically and engage with management … she said [it] "means that when an employee reports something … you thank them because they just did you a huge favor." But she asserted, "I think the biggest impediment is HR because that is not how HR in a large organization function … somebody does something bad you discipline them … Their job is not to encourage equality." P1 said "CPS employees give the boss information and … they are kind of equals. This doesn't fit in with the HR model to be helpful. You can't have equals."

P1 said, "*Really, I think that they're* [HR] *very hierarchical, so I don't know how well it's* [CPS] *really going to come to organization*." She asserted that, "*the employees are really excited about this. Even the supervisors—everybody. Your biggest impediment is HR* … [they say] *'oh no we are very excited,*'" and I said*, "I know they are telling you that, let's just see how it really comes to be."* She concluded*, "Let's just see if we have less discipline and all that, cause that's the goal and more engagement."*

Wholistic Reading: Employees expected HR to be impartial when there were disputes with management. Yet, they were suspicious that HR would be biased against helping them. P1 said "I was freaking out calling HR who had become involved. HR [was] very management focused,

but I was calling them, crying, saying what am I supposed to do." P1's lived experience of being the subject of an investigation was traumatic. Her phenomenological structure may have been—how could this happen to me? —what have I done wrong?

Selective Reading: P1 asserted that, "the checks and balances is supposed to be HR … people who did this treated me this way are terrible" She concluded that, "HR was the real culprit … those two leaders, … HR just needed to cut them off and prevent it from going further, —Not *only was that not done … but it is also actually endorsed*." P1's reaction to HR's role in the investigation of her was the lived experience of vulnerability and betrayal. Her meaning structure could be if I can't rely on HR—who could I rely on? —no one?

Detailed Reading: P1 said "*I think the biggest impediment is HR … in a large organization function … somebody does something bad you discipline them … Their job is not to encourage equality … You can't have equals. I think that* [HR] *is very hierarchical."* P1's lived experience may have been that HR and management perceived her as an unequal employee. Her meaning structure could be feelings of being less valued and not respected by HR/management.

P2 Findings-Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision

P2 said a coworker said to me, "*quit after about 8 or 9 months.* She [coworker] said 'this woman [supervisor] *is not healthy. This is a toxic situation and I'm getting out of here*". P2 stated that, "*But by that time, my boss had given me a really poor review and so I felt like I should stay to get a good review. Never going to happen, never going to happen*."

She asserted, "*Not much. No very little* [HR does not intervene], *I think unless there's really egregious behavior that they don't … it's just that they don't wanna deal with it because it's too hard because* [supervisor] *she's an older lady like me*." P2 said, "*a senior citizen class*

which is a protected class by age and she's female [supervisor] *and I don't know what else she's got. She's saying she has a disability … And then she's protected by the union*."

P2 pointed out that, "*here's this thing that the leadership in HR … is in very, has very strong* [relationships] *outside of work with a lot of managers and supervisors … the director of HR, has very close friendship with … our division director*." P2 said, "*So, they protect each other … if you're a manager or you know a director the one person you want on your side is the HR director. Especially if you have challenges in your area with personnel*."

She asserted that, "*the organization does not want to put the effort into it. They have too much work to do. Personnel stuff takes up a lot of time—HR is pretty ineffective, and the union is also ineffective.*" According to P2, "*The only thing they* [union] *do is to help you after the fact … if I get a written reprimand, I can grieve that, if I get fired, I can grieve that …* [it] *is a hostile work environment and absolutely is hostile and toxic*."

P2 pointed out that, "*HR … came out and said, 'that when there is a difference of opinion on performance reviews or LOE's or anything else or reprimands they* [HR] *will side more on the favor of the director or the supervisor*.'" She advised that, "*you almost have to record every conversation and save every email. That's what I do, I must because I have to protect myself … record everything and retain all those. And having transcribed, you should do that too*."

She wanted permission for a leave of absence to work out of class and knew that "*HR said, 'that they highly recommended supervisors approve those to give the employee a chance to work in another area and learn more about the organization*.'" But P2 said "*I was denied. There's no reason why I can't. I worked ahead" …*They said, "*there's too much work to do*." P2 asserted, "*Well, that's not true … all my contracts had to be executed by the end of this fiscal year, there already rewritten*."

Wholistic Reading: P2 said that HR considered bullying interventions as "*too hard"* and would get involved only if the abuse was flagrant. HR felt that they had "*too much work to do* [and] *does not want to put the effort into it—personnel stuff takes up a lot of time.*" P2's lived experience could have been that she knew that HR viewed employees as a low priority and would not get involved. Her phenomenological meaning structure may have been—I'm defenseless and I could be targeted.

Selective Reading: P2 knew that HR and management had cultivated a close relationship to *protect* each other's department. Managers and leaders with *personnel issues* knew th*e one person you want on your side was the HR Director*. Employees who knew about the relationship realized that HR was not their ally. The lived experience for P2 was her awareness that in a dispute with management she would be at a significant disadvantage. A phenomenological meaning could be a deep sense of futility and vulnerability.

Detailed Reading: According to P2 the HR department affirmed that it would support the "*director or supervisor"* in regard to employee's "*performance reviews or LOE's … or reprimands."* The policy communicated to P2 that her lived experience with performance reviews, LOE's and reprimands could be biased against her. A potential phenomenological meaning structure may be the threat of demotion or termination.

P3 Findings-Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision

P3 asserted that, "*If you want to really help to stop bullying; if you really want to implement equity, if you really want to stop management from discrimination and protect employees, two things must be done*." First, P3 said, "*all equitable opportunity offices and all its division offices should be combined into an independent equity opportunity commission … Not*

reporting to any divisions." Second, P3 said, "*rotate the officer or investigator. They should not stay in the same agency for a long time*."

P3 pointed out that, "*to make sense to know why bullying continues to be a chronic issue, impossible to stop because we need dramatic change in the system itself*." P3 said that "*We need to hold the leader accountable. It is almost impossible to sue or file a complaint of a state leader or a state supervisor or manager* [and] *convict. That's why there is chronic pain that is not easy to go or manage. Because no one is being held accountable*."

From P3's perspective *"it looked; you know ah* [like a] *toxic workforce it is not enough description*." There were even more questions. "*The investigation* [equity training] that they *started with the office of equal opportunity did not move one inch forward after that meeting*." P3 asked, you know why? —because "*they are accomplices to the objective*." To "*terminate me and kick me out.* There was *no need to continue any ah activities, written discipline or anything related to that training again. That is my conclusion*."

Wholistic Reading: P3 was aware of the organization's dire need for structural change. He said to stop bullying, implement equity, end discrimination, and protect employees, "*two things must be done*." Equity offices must be merged under one commission and officers/investigators rotated between office's. P3's lived experience would likely be frustration and futility due to being unable to implement change. The meaning structure for P3 could be that if he was unable to implement change—what is my purpose?

Selective Reading: P3 asserted that the leadership needed to be held accountable. The ability to file complaints, discipline leaders, managers and supervisors was nonexistent. They had free rein and did not intervene on the employee's behalf. P3's lived experience could have been a sense of

helplessness and guilt because he could not implement accountability. His meaning structure may well have been that he disappointed the employees.

Detailed Reading: The investigation into P3's alleged mismanagement of equity training resulted in nothing being done. P3 said "*the OEO did not move one inch forward … they are accomplices to the objective … terminate me and kick me out … no need to continue … written discipline or anything related to that training again*." P3's lived experience was that he was terminated without regard for his well-being. His phenomenological meaning structure would be that the false claim that he bungled equity training was used to justify his termination. However, the real reasons were his advocacy, structural change and holding leaders accountable.

P4 Findings-Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision

P4 said, "*I didn't even bother* [with HR] *because I knew then after talking to my boss things got really bad, I went to her* [supervisor's] *boss things got really bad, so I had no trust after that. I didn't go above her*." P4 thought that HR "*was just going to make it more difficult for me and life is too short um and I just instead of using that energy to try to fight it I was using the energy to move forward with my life*." P4 was determined to, "*find my own plan and all that stuff. I didn't want to do it* [with HR] *because I didn't think it was going to help. I think it would do more harm.*"

Wholistic Reading: P4 said, "*I didn't even bother* [with HR] and thought that HR "*was just going to make it more difficult for me and life is too short …I didn't want to do it* [with HR] *because I didn't think it was going to help.*" The lived experience for P4 was that HR would make things worse and not be helpful. Her phenomenological meaning structure would likely be that she knew how to rely on herself.

Selective Reading: P4 had recognized that battling with her supervisor was no longer worth the effort— "*I think it would do more harm.*" Her lived experience was the awareness that quarrelling was not useful and detrimental to moving forward. P4's phenomenological meaning structure could be that arguing with her supervisor would drain her momentum to seek other opportunities.

Detailed Reading: P4 decided that it would be better to use her energy to move into her future. *Instead of using that energy to try to fight it I was using the energy to move forward with my life*." P4 was determined to, "*find my own plan and all that stuff."* Her lived experience was planning for her future and moving forward. P4's meaning structure may be that it was time for her to find a new position where she could flourish as a professional.

P1 Findings-Reflections-Regrets

What struck her, "*the most was the fragility of my security … I look back at my complaints …* [it] *was pretty darn normal—a little bit of eye rolling well on … I'm resilient*." She said, "*I'm tolerant. That was okay and then it went boom* [P1] *you are not doing your job … isolation from meetings … seemed so fast … I think that means that we are all one person away from getting targeted*."

P1 commented that, "*I didn't know I was on the fence, but I was on the fence, and I fell off ... Everything was normal ... and then boom …* it's strange how fast that can happen to really anybody." She experienced vulnerability and said, "*I'm very involved in our union and so I'm not somebody you should go after. And yet it happened, so shoot … as bad as it was for me*."

P1 attended a conference where she shared her experiences working in her chosen field. She confirmed that professionals must be prepared to deal with the inevitable successes and disappointments of upholding ethical standards. P1 asserted, "a lesson learned would be—this is

not short … a lawyer [friend], told me that early on, *this is the long fight and if you ever do get something* [P1] … *I don't mean financial … Something that makes me feel better ... it will be a couple of years, dig in ... for a long fight.*

She acknowledged that, *"for my own level of confidence I wish I wouldn't have been constantly crying at work ... it was out of control—went to the bathroom and cried … walked around for a year with big swollen eyes. I'm so embarrassed …* She accepted that it was *a fluid time … go with the flow—this sounds stupid—but I just wish somehow, I would have been able to compartmentalize it better, so that I wouldn't have walked around crying … I keep going back to that, but that's so unfair to myself.*

In retrospect P1 said *"I will think of the good deeds … Like a bunch of policies were changed … a bunch of things were changed—because of the stuff they reported … keep thinking about those good things."* She concluded that, *"you have to pretty much just write that on your mirror in red lipstick to remember it, because it's very hard to remember."*

Wholistic Reading: P1 was surprised by "*the fragility of my security … I didn't know I was on the fence, but I was on the fence, and I fell off … and then boom."* She said, "*it's strange how fast that can happen* … P1's lived experience was her awareness of vulnerability in regard to the unpredictability of continued employment. Her phenomenological structure may have been the realization that there is no such thing as a secure job.

Selective Reading: P1 attended a conference where she shared her experiences working in her chosen field. She confirmed that professionals must be prepared to deal with the inevitable successes and appointments of upholding ethical standards. The lived experience for P1 was her recognition that she would no longer report irregularities internally. P1's meaning structure could include the recognition that any day of the week could be her last day of work.

Detailed Reading: In retrospect P1 said that it was "*a fluid time … go with the flow — but I just wish somehow, I would have been able to compartmentalize it better, so that I wouldn't have walked around crying."* P1's lived experience was her recognition of her inability to compartmentalize and not walk around crying. Her phenomenological structure may entail the notion that compartmentalizing (stifling) strong emotions may be counter-productive and unhealthy depending on the situation.

P2 Findings-Reflections, Regrets

P2 thought that "*My mistake was not complaining enough about the way she was treating me — in the beginning because she was on probation at the time*." Looking back P2 said, "*I think that you know, hindsight. There are things I should have I could've done, maybe to have revealed her to others sooner.*"

She felt, "*regretful that I had accepted the job …* [it] *was to do contracts and grants so there were some — and I had a lot of experience with that …* [yet] *you know, being torn between needing the money to have a job and just quitting, just walking out*.". But, as P2 said, "*I just needed the job. It really wasn't the kind of work I really wanted to do, but I just needed a job. So, I took it, and it was a mistake*."

P2 unequivocally said, "*I so regret working at this organization. I really regret it. It's a horrible, horrible, place to work*." P2 asked, … [a] Union Steward, "*is my boss an outlier in the agency that she's so awful*? — but she's [steward] laughing, she said '*no there's a lot of them in the organization*.'"

She resolved that, "*when people are looking for jobs, don't look at the work or the money, look at who is going to be your supervisor … that determines your success or failure and your happiness*." P2 asserted there's, "*different categories of people in power … Those who are there*

for the power and the control … [and] *people who really want to get the work done … collaborate … help other people to advance*." P2 said, "*the only thing I see is other people who like to control*."

P2 said, "*the dominant group* [control] … *it's all about money … great benefits* … and *throwing somebody else under the bus*." P2 said, "*what I would do differently is, interview the person I'm interviewing with …* [and] *I would say as little as possible … just consider it a paycheck and not … a mission in life to make the world better*." P2 warned, "*as a subordinate, you have no freedom to act … I* [can] *work on a document but … sending email, collaborating … I may need to talk to my boss … she's a nano manager. Not just micro*."

P2 stated "*in any organization … you should expect that there's some toxic hostile disfunction …* [and] *if you find it … your job* [as an] *employee* [is] *to get out as fast as you can*." Consequently, P3 said, "*if you can't* then *your job is to be as passive as possible* to *stay out of the gunfire*. If you work for a *manager who is a narcissist, you will fail … they want you to fail*."

P2 stated "*When you get* [a] *bad boss, they can ruin your whole career. My boss has been purposeful trying to do that.*" P2 said … "she would say, '*we're gonna sit together at the computer, do this together …* I said, '*no, there's a meeting on that and I should* [go] I'm doing *all these contracts grants*.'" The supervisor said, "*Oh no, no, I'm going to go and I'm going to tell you*." Then P2, "realized … *she didn't want me to have contact with people …* she didn't *want me to be known as having any talent …* she could *use me to help her in advancing her career*."

P2's supervisor said early on, "*I need to teach you how I think. I want you to be able to anticipate what I'm going to think*," and P2 responded— "*that's gonna be really hard to do … it*

would be better if you would tell me what you want … if it's not exactly what you want, we can work through that and make it what you want."

Wholistic Reading: P2 said that filing a complaint sooner could have made a difference in how her supervisor treated her. She said, "*My mistake was not complaining enough. There are things I should have, I could've done, … revealed her to others sooner.*" P2's lived experience was the realization of acting sooner rather than later when being bullied. Her phenomenological meaning structure could be the notion of being aware of bullying symptoms when they first appear.

Selective Reading: P2's said, "*when people are looking for jobs, don't look at the work or the money, look at who is going to be your supervisor … that determines your success or failure and your happiness*." Her lived experience provided P2 with an astute approach in how to avoid being hired by a supervisor who is a bully. P2's phenomenological meaning structure could help her to be more discerning in regard to interviewing with a potential future boss.

Detailed Reading: P2's supervisor said "*we're gonna sit together at the computer, do this together* … P2 asserted, '*no, there's a meeting on that and I should* [go] I'm doing *all these contracts grants*.'" The supervisor said, "*Oh no, no, I'm going to go and I'm going to tell you*." P2, "realized … *she didn't want me to have contact with people* … she didn't *want me to be known as having any talent* … she would *use me to help her in advancing her career*." The lived experience for P2 was knowing that her supervisor would advance her career at her expense. P2's meaning structure could be that the supervisor's top priority was herself as opposed to facilitating her career development.

P3 Findings-Reflections, Regrets

P3 said, "*A person with a disability like me ... I'm not always free to take my time … I must take what's available, so … I have to adapt … otherwise stay home and be homeless or not feed the family. So, I just take it*.

P3 said, "*I'm with MN DOT I got an okay job … But, let me tell you something … I made a conclusion that I will never participate in an equity role with the government ever again. It's just not going to work*." But, P3 asserted, "*I will do … advocacy and through the memberships I have. But not through a government they do not want someone to implement equity. They want someone who can talk about how great they are*…"

Wholistic Reading: P3 explained that "*A person with a disability like me ... I'm not always free to take my time … I must take what's available, so … I have to adapt … So, I'll take it*."

P3's lived experience of disability made his job search difficult and complicated. His meaning structure involved having to accept what is available, in a timely fashion and adapt accordingly.

Selective Reading: He stated, *… "But, let me tell you something … I came to conclusion that I will never participate in an equity role with the government ever again. It's just not going to work*." P3's lived experience was that he wanted to make a difference, but the organization was not ready for change and resisted his efforts. The phenomenological meaning for P3 was his loss of purpose, mission, and vision for the future of equity in government.

Detailed Reading: P3 asserted, "*I will do … advocacy and through the memberships I have."* Despite P3's negative lived experience with public sector equity he adjusted, found a new job, and decided to participate in equity programs via his memberships in organizations. P3's phenomenological meaning was to be resilient.

P4 Findings-Reflections, Regrets

P4 expressed appreciation for, "*the opportunity … whether it's good or bad, this is definitely an experience for me, and* I learn from it *… what am I going to do about it …* be quiet and say nothing *… or am I going to say this is unacceptable*." Also, P4 said, "*I want people to hear my experience … more awareness … will get a chance to move, right? That is why people protest … without people seeing it then it's what you say against what I have to say*."

She said, "*things happen for a reason … and I wish it was a little bit different, there is nothing we can do … I am moving forward and lay a plan … working with a therapist to … understand my own feelings … what I can and* [can't control]." P4 acknowledge "*as easy as it sounds it is really hard in practice … I need help to move me forward*."

P4 knew that … "*one life lesson that I always know is that if your healthy—well money can always be made—a job can always be found*." But said, "*if you're not healthy and* [not at your] *best … then everything is impossible, so I think I know … all the time that I've taken a break from my job …*[things] *always turned out to be very meaningful*."

When she looked "*at everything, it was against everything I was taught, it went against everything I ever learned, you know*". P4 asserted, "*It kind of went against all the faith I had … to be like that is not what I learned in school … and what I learned from the experience of what a really good team is*."

From P4's perspective, "*they are not ready for people like us … If we don't force ourselves into kind of twisting their arms, when are they going to be ready*?" At times P4 felt that the supervisor "*and I are just puppets … and again I think for her it's more like wow am I going to let this little Asian overpower me or am I going to overpower P4"*.

"*I guess they have not dealt with anybody like me. I thought that's why we have that uniqueness so that we can—that's why the inclusion piece comes in so that we can be a part of that. But I guess I'm dealing with an institution that has been this way for many years*."

Wholistic Reading: P4 had an optimistic outlook for her future. She expressed appreciation for, "*the opportunity … I am moving forward and lay a plan … working with a therapist to … understand my own feelings … if your healthy—well money can always be made—all the time* [s] *that I've taken a break from my job* …[things] *always turned out to be very meaningful*." P4's lived experience was gratitude for the chance to work at the organization and her phenomenological meaning structure was that being healthy and taking a break would be consequential in the future.

Selective Reading: P4 said I looked "*at everything, it was against everything I was taught, everything I ever learned, … went against all the faith I had … not what I learned in school …* [not] *what I learned from the experience of what a really good team is*." P4's said, "*they are not ready for people like us … If we don't twist … their arms, when are they going to be ready*?" P4's day-to-day lived experience while working at the organization was negative. Her phenomenological meaning structure could be the realization that the organization's culture and values were not aligned with hers.

Detailed Reading: P4 said, *… "I want people to hear my experience … more awareness … get change to move … they have not dealt with anybody like me … we have that uniqueness — that's* [where the] *inclusion piece comes … I'm dealing with an institution that has been this way for many years*." P4's lived experience within the organization was that it was ill-prepared to deal with somebody like her who was unique. Her phenomenological meaning structure would likely be that when she is seeking employment look for an organization with similar culture and values.

Chapter 5 Findings

Theme Analysis, Interpretations, and Research Findings/Literature Review

Analysis

Phenomenological analysis is based on philosophical methods that compel researchers to go beyond events and scrutinize pre-reflective, pre-suppositional lived experience and structures of meaning. The epoché (abstaining) or bracketing (mathematics) circumvent assumed beliefs and logical thinking that limits insights. Reduction is a paradox in that phenomenology avoids "reductionism" that conceptualizes, categorizes, and truncates phenomena (van Manen, 2014).

Theme analysis in phenomenology does not use frequency counts, coding, or the dissecting of written materials but rather interprets narratives and lived experiences that are creative and insightful. In phenomenology themes are intended to be a way to explain ideas and perceptions that impart structure and direction for research and writing (van Manen, 1997).

Conducting theme analysis involves experiential questions that are intentional and without these questions the reflective process is impeded. Theme analysis requires relevant experiential material for the researcher to explore and reflect on. If the material is inadequate, the lived experiences will lack veracity. Appropriate phenomenological questions and experiential data (narratives) are essential for success (van Manen, 2014).

Phenomenological questions should direct the analysis of lived experiences and structures of meaning that are experiential, familiar, and accessible. The questions must challenge the researcher's "taken for granted" assumptions by asking, "what is this human experience like." The researcher collects lived experience descriptions (LED's) and uses phenomenological questions to probe the descriptions. The questions must be central throughout the process (van Manen, 2014).

The questions must be created from pre-reflective experiential narratives that exclude opinions, views, beliefs, and perceptions. The best materials for doing phenomenological analysis are the direct descriptions of the experiences provided by the participants (van Manen, 2014). Descriptions should express the intensity, depth and subtlety of the study and support the interpretations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

In the theme analysis below are my insights and understandings of the participant's lived experiences and phenomenological meaning structures that I arrived at through the participant's descriptions (narratives) and experiences. My purpose was to expose the psychological and physical harm done by perpetrators who target their victims and bully them. I used van Manen's approach (see Data Collections, p. 37) to theme analysis as follows: 1) Wholistic reading — meaning of the entire text in a phrase; 2) selective reading — statements/phrases about phenomenon or experience as described, and 3) detailed — single sentence or sentences phenomenon or experience as described (van Manen, 2014).

Interpretations of Research Themes

Narratives become meaningful through the researchers interpretations and reflexivity. Phenomenological studies delve into narrative descriptions that explain what happened; how phenomena are experienced and describe its essence (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Also "it has been argued that all descriptions become interpretation." The meaning of a phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation," (van Manen, 1997).

A phenomenological outlook is a conversational relationship that the researcher seeks to explore and understand. Every conversation that occurs with another human being has this structure. When individuals interact there is an interpretation that addresses the topic or idea of the conversation that participants share. It has a hermeneutic impetus and is focused on sense

making and interpreting the idea that propels or animates the conversation. Thus, conversations are useful for reflections on the themes of a phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1997)

Interpretation: Participants

All four participants were educated, articulate, motivated and possessed extensive professional work experience. They were sought-after job applicants due to their academic accomplishments, work history, and suitable personalities. The participants had impeccable moral standards, work ethics and were oriented towards moving forward and getting things done. Given their outstanding credentials they were improbable victims of workplace bullying. This suggests that there were ongoing organizational circumstances, situations and conditions that diminished their likelihood of succeeding and increased their probability of being bullied.

The participants experienced significant workplace bullying and all four of them suffered through unique forms of bullying depending upon their perpetrators and circumstances. Consequently, their individual lived experiences and structures of meaning were unique in that there were no standard patterns or norms other than relentless bullying.

P1: Interpretation

P1 likened her situation to the movie Lord of the Flies by W. Golden (Taylor, 2003-2023). The movie tells the story of a group of boys who survived a shipwreck and were stranded on an island without adults. It depicted how they descended into brutality without the constraints of a civilized society. The majority of boys became an aggressive gang while another group of four boys tried to maintain order, but they became outsiders. The four boys were chased and threatened and one of the boys died. The situation concluded when adults showed up and found the boy's in their degraded condition.

Retaliation: The methodology-interpreting interview process is useful for obtaining insights through media sources—movies, authors, podcasts, and videos. P1 recognized that the staff *retaliated* by "ganging up" (Lord of the Flies) against her. Multiple staff members bullied P1 regardless of their rank in the hierarchy. No one in management or leadership spoke up on P1's behalf; consequently, she was abandoned by individuals who had the power to intervene but did not get involved.

Assertive/Outspoken: P1 held a law degree as well as a master's and bachelor's degrees in psychology. Given her professional experience, education, and qualifications, her employer should have expected that she would be assertive and outspoken regarding irregularities in contracts. But P1's coworkers and management were hostile towards her auditing results even though she repeatedly proved that her outcomes were correct.

Health-Physical and Mental: P1's said that an aftereffect of being bullied was that she was no longer the person she used to be. Her relationships changed, she felt uncomfortable, and her self-confidence declined. To cope with the situation, she obtained a Xanax prescription. P1 felt that her IQ had declined because her processing was not as fast as before. After two years the impact of bullying was still present, which made her very angry.

Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision: HR unknowingly sent P1 a 300 page unredacted investigation of her that caused P1 considerable consternation. She thought that the two leaders who had surveilled her for the investigation were terrible people and she felt that HR was complicit because it sanctioned it. HR could have intervened on her behalf but apparently reneged on its moral obligation and failed to provide "essential checks and balances" to ensure fairness.

Reflections, Regrets: What caught P1's attention was the illusion of her security in that her sense of safety was ephemeral and quickly disappeared. The reality was that P1 was targeted by powerful leaders and by complacent coworkers who ignored her commitment to ethical and moral behavior. P1 was involved in the union but was not afforded any protection. She regretted her constant crying out of control because it undermined her self-confidence, and she wished that she had compartmentalized her situation.

An interpretation of P1's experience with her coworkers, managers and leaders involved torment that caused her daily anguish, emotional distress, suffering, and anxiety that instigated frequent conflict between P1 and the department. P1's colleagues denied the validity of her results and they discounted her speaking about irregularities in their business practices. The ganging up behavior caused self-doubt about her audit results despite her high ethical standards. P1's experience showed that the leadership and HR collaborated in preserving their hierarchal status and would willingly sacrifice the health and well-being of P1. Her coworkers fell in line with the leaders and managers. The essence of P1's lived experience and meaning structures were that of being spun around in an ocean whirlpool and being pulled deeper and deeper with no escape.

P2: Interpretation

She described her supervisor as a "control freak" which was an ideal metaphor to capture the supervisor's dysfunctional behaviors that she inflicted upon the employees. The supervisor would probe employees for personal information, conduct unfair performance reviews and insisted that employees sit next to her.

The description of P2's supervisor as a control freak (controlling personality) is an example of the phenomenological method named "Conceptual Analysis." Conceptual analysis is

based on the idea that the meaning of a concept is established by its usage in various arenas of life. It is useful because it shows how individuals comprehend their world.

Retaliation: The supervisor used retaliation as a way to control P2 e.g., unfair performance reviews, interrupting P2 during meetings, and late Friday afternoon meetings. Most supervisors would appreciate an employee like P2 who would lighten their workload. P2 realized, "*I was dealing with somebody who felt threatened by me because she would say I want to create this document in Excel and we're going to do this.*" The supervisor thwarted P2's independence and desire to get things done while the supervisor satisfied her need for control.

An interpretation of P2's experiences were based on her awareness that her supervisor was deeply flawed emotionally. P2 knew intuitively that her supervisor was incapable of allowing employees to do their work independently. The supervisor feared that the employee's talent would diminish her value to the organization and expose her vulnerability to feeling, "less than." To compensate for her fear and survive as a supervisor she was a "control freak."

Assertive/Outspoken: An unusual behavior that the supervisor exhibited was insisting that P2 sit next to her so they could work on tasks together. But this made no sense because P2 would work independently without oversight. But the supervisor would not give P2 any leeway due to her fears about being overshadowed and losing control. P2 repeatedly told her supervisor that *"I know how to create those"* and *"I'm happy to fill it out without your help"* … [but] *she insisted, and we* [sat] *side by side.* P2 said *"just give it to me, I'll do it. I can have it for you tomorrow or the next day, right?* Despite P2's assertions nothing changed.

Health-Physical and Mental: P2's descriptions of how she was treated by her supervisor were appalling and conveyed a nightmarish quality. The supervisor's approach to working with P2 was like psychological warfare or a "winner takes all." The supervisors behavior was

unconscionable and under normal conditions a manager or leader would have terminated the supervisor. Throughout P2's narrative she spoke about filing complaints with HR and she wrote memos to department directors, but the directors took no action on her behalf.

Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision: P2 was in a precarious situation with her supervisor and HR department. HR would not intervene on her behalf. Her supervisor was in a senior citizen protected classification, a female, had a disability and was in the union. HR saw P2's situation as too hard to deal with. The department did not want to expend time and energy on interventions and the union limited grievances, reprimands and terminations.

The HR department had a close relationship with the organization's leadership outside of work. They protected and maintained good relations with each other. Also, when there were disputes on performance reviews, LOE's and reprimands HR would side with directors and supervisors. Consequently, P2 was literally "boxed-in" and surrounded with no place to go. P2 concluded that, [it] "*is a hostile work environment and absolutely is hostile and toxic*."

Reflections, Regrets: Early on in P2's employment with the organization she began to regret accepting the job. She needed the money but soon after P2 started she found out that the job would make her miserable. The "lesson learned" for P2 was that having a good boss makes "all the difference in the world." P2 believed that organizations were toxic and that a bad boss would ruin your career.

A source of P2's negative lived experiences and meaning structures could be that the HR department's ambition to be in the "good graces" with the leadership. The department wanted to "have a seat at the table" i.e. influence the organization's decision making. However, advocating on behalf of employees would appear as "going soft" on employees and could jeopardize the department's close relationship with the leadership. HR could lose its seat at the table.

When P2 wanted to attend training related to her job duties, but the supervisor intervened and said, "*Oh no, no, I'm going to go and I'm going to tell you*." P2 realized that her supervisor wanted to keep her out of sight because she was talented, and the supervisor wanted to use P2 to advance her own career.

P3: Interpretation

P3 became the director of the equity program but soon after he assumed the position the organization began reneging on its obligations. The organization withdrew P3's grade 11 classification, revoked his status as a director and told him that he would be a subordinate. The directors terminated P3's participation in the strategic meetings, did not allow him to speak with employees about equity and they ignored his data requests. They curtailed his activities and his role in the organization. When one of the directors revised his job description, he concluded that, *"they did not want me to do my job ... I discovered that they decided to get rid of me."*

"Bait and Switch" is an apt interpretation for what P3 experienced. An example would be a salesperson who advertises products that would meet a customer's needs at a reasonable cost. The salesperson promotes a specific product at a definite price, but the product is no longer available when customers showed up. However, the salesperson offers a less desirable model or a more expensive version that is available for purchase. In P3's case the bait was the director position, and the switch was a downgrade to an administrative assistant. This is an example of the phenomenological method "Conceptual Analysis," that shows how concepts (bait and switch) have different meanings depending on the situation.

Retaliation: In the beginning everyone was happy with what P3 was doing. He said that the supervisors saw him as an important addition to the staff and they complimented him. However, things got worse when the director of licensing confronted P3. The director retaliated

against P3 by attacking his efforts to move the equity program forward and she said, "*why are your requesting data*; *why are you doing that, who told you to do that, you should not be doing that*; *who permitted you to do that data;* and she said, "*why don't you just* [expletive]." P3 repeatedly responded, "*I see it as doing my job*."

An interpretation of P3's experience was that his efforts to invigorate the organization's equity program became noticed by the leadership and management. P3 was becoming increasingly aware that the program was "underwater" because there were few accomplishments in the past. P3's desire to build an effective equity program threatened the leaders that did not accomplish anything of substance. The leadership did not want this to become public and used retaliation as a method to silence P3.

Assertive/Outspoken: P3 was assertive and a fearless advocate, who was strategic player and he wanted to help victims. He made it clear that he was there to work on equity and not just talk about it, but he soon found out that the equity program was not equitable. P3 was confronted by a group of directors who used their position to intimidate him. However, he was not obsequious and said, *"it's not about what class you are in—you … hired me as a subject matter expert on equity*." An interpretation of P3's assertiveness is that it drew the directors attention to his proactive approach with equity which could expose the dismal state of the current equity program.

Health-Physical and Mental: P3 said he was traumatized twice in that he was discriminated against and bullied; the second time he was denied a remedy for being mistreated. The leadership told P3 he would never be a director, and they looked down on him because their class was higher, yet they all had equal duties. It was traumatic to be told by the directors that they did not trust him because he was from the outside.

P3 and his family were almost homeless had it not been for his network of friends and supporters. He became extremely depressed, experienced significant mental health issues and described his situation as a nightmare. P3 found himself in an emotional conflict in that he wanted to protect his family from their situation and at the same time he felt responsible for what happened. He wanted to uphold his values, be a determined leader, dedicated servant, and influence the community but at the same time take care of his family.

An interpretation of P3's experience could be that it was not wrong or a mistake for him to have a professional career, take care of his family and protect them. What was wrong was the way that the organization treated P3. The leadership saw that he was assertive, independent, self-directed and a staunch advocate for equity. They feared that the public would find out that the existing equity program was a sham and could be subject to an investigation. He was demoted and terminated.

Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision: P3 said that to stop workplace bullying deep structural change was needed i.e., stop management discrimination; protect employees; create an independent commission; and rotate investigative officers. He also asserted that the source, "of chronic pain" (emotional) is that the perpetrators and leaders are not held accountable. Also, P3 noted that the investigation regarding his alleged role in the equity training program never moved forward. P3 said the purpose was to, *"terminate me and kick me out."* There was no reason to continue the investigation after P3 was gone.

Reflections, Regrets: P3 concluded that given his disability he must quickly accept a job at the time it's available otherwise he and his family could end up *homeless or not feed the family. So, I just take it*. Also, P3 decided that "*I will never participate in an equity role with the*

government ever again … they do not want someone to implement equity. They want someone who can talk about how great they are…"

P4: Interpretation

P4 wanted fairness, support, and an approachable, accessible supervisor but management was uncaring—she had become a target. P4 decided to resign from her position and stop struggling with management so she could move forward by creating a plan for her future. She anticipated working with a therapist to sort through what was controllable and what was not. P4 said, every time, "*I've taken a break* [resigned] *from* [my] *job, things always turned out to be very meaningful."*

Fictional literature, "novels and short stories, are excellent sources for experiential materials," Manen M. (2014, p. 318). However, the nonfiction book, "Mans Search for Meaning" by Victor E. Frankl is also a relevant resource. Frankl wrote about finding "meaning" during his horrendous experience of surviving in a German concentration camp during WW 2 (Oade, 2023). The physical and psychological harm of workplace bullying is not equivalent to what Frankl experienced, however, he espoused that the animating force in life is finding meaning in everyday existence (Lit Charts, 2023). P4 left her job to pursue a meaningful career.

Retaliation: P4's said that her situation was *"like an up-hill battle" ...* their tactic was to overwhelm her with too many duties, and they portrayed her as a horrible employee who was inept. P4 said it was *"difficult to describe and … a combination of everything … forcing people out—like blame and not creating an inclusive space."* The supervisor revoked P4's flex-scheduling that she used for her son's doctor visits and that negatively impacted her home and work balance.

Assertive/Outspoken: When P4 asked, "*for specific instructions,"* the supervisor would say schedule a time, but she said … "*I don't need help. I know how to do my job; I just need a little more support."* P4 asked the manager for help, *"most of the time the manager didn't do anything."* She asked, "*is there a better way to do this*? … *Nothing was offered*." P4 wanted, "*somebody who is approachable … I can't find this information to do my job and how do I get it.*" P4 said … *I ask questions when I see things are not right … They didn't like that about me.*

Health-Physical and Mental: P4 realized that her relationship with the supervisor had completely deteriorated. She said, it reached a point where it was "*really toxic, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, … just mentally broken."* She thought that "*for my own sanity* [I needed to] *"just get out, … I was so exhausted at the end of the day. I didn't want to do anything.*

Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision: P4 said, "*I didn't even bother* [with HR]. She thought that HR would make things difficult, and she said, "*I didn't think it was going to help. I think it would do more harm.*" Also, she knew that her working relationship with supervisor had deteriorated. She went to her supervisor's boss and after that, *"things got really bad, so I had no trust after that. I didn't go above her*."

Reflections, Regrets: P4 was grateful for the opportunity to work in the organization despite the good and bad she saw it as a learning experience. She wondered if it was better to be, *"quiet and say nothing" …* or "*say this is unacceptable."* P4 wanted to be heard, share what happened and create awareness. She said being healthy was essential for success but if you are not healthy everything is impossible.

When P4 reflected on her experience, … "*it was against everything I was taught, it went against everything I ever learned.*" Her experiences contradicted her faith and negated what she learned from good teams. P4 realized the organization was not ready for people like her and she

wondered when *"are they going to be ready*?" She was in a "lose-lose" situation and the only way to survive was to conform, which she would not do—so she resigned.

An interpretation of P4's experiences at the organization was like being a data point—an "outlier" on a graph in that she was unique and that rankled management. P4 was "ahead of her time" as compared to the organization. The things that were important to her e.g., inclusion, fairness, support, meaning, communication, and equity were unimportant. She became an outsider despite her motivation and altruism. The idiomatic expression, "square peg round hole" described P4's situation.

Research Findings and Literature Review

The purpose of this section was to establish that my research findings were aligned and congruent with the literature review articles in this dissertation. This is important because it would demonstrate the significance of my findings in relation to what is already known from the existing literature on workplace bullying. I inserted findings into the review themes below and found that they were compatible with the literature. This supported the veracity of the findings and substantiated the findings alignment with the literature. Also, the findings were consistent with the research problem (Peoples, 2021).

There were five literature review themes, and they were the following: 1) *Discursive strategies,* 2) *power*, 3) *the role of human resources,* 4) *recognition—awareness,* and 5) *policies—procedures*. In each of the themes I inserted several excerpts from my research findings to demonstrate that they were compatible and aligned with the review themes and this reinforced the veracity of my dissertation.

Discursive strategies: Employees who were assertive, educated, intelligent and open-minded were stifled and controlled by leaders and managers who used language as a weapon. The strategies included silencing, discounting and prosody.

[P1 discussed $150,000] … she said, *"what 150 are we talking about? I guess I don't know … I think I missed some information—yeah, what's up with the 150." … "let's deal with 150 cause I was gonna jot down the 150, right?"* The director said, "*that's information you don't need to know."* [P1] said again … *"you know I have to account for all of this money so … tell me so I can make sure that it is fine with the feds that we use 150.*" She [director] said *"no, you don't need to know that information." None of us actually have a choice … I was actually obligated. Nobody else was getting that, so the treatment towards me didn't change."*

P2 stated, "*I felt belittled, well, ah—she, her approach was very hypercritical. And I felt humiliated and ah … I mean, there were times in the first couple months … that I cried in her office because of the* way *she was treating me*." P2 described *"feeling out of breath … flushing of tears, attacked, feeling emotionally exhausted."* But *she dragged me down to kindergarten because she was a teacher … that was her comfort zone."*

P2 said that her competence and confidence, *"varies from day to day depending on how tired I am* [and] *how beaten-up I'm feeling … I never had an FMLA for work related stress before in my life—I have one now I have for this third year*." P2 said, "*so I can take a day off, I get to the point where it's really hard to function because I'm constantly being bashed by her*."

P3 said, *"I should have been part of the strategic meeting. It's not my assumption, it is not my demand, it was in my job description. Except me. Never allowed … everybody is attending the strategic meeting. But I was prevented and excluded."* P3 saw this as *"just another kind of bullying and discrimination … my job description said that I am the lead and the*

consultant … I was supposed to be one of them … I was never allowed, I asked … I was told 'no.'"

[He asserted] *"they blocked me; they blocked my way completely and in all directions. I wanted to speak with employees, they told me no, do not speak to employees about equity*." I said, "*I want to list a hot line for equity for both internal and external to report … their experiences.*" Employees … wanted to file complaints about their experiences. But P3 said, "*I did not have any ability to help them. And when I requested data, they blocked my way.*"

[P4 said] … "*it was just unbearable*. Then I went to the manager *'hey look and I said, I feel that this is not working … I am just asking you to listen to my concerns and questions and … bring us together to resolve the issue.*" P4 was *"looking for more, … when the manager intervenes …* [but] *most of the time the* [manager] *was there she didn't do anything, and I feel like she added more to the stress*."

She said, "*this is not right … when you ask questions* [they should] *say, this is what they expect of you … this is what I need" …* P4 thought that … "*management is there to say, 'okay yeah let's do this, let's do that*. *Nothing was offered to me. The only thing they did offer …* [was] *training and I said no, I know how to do my job*.'" … "[what I] *needed was support … somebody who is approachable … and say*, '*I can't find this information to do my job and how do I get it*.'"

Power: Leaders and managers used their power to subjugate and disarm employees who were seasoned professionals that possessed ethical standards, moral values and were self-directed.

P2 said her supervisor, "*pegs people because she would ask me personal questions about my family life where I grew up."* She [supervisor] *"was looking, searching for ammunition for*

her manipulation. Yes, *looking for vulnerability … she wanted me to be dependent … that gives her more control*." The supervisor "*pegged me for somebody who knew … about a lot of things*

She stated "*Yes, looking for vulnerability … she* [supervisor] *wanted me to be dependent … that gives her more control*."

She said, "*there was a person to handle the SharePoint functions*." P2 said, *"we're both women of an older age group similar to my boss* [and] *I think she feels the real need to control us … because we both didn't have history at the organization. She has been able to diminish us as employees, repeatedly*."

She asserted "*She* [supervisor] *never asked me what I think, never, never, never, ever. She uses humiliation and shame and um, extreme criticism. I mean a spelling error or a margin that doesn't line up perfectly is a catastrophe.*" P2 was unequivocal in stating, "*She was an extreme case. I've never worked with anything like her. I worked with people who have been mean before or who are on power trips, but she's extreme … Well, she's a control freak*."

From P4's perspective, "*they are not ready for people like us … If we don't kind of force ourselves into kind of twisting their arms, when are they going to be ready*?" At times P4 felt that the supervisor "*and I are just puppets … and again I think for her it's more like wow am I going to let this little Asian overpower me or am I going to overpower P4."*

She thought that "*her* [supervisor's] *ego got hurt a little bit … so she felt that she needed to put a leash on me, and just spiraled out of control" …*

[P4] … She concluded that it was about, *"power you know. They don't want people like us who are truly, truly trying to make a difference you know and for me it's like thinking to myself … that no matter what I did* [it] *was not going to be good enough."*

The Role of Human Resources: The role of HR had been largely subsumed by the organization's leaders and managers. Employees are left with little recourse in situations where they are being abused and disrespected due to HR's absence in advocating and protecting them.

She said, "*I have learned … These things can happen in isolated incidents, but the stop gap, the checks and balances is supposed to be HR … I think people who did this treated me this way are terrible. I have more of a problem with HR who endorses it*." Consequently, P1 concluded that, "*HR was the real culprit in my case because … the two, those two leaders,* that happens—*those people exist, but you just cut them off … HR just needed to cut them off and … prevent it from going further … Not only was that not done … but it is also actually endorsed*."

[P1] But she asserted, "*I think the biggest impediment is HR because that is how HR in a large organization function … somebody does something bad you discipline them … Their job is not to encourage equality*." *This doesn't fit in with the HR model to be helpful. You can't have equals."*

She asserted that, "*the checks and balances is supposed to be HR … people who did this treated me this way are terrible"* She concluded that, "*HR was the real culprit … those two leaders, … HR just needed to cut them off and prevent it from going further, —Not only was that not done … but it is also actually endorsed*."

P1 said "*I think the biggest impediment is HR … in a large organization function … somebody does something bad you discipline … Their job is not to encourage equality … You can't have equals. I think that* [HR] is *very hierarchical."*

[She] asserted, "*Not much. No very little* [HR does not intervene], *I think unless there's really egregious behavior that they don't … it's just that they don't wanna deal with it because it's too hard because* [supervisor] *she's an older lady like me*."

P1 said that the "*organization does not want to put the effort into it*. *They have too much work to do*. *Personnel stuff takes up a lot of time—HR is pretty ineffective, and the union is also ineffective.*" According to P2, "*The only thing they* [union] *do is to help you after the fact … if I get a written reprimand, I can grieve that, if I get fired, I can grieve that …* [it] *is a hostile work environment and absolutely is hostile and toxic*."

P2 said that HR considered bullying interventions as "*too hard"* and would get involved only if the abuse was flagrant. HR felt that they had "*too much work to do* [and] *does not want to put the effort into it—personnel stuff takes up a lot of time*."

She knew that HR and management had cultivated a close relationship to *protect* each other's department. Managers and leaders with *personnel issues* knew th*e one person you wanted on your side was the HR Director.* Employees who knew about the relationship realized that HR was not their ally.

P4 said, "*I didn't even bother* [with HR] *because I knew then after talking to my boss things got really bad, I went to her* [supervisor's] *boss things got really bad, so I had no trust after that. I didn't go above her*." P4 thought that HR "*was just going to make it more difficult for me and life is too short um and I just instead of using that energy to try to fight it I was using the energy to move forward with my life*." P4 was determined to, "*find my own plan and all that stuff. I didn't want to do it* [with HR] *because I didn't think it was going to help. I think it would do more harm.*"

Recognition and Awareness: Employees begin to recognize and become aware of their work environment's toxic and unhealthy attributes over time. They may have decided to tolerate their situation due to their need for an income or resignation.

[P1] thought — *"it does something different to your brain …* [bullying], *it does impact my ability … my brain is shriveling …having some difficulty with the basic function of a secure job … These experiences just prevent me from doing the higher things*."

She was surprised by "*the fragility of my security … I didn't know I was on the fence, but I was on the fence, and I fell off … and then boom."* She said, "*it's strange how fast that can happen …*

P1 said "*I spoke at …* [a] *conference … what you would do different*," and I said, *… a person must make that decision about being loud or proud, …*

[P2] Managers and leaders with *personnel issues* knew th*e one person you want on your side was the HR Director*. Employees who knew about the relationship realized that HR was not their ally.

P2 said that filing a complaint sooner could have made a difference in how her supervisor treated her. She said, "*My mistake was not complaining enough. There are things I should have, I could've done, … revealed her to others sooner.*"

From P3's perspective *"it looked; you know ah* [like a] *toxic workforce it is not enough description*." There were even more questions. *The investigation* [equity training] that they *started with the office of equal opportunity did not move one inch forward after that meeting*." P3 asked, you know why? —because "*they are accomplices to the objective*." To "*terminate me and kick me out*. There was *no need to continue any ah activities, written discipline or anything related to that training again. That is my conclusion*."

P4 decided that it would be better to use her energy to move into her future. *I just—instead of using that energy to try to fight it I was using the energy to move forward with my life*." P4 was determined to, "*find my own plan and all that stuff."*

She said, "*I want people to hear my experience … more awareness … will get a chance to move, right. That is why people protest … without people seeing it then it's what you say against what I have to say … they have not dealt with anybody like me … we have that uniqueness." …* "*that's* [where the] *inclusion piece comes … I'm dealing with an institution that has been this way for many years*."

Policies and Procedures: Typically, leaders and managers oversee an organization's policies and procedures. However, in dysfunctional work environments the existing policies and procedures may reflect the organization's inability to address its need for change.

When P1 identified contract irregularities colleagues said, *"no, that's not correct* [P1] *that's not correct, you're wrong …* [she said] *look at this GM policy, it says we actually can't do that … So, to fix it, what we* [are] *going to* [do] *here" …*

"*I had issues about a particular RFP that had not gone according to law and …* [there was an] *investigation of it. I was right when I was speaking out.* [There] *was a violation of law* [and] *policy, just everything."* …

P1 was told to charge … her salary to the feds … [but P1 said] *"I can't charge salary to the feds … they had taken it all away … I was now doing my secretarial duties. And so, I had warned management a couple of times."* She wrote an email, and said, "*I can't fill it out anymore and then I wrote a separate email to our internal auditors — I just want to put you on notice that I can't fill* [salary] *out. I don't know* … [about] *my salary, but I can't do it*." P1 said, "*I had confidence in* [unbiased auditor] *and to my horror … Well, he wasn't at all … I did successfully make a huge deal out of that; they are no longer allowed to do that—the policy was changed.*"

In retrospect P1 said, "*I will think of the good deeds … like a bunch of policies were changed … a bunch of things were changed—because of the stuff they reported … keep thinking*

about those good things." She concluded that, "*you have to pretty much just write that on your mirror in red lipstick to remember it, because it's very hard to remember*."

According to P2 the HR department affirmed that it would support the "*director or supervisor"* in regard to employee's "*performance reviews or LOE's … or reprimands."*

P2 had created a process/procedure, and the supervisor wanted P2 to present it … she [supervisor] covered everything, then she turned to me and said, *"okay ... go ahead"* … I said, *"well, that covers it in a nutshell,"* and everybody laughed … She was livid cause; well, what else was I going to say? … [The] supervisor had already said it.

She resolved that, "*when people are looking for jobs, don't look at the work or the money, look at who is going to be your supervisor … that determines your success or failure and your happiness*." P2 asserted there's, "*different categories of people in power … Those who are there for the power and the control …* [and] *people who really want to get the work done … collaborate … help other people to advance*." P2 said, "*the only thing I see is other people who like to control*."

Research Findings, Themes and Interpretations

There were unique research findings for each participant that were emblematic of the participant's lived experiences and meaning structures. The diversity of the participants experiences necessitated that the research findings were coalesced into five major themes which were the following: 1) Retaliation; 2) Assertive/Outspoken; 3) Health-Physical and Mental; 4) Leadership, HR, Management, Supervision and 5) Reflections, Regrets.

According to van Manen, (1997) themes provide a structure for gathering findings and understanding narratives which provide a framework for interpretation and writing. Identifying a

theme is experimental without limitations and researchers discover structures of meanings based on participant's lived experiences. Researchers write phenomenological descriptions based on narratives that exemplify the characteristics of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1997).

P1: Research Findings, Themes and Interpretations

P1was highly educated as compared to her colleagues in that she possessed three degrees; one in law, and two degrees in psychology—masters and a bachelors. Her credentials would be especially useful for the department because she was hired for the financial auditor position. This position required her to oversee legal and regulatory standards and if there were irregularities there could be problems. The research findings and the resulting themes showed the obstacles that she would face going forward, which included the five research findings.

When she identified financial irregularities her colleagues retaliated and said, *"you're not doing it right"* and "*resistant and problematic employee*." P1 was assertive and outspoken about reporting irregularities but none of the staff complied with the requirement. Also, she noticed her health had diminished, *"myself um talking nervously—I can feel my heart sort of racing—I'm not some smooth professional* anymore." According to P1 the leadership of, "*HR was the real culprit in my case—their job is not to encourage equality—really, I think that they're* [HR] *very hierarchical."* When P1 reflected she was struck by, "*the fragility of my security—we are all one person away from getting targeted—I was on the fence, and I fell off."*

A interpretation of the research findings was that P1 was a threat to the department's leadership and management and employees. Her expertise regarding audits, legal and regulatory activities exceeded the capability of the department's staff regardless of their position or status. The staff chose to bully her rather than benefit from her expertise. Another finding was that the department's staff ganged up against P1, which isolated her from colleagues. An additional

finding was that there was an investigation of P1 which she was unaware of until HR unknowingly sent to her an unredacted version that was a traumatic experience for P1.

P2: Research Findings, Themes and Interpretations

P2 was an experienced administrator, manager and supervisor who possessed a master's degree in public health and a bachelor's degree. She was a skilled writer and editor of documents. She had excellent computer skills and was knowledgeable in regard to computer operating systems and familiar with several software applications. She was self-directed, took the initiative to get things done, liked to work independently with little or no supervision. However, the supervisor's need for control created a hostile environment.

The supervisor used performance reviews as a way to "practice retribution," (retaliation*)* directed at her but P2 appealed, and the supervisor had to correct her reviews. P2 was *assertive* and when the supervisor yelled at her she sent an email asking the supervisor not to yell. The supervisor's harsh behaviors negatively impacted P2's *health* and she said, *"the stress is what's gonna eat me up."* P2 asserted that HR— "*They have too much work to do*. *Personnel stuff takes up a lot of time—HR is pretty ineffective."* P2 said, "*I so regret working at* [organization] *I really regret it. It's a horrible, horrible, place to work*."

P2's ability, knowledge and experience was a constant threat to her supervisor's need for control. An interpretation of the research findings was that the supervisor's extreme controlling behaviors were mental health issues that fueled her need to control employees. P2 said her supervisor, "*pegs people because she would ask me personal questions about my family life where I grew up … searching for ammunition for her manipulation … gives her more control*." P2 realized, "*I was dealing with somebody who felt threatened* … the supervisor said, "*I want to*

create this document in Excel and we're going to do this." [P2 said] *"just give it to me, I'll do it.* And the supervisor said, "*no, no we're going to do it together*."

P3: Research Findings, Themes and Interpretations

P3 had substantial experience with employee equity programs prior to accepting the position of director of equity at the organization. He possessed a Ph.D., and had a strong sense of purpose, mission and passion for employee equity programs. P3 was devoted to building an affective program and his disability did not stop him from being a strong advocate. P3 was dedicated to being a strategic player and wanted to have a seat at the table. He was hired to be an expert on equity, and he intended to fulfill that role.

A director retaliated against P3 and said, *"why are you requesting data,"* and P3 said *"I see it as doing my job,*" the director said, "*why don't you just* [expletive]." P3 was outspoken—"*I am a person who can speak up—I don't fear the consequences—I was an advocate."* The unhealthy milieu reduced P3's well-being—*I was very depressed, and I am going into major mental health issues … I couldn't believe that I would be exposed to that.* P3 knew the leaders failed to see *"why bullying continues to be a chronic issue, impossible to stop because we need dramatic change in the system itself*." P3's reflection on his experience was *"I will never participate."*

An interpretation of the research findings was that P3 became a victim of an organization's moral and ethical failings. Soon after he became director of the equity program the organization started to eliminate its commitments to P3. The organization's directors were systematically forcing P3 out of his job. The directors knew that the existing program was ineffective because little or nothing had been implemented, and they wanted to avoid public

embarrassment. The directors undermined P3's efforts to move the equity program forward because it would threaten the leadership.

P4: Research Findings, Themes and Interpretations

P4 possessed a bachelor's degree in business and was an investigator for the Medicaid Program. P4 believed in the organization's mission, and she wanted to preserve the program's integrity. She had a strong passion for helping people due to growing up in a refugee camp and she understood how life can be a struggle. However, P4's supervisor received pressure from management that she was lacking in her work and not moving forward. P4 thought that "somebody panicked." The panic originated with the organization because it would not tolerate her assertiveness, being a woman of color, and her individuality.

P4's supervisor retaliated by, "*overwhelming* [her] … *messaging … going on the path of making me look incompetent."* She was assertive and, *"asked for specific instructions*," but realized, "*I know how to do my job—I need support."* P4 realized that her health was deteriorating, *"got to the point where it just got really toxic. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, … just mentally broken."* P4 said, "*I didn't even bother* [with HR] *after talking to my boss things got really bad."* P4 regretted that … "*it was against everything I was taught; it went against everything I ever learned … It kind of went against all the faith I had*."

An interpretation of the research findings was that the organization's leader's priority was to maintain its power. P4 felt that the organization did want employees who were, *"truly trying to make a difference."* She said that "*this is the mission statement this is the value, if you don't live up to it then … quit being a fake"*. P4 felt that "*If you are not willing to work with current employees and let them go*, but "*willing to hire somebody* [else] *it's going to take another year and a half or two for the person to truly know their job … that's abuse … a waste of tax dollars.*

Lived Experience and Meaning Structures

P1's lived experience was to survive in a hostile work environment. Her assertiveness enabled her to conduct thorough audits, but her colleagues ostracized her. P1's negative experiences impacted on her relationships i.e., social isolation, increased anxiety, reduced confidence and diminished performance. She obtained FMLA and Xanax to compensate for her fear of losing her job. P1's anger was the result of knowing that her functioning had deteriorated. The investigation of P1 traumatized her, and she felt vulnerable and betrayed by HR. She decided that she would no longer report irregularities internally.

Her phenomenological meaning structure of being "loud and proud" supported her auditing responsibilities, ethical tenacity, and unyielding moral standards, however, she became labeled as a troublemaker. It was "like a scarlet letter" it's always still there." P1 was shocked by knowing that she was no longer, "the person she used to be." P1's awareness of losing important skills made her see that recovery was a "work in progress." She may have wondered—how this could happen to me? —What did I do that was wrong? P1 realized that if she cannot rely on HR—who could she rely on—no one? She learned that there was no such thing as a secure job.

P2's lived experiences involved interrogations, frequent retaliation and her supervisor insisted they sit together while completing work. She suffered through extreme levels of bullying that diminished her health and exacerbated her anxiety. This denigrated P2's expertise, independence and effectiveness in the organization. The supervisor's "over the top" controlling behavior, excessive bullying and psychological torment resulted in P2 regretting that she accepted the job.

She knew that HR viewed employees as a low priority and in a dispute with management she would be at a disadvantage. HR used biased performance reviews, LOE's and reprimands

against employees. P2 acknowledged that she should have acted sooner regarding her supervisor's bullying behaviors, and she knew that her supervisor would advance her career at P2's expense. The supervisor's top priority was herself.

P2 structures of meaning entailed oppressive control, feeling trapped in a miserable job and being in a lose-lose situation (hopelessness). She could wonder "why does my supervisor need so much control—I am trustworthy. P2's work environment felt like psychological incarceration which could engender deep resentment, anger, and frustration.

She felt that "stress is what's goanna eat me up" and she decided not to fight too much cause I'm tired. The supervisor was a malevolent person who felt satisfaction in ruining the health of others at work. P2 felt trapped in a miserable work environment with no viable options. P2 knew she was defenseless and could become targeted. This could engender a deep sense of futility, vulnerability and provoke the fear of demotion or termination.

P3's lived experience was isolation, no data, felt lost in a jungle and there was no way for him to move forward. He had confrontations with directors who fought his assertion that the "equity operations were not equitable" and they usurped his role in the program. He felt frustration, futility, helplessness and guilt because he could not implement change and enforce accountability. He wanted to be effective and make a difference, but the organization was not ready for change and resisted his efforts. Despite P3's termination he adjusted, found a new job, and participated in equity programs through his community contacts.

He was exposed to discrimination, bullying and he found no justice. He was deprived of his purpose, mission, and passion as the director of the program, and he concluded that life presents unexpected paradoxes that remain unresolved.

His meaning structure was that he had become disposable, rejected by peers, and felt lost. When P3 was hired as a subject matter expert on equity, he intended to fulfill that role. He had a sincere desire to help people. P3 had a sense of abandonment and, "just another kind of bullying and discrimination that I was subjected to." He likely wondered—what is my purpose? —if I am unable to implement change—? He felt that he had disappointed the employees. The false claim that he bungled equity training became the justification for his termination. He had to accept any available job, in a timely fashion and adapt. P3 lost his sense of purpose, mission, and vision for the future of equity in government, but he kept his resilience. He decided that life presents inevitable conflicts that can only be resolved by acceptance, "this is the way it is."

P4 was assertive and asked for guidance but her lived experience was that the management ignored her. She asked for help, but nothing was done to alleviate her situation, and management made her job unbearable. There was conflict between her and the supervisor/manager which she thought would never end. P4 felt futility and frustration—she wanted to do her best, but the supervisor retaliated by restricting P4's time-off for her son's illness. This was a form of punishment/control that made P4's work life intolerable. She was aware that quarrelling with her supervisor was not useful and was detrimental to moving forward.

She believed HR would make things worse—would not be helpful and decided to plan for her future. P4 felt gratitude for the chance to be an employee in the organization, but her day-to-day work environment was miserable. She believed that the organization was ill-prepared to deal with somebody like her who was unique. But she received support from her family and friends, so she decided to resign.

A possible phenomenological meaning structure could be … "no matter what I did [it] was not going to be good enough." The supervisor and management would use any scheme to achieve their objectives while all P4 wanted was "fairness—they didn't care to look at it." P4 felt a sense of "impending doom" because she bypassed her supervisor and met with the manager. She may have wondered, "am I unworthy of being helped?" The organization was not a good fit for her, and she decided that in order to end the conflict it would be wise to leave. She was confident about relying on herself. P4 knew that it was time for her to find a new position where she could flourish as a professional. She believed that being healthy and taking a break would be positive and supportive for her future. P4 knew that the organization's culture and values were in conflict with her desired work environment.

Chapter Six

Problem, Purpose, Research Question, Discussion, Recommendations, Implications HRD Research/HRD Practice, Limitations of the Study

Research Problem

In the United States most forms of abuse became unacceptable with the exception of workplace bullying (Namie, 2021). Decades of quantitative research has not reduced or eliminated bullying, thus there is a need for approaches that would activate the use of other methods. For example, in the 1980's Heinz Leymann, a German psychiatrist founded an anti-bullying social movement in Sweden. In the United States the "Me To" and "Black Lives Matter" movements are recent examples.

Research Purpose

Bullying occurs in organizations with impunity and employees are fearful about speaking up because they could be terminated. If the lived experiences and meaning structures of victims

became more widely known this could provide the impetus for organizations to initiate collaborative and proactive efforts towards alleviating bullying.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences and meaning structures of victims of workplace bullying as described in their narratives?

Discussion: Literature Review Findings

The workplace bullying academic literature revealed how organizations dominated and controlled through patterns of abusive behaviors that were detrimental to employees psychological and physical well-being. The patterns were coalesced into themes that discerned and depicted how the participants were victimized by their perpetrators. In addition, the themes answered the research question through addressing the participant's lived experiences and meaning structures. The themes were the following: The themes are the following: 1) Discursive strategies, 2) power, 3) the role of human resources, 4) recognition—awareness, and 5) policies—procedures.

Discursive Strategies

Silencing, prosody and *discounting* were used to control and suppress assertive employees. Abusive language was systemic and enmeshed in cultures of mistreatment where the leaders were indifferent, withheld information and were unaccountable. Also, double speak language (one-way communication) concealed, confused and smothered the meaning of words. The impact of using language to bully was that victims became confused and perplexed. The lived experiences of victims likely entailed a sense of disorientation, and their meaning structure was, "I am unable to communicate with the staff."

Hierarchical *power* was associated with leaders who were unaware of their organizations complex, interpersonal, interconnected and multifaceted nature. Institutional practices, processes, and structures promoted bullying. Power was used to subsume HR into management, and HR forfeited its advocacy role. Differentials in power created imbalances that caused organizational turmoil. Employee's metaphor for power may be a "Merry Go Round" because their lived experiences were "moving forward," but their meaning structures were "going in circles."

Employees were threatened by *HR's* close relationship with management and were frightened by depersonalized bullying which enforced employee's completion of goals. *HR* said it protected employees from bullying, but their policies and procedures were ignored. Change and unitarist HR imperiled employee's security and the trade unions were irrelevant. There was a capitalist approach to employee management and performance focused on financial value and competitive advantage. Employee's lived experiences could have been "outmanoeuvred" by management and their meaning structures may have been "abandonment" by the organization.

Nurse Managers (NM's) *recognized* the lack of studies on bullying and felt deprived of supportive knowledge. They were unaware of bullying when it occurred, unprepared psychologically to deal with bullying and had little training and education for interventions. Academic librarians were unaware of bullying, failed to protect themselves, had physical and psychological maladies' and questioned their careers. Entitled executives did not fear punishment, were unaware, and unable to grasp their offenses. The victims lived experiences could have been "I want to be competent and help my peers" and their meaning structures may be "how do I facilitate organizational change."

Organization's had deficient *policies* and *procedures* that ironically supported bullying. Women educators were targeted, and their environment was hostile. Low morale was linked to

bullying because organization's disregarded investigations. In some educational institutions bullying was accepted and staff could not support anti-bullying efforts. Clinicians in another organization knew that their policies/procedures and reprimands were ignored. The lived experiences of the victims could be "I am unworthy of protection" and the meaning structure would be, "it is just a matter of time before I get bullied."

Discussion: Research Findings Align with the Literature Review

Several research findings in this dissertation were inserted into the literature review to demonstrate that the five research themes were compatible with the current academic literature on bullying. Below are examples of themes that were congruent with the literature review. This validated the research theme's veracity and the relationship with the existing literature on workplace bullying.

Discursive Strategies:

[P1 discusses $150,000] … "what 150 are we talking about? I guess I don't know … I think I missed some information — yeah, what's up with the 150." … "let's deal with 150 cause I was gonna jot down the 150, right?" The director said, "that's information you don't need to know."

P2 stated, "I felt belittled, well, ah—she, her approach was very hypercritical. And I felt humiliated and ah … I mean, there were times in the first couple months … that I cried in her office because of the way she was treating me." P2 described "feeling out of breath … flushing of tears, attacked, feeling emotionally exhausted."

[P3 said] "they blocked me; they blocked my way completely in all the directions. I wanted to speak with employees, they told me no, do not speak to employees about equity." I

said, “I wanted to list a hot line for equity for both internal and external to report … their experiences.”

Power

P2 said her supervisor, “pegs people because she would ask me personal questions about my family life where I grew up.” She [supervisor] “was looking, searching for ammunition for her manipulation. Yes, looking for vulnerability … she wanted me to be dependent … that gives her more control.”

At times P4 felt that the supervisor “and I are just puppets … and again I think for her it’s more like wow am I going to let this little Asian overpower me or am I going to overpower P4”.

[P4] … She concluded that it was about, “power you know um. They don’t want people like us who are truly, truly trying to make a difference you know and for me it’s like thinking to myself … that no matter what I did [it] was not going to be good enough.”

The Role of Human Resources

P1 concluded that, “HR was the real culprit in my case because … the two, those two leaders, that happens—those people exist, but you just cut them off … HR just needed to cut them off and … prevent it from going further … that was not done … it was actually endorsed.”

[P2] asserted, “Not much. No very little [HR does not intervene], I think unless there's really egregious behavior that they don't … it's just that they don't wanna deal with it because it's too hard because [supervisor] she's an older lady like me.”

P4 said, “I didn’t even bother [with HR] because I knew then after talking to my boss things got really bad, I went to her [supervisor’s] boss things got really bad, so I had no trust after that. I didn’t go above her.” P4 thought that HR “was just going to make it more difficult …

Recognition and Awareness:

P1 was surprised by "the fragility of my security … I didn't know I was on the fence, but I was on the fence, and I fell off … and then boom." She said, "it's strange how fast that can happen …

[P2] Managers and leaders with personnel issues knew the one person you wanted on your side was the HR Director. Employees who knew about the relationship realized that HR was not their ally.

P2 said that filing a complaint sooner could have made a difference in how her supervisor treated her. She said, "My mistake was not complaining enough. There are things I should have, I could've done, … revealed her to others sooner."

Policies and Procedures

When P1 identified contract irregularities colleagues said, *"no, that's not correct* [P1] *that's not correct, you're wrong …* [she said] *look at this GM policy, it says we actually can't do that … So, to fix it, what we* [are] *going to* [do] *here" …*

[P1] "I had issues about a particular RFP that had not gone according to law and … [there was an] investigation of it. I was right when I was speaking out. [There] was a violation of law [and] policy, just everything." …

According to P2 the HR department affirmed that it would support the "*director or supervisor"* in regard to employee's "*performance reviews or LOE's* … *or reprimands."*

Discussion: Interpretations of Lived Experiences and Meaning Structures

Phenomenology is a conversational relationship between the researcher and participant. They develop an informal association that establishes their connection with the phenomenon. Their rapport facilitates sense making and enables interpretation that supports reflection on the

phenomenon understudy. The researcher formulates themes that are a resource for reflection and the researcher and participant evaluate the validity of each theme (van Manen, 1997).

P1: Interpretation: Examples of Lived Experiences and Meaning Structures

P1 said, “whenever I'm in a meeting I don't know what they know about me. I have to question the worst … how many of those have heard absolutely crazy stuff about me … so you are always uncomfortable, you're always a little bit nervous, you are never relaxed” … P1 notice[d] that she was, “talking nervously … you know like I can feel my heart sort of racing a little bit and then I start talking nervously.” It was embarrassing because … “they said that they heard something strange about me. My behavior kind of affirms it; I do seem a little bit weird.”

P1’s lived experience entailed fear that was engendered by her feeling that she was an outsider who did not fit in and was shunned because of her alleged odd behaviors. Her meaning structure could have been the notion that she would never know what her colleagues know about her, and she perceived this as a source of imminent harm.

P1 said, “Yeah, it takes away from the subject of the meeting because my mind keeps wondering … [why] they [are] not talking to me about something [is it] because they heard something [about P1] or did I not just say that because what I said could easily be construed as blah blah blah … [it’s like] you second guess everything the confidence is just gone, and it so impacts the actual work. She asserted that, “Yeah, I still have the exact same education, … I have nine years of college … I still have a really good resume, right? … But it's like the scarlet letter, it's always still there and I don't imagine a time when it's not going to be there because it's still there now.

P1’s lived experience could have involved an intense level of rumination (self-doubt) that literally preoccupied her mind to the extent that she would constantly “second guess” herself.

Her meaning structure may possibly be that she did not want to draw attention to herself because this would produce anxiety which could exacerbate her rumination and create an unintentional "self fulfilling" process.

P2: Interpretation: Examples of Lived Experiences and Meaning Structures

P2's supervisor insisted that they sit next to each other while they completed a PDF form. She said, "My boss wanted me to sit with her at the computer and she was going to show me how to fill out a PDF form and I explained to her that I know how to create those." P2 was a seasoned professional who could easily fill out a PDF. She told her supervisor that, … "I'm happy to fill it out. Without your help, I feel I can do that. [But] she insisted. And we were going to sit together at the computer side by side, and she was going to point where I was supposed to insert the information, and I was to type it in."

Her lived experience could have been humiliation in that the supervisor's approach to her was the equivalent of treating a competent adult like a child which would be demeaning. The supervisor's managerial skills were incomprehensible, and she should not oversee adults. P2's meaning structure may have been "how could this be happening to me" and would have a surrealist quality that was disorienting.

P2 would be called into her supervisor's office about 20 minutes before quitting time and then kept me in her office for about an hour and a half lecturing her about different things. P2 said that she "would leave in tears." It was seen "by a police officer who is in The Office of the Inspector General. He walked by when I came out of her office one day and I was in tears, and he reported that I was not being treated well." After that incident P2's situation "got bad from there. My mistake was not complaining enough about the way she was treating me in the beginning because she was on probation at the time."

An interpretation of P2's lived experience could have been daily intimidation that was perpetrated by the supervisor. The supervisor used intimidation as a method to control her. P2's meaning structure was that she realized that her supervisor "felt threatened by me," and P2 said, "I've never been micromanaged at that level in my life."

P3: Interpretation: Examples of Lived Experiences and Meaning Structures

P3 asserted that, "I was doing all the activities that I am supposed to do but they never allowed me anything … I am also a data analyst; statistical analyst and I like to make detailed informed decisions … data driven strategy and plans." He wanted to see where the gaps were. According to P3, "Everybody knows where these gaps are, why they are there, what the effort is to try and remediate it, why it did not work, then you start looking into a plan to eliminate the inequity." He wanted to, "close the gap, how to do it, how long it takes, what shifts you need … They never responded to a single request for data, and they looked at me as a threat," …

P3's assertiveness and expertise may have caused his lived experience of being ignored by colleagues and the possibility of change threatened them when he requested data. P3's meaning structure may have been "isolation" due to the strong resistance to his plan for equity.

P3 said, "It was a nightmare, a nightmare in that I wanted to protect my children my and family from going through this (termination) and at the same time I was struggling with my mental health. I felt exactly like I put my family in this situation." He had a difficult, problematic job and was trying to meet the needs of his family. "Why? —well because I stood up for values. So, when you stand up for your values, when you are a persistent leader, when you are passionate to serve, want to lift-up your job and leverage your community. By accepting this kind of job, I felt guilty with my family."

P3's lived experience entailed the daily balancing of his family's needs while complying with the demands of his job. His realization that the existing equity program had significant deficiencies resulted in P3's termination. His meaning structure may be that meeting the needs of his family while dealing with the stress and difficulties of a job was like walking on a tight rope with out falling.

P4 Interpretation: Examples of Lived Experiences and Meaning Structures

P4 stated, "It was like if you don't do this, I am going to take away this, I am going to take away that, and she started to take away my privileges. Um and I know that she is the supervisor and that she can do that." When P4's privileges were restricted, her life became more difficult. She said "that really impacted me because I was doing a flex-schedule every two weeks I had a day off … I use[d] it to take care of my son … his doctor appointment … She took away that; it really impacted me with my life and my work balance."

P4's lived experience was being put in a stressful situation in that she was being pushed to accommodate her supervisor's demands over her son's well-being. Her meaning structure may have been the revelation that family life was far more important than work.

P4 said "I had enough you know, like that the romance is over and she's going to whip you until you get in shape and of course that just added more stress to me … I got a sick kid, and the trust started flipping I didn't trust her anymore." P4 was being pressured to explain … "why I was taking so much time off, and you know I didn't want to go into why … during Covid, and we had distant learning, and he had expressed to his teachers and counselors that he wanted to take his own life. This kid is only ten years old."

P4's situation deteriorated to the point where "the supervisor felt the need to put a leash on me and it just spiraled out of control a little bit." Her lived experience could have been that

she was unable to balance her work/home life given her circumstances i.e., supervisor and organization. P4's meaning structure was that she valued her home life and would not sacrifice it to stay employed.

Recommendations

My recommendation for reducing or eliminating the phenomenon of workplace bullying necessitates an effort to mobilize a social movement on behalf of the victims. As noted throughout this dissertation, the current efforts to protect victims has been well intended but ineffective. However, hermeneutic phenomenology presents an opportunity to explore the lived experiences and meaning structures of victims. The public's attention and awareness of victim's devastating encounters with bullies could inspire a social movement.

Workplace bullying is prevalent in most organizations and its victims experience physical and psychological harm. Qualitative and quantitative research has not produced results that would stop perpetrators from bullying (excluding phenomenology). A social movement like "Black Lives Matter" or "Me To" could provide the impetus for change within organizations regarding bullying

A social movement is an organized effort by a sizable group of people to create or resist social, political, economic, or cultural change. Generally, social movements often work outside the system by engaging in numerous types of protest, including demonstrations, picket lines, sit-ins, and sometimes violence (Social Movements-Sociology, 2024).

The *reform* social movement is a moderate approach to initiating changes in a nation's political, economic, or social systems. Its proponents work to improve conditions within the government. Examples are the women's suffrage, Vietnam antiwar, and the environmental movement. Another form of social movement is the *revolutionary* approach that promotes

toppling the current government and replacing it with a new regime. The reform and revolutionary are political movements because their adherents pursue change. *Reactionary* movements resist change or stop change all together. The antiabortion movement is an example of a reactionary movement that eliminates legal abortions (Social Movements-Sociology, 2024).

Social Movements are not a panacea for rectifying all of society's dilemmas; however, movements provide a legitimate opportunity for citizens to unite and address their most perplexing problems. It does not deliver perfect solutions, but it can reasonably render outcomes that citizens agree on and support. Movements impart a process wherein citizens are enabled to participate in improving their communities. Below are three examples of social movements that delivered acceptable results that were unique depending on the situation.

In this Black Lives Matter study (BLM) the researcher said that the numerous killings of unarmed African Americans had spawned a social movement, but it was criticized as too combative and acrimonious. The researcher conducted a comparative analysis of the BLM Movement with the Civil Rights Movement and directed a content analysis of the *New York Times* newspaper over 2 years. The researcher asserted that the civil rights movement process was more inclusive as compared to the BLM. The adherents of BLM could learn from replicating the Civil Rights Movement and undertake an issue like police brutality of African Americans. A BLM movement could push back on their self-imposed limitations (Clayton, 2018).

Awareness of anti-gambling efforts is well known but researchers have ignored anti-gambling social movements. In this study researchers utilized movement literature as a theoretical guide and ethnographic content analysis was the methodology for examining anti-gambling documents over two hundred years. Three periods emerged: 1) 1816-1915 strict religion and sin; 2) 1915-1980 science-based medical discourse i.e., problem gambling; and

3)1980 incorporated moral and scientific claims. Researchers identified a process where problem gamblers were scorned and then transformed into victims. The researchers developed an example of how social movement's rhetorical tactics can change over time (Bernhard, 2010).

In this study the researcher analyzed early 20th Century women's suffrage maps to demonstrate the map's efficacy in regard to social movements. The maps predicted the movement's national influence which prompted the suffragist's historical success with their political activism and their language of maps and places. The mapping process substantiated women's voting rights and highlighted the importance of the United States continental East and West. The women's suffrage social movement expanded throughout the country, and it exemplified the potential for political maps to energize and motivate members of social movements (Lewis, 2019).

Implications HRD Research/HRD Practice

There were five research findings that indicated significant implications for the future of HRD and HRD practice. Below are findings with examples of the participants experiences with workplace bullying: 1) Retaliation; 2) assertive/outspoken; 3) health-physical and mental; 4) leadership, HR, management, supervision, and 5) reflections/regrets.

The research participants experienced ***retaliation*** from their colleagues that caused them to feel maligned and bullied. (P1) said "there was nothing I could do right … keeping their heads low … my friends at work talked about [it] … they're targeting you know that's pretty clear. P2 noticed that "My boss had a pattern … Friday afternoon meetings … she would criticize me … give me things to think about over the weekend and ruin my time off.

Another finding was that bullies justified their abuse of the research participants because the participants were ***assertive***. P3, said "I made it clear from the first moment that I am here to

work on equity not to talk about it. We had been talking about equity since the beginning. Now I am here to take it into action." P4 asserted, "this is not right … when you ask questions [they should] say, this is what they expect … this is what I need … management is there to say, 'okay yeah let's do this—Nothing was offered to me."

Research participants experienced significant ***health*** problems due to workplace bullying. P1 said that I, … "thought after two years … I would not be feeling this way ... I get angry about it. Because I think—I can really tell it in work situations that my IQ is just not where it used to be." [P2] said "the impact on my health has been pretty significant—I have a FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act), and I see a therapist once or twice a week. Which is not something I've done in the past. Yeah, my sleep is disturbed, a lot of anxiety."

P3 said, "to make sense [and] to know why bullying continues to be a chronic issue—impossible to stop … we need dramatic change in the system itself. We need to hold the *leaders* [*HR, Management and Supervision*] accountable." He asserted that "it is almost impossible to sue or file a complaint … [and] convict … There is chronic pain that is not easy to go or manage. P4 said, "I didn't even bother [with HR] because I knew then after talking to my boss things got really bad." She thought that HR "was just going to make it more difficult for me and life is too short … instead of using that energy to try to fight it I was using the energy to move forward with my life."

The research participants had significant ***reflections and regrets***. P1 said, "for my own level of confidence I wish I wouldn't have been constantly crying at work … it was out of control … went to the bathroom and cried … walked around for a year with big swollen eyes." P2 stated "My mistake was not complaining enough about the way she was treating me — she was on

probation." P2 said, "there are things I should have; I could've done; maybe to have revealed her to others sooner."

The five research findings above portray the endemic nature of workplace bullying within organizations. The implication is that quantitative and qualitative researchers produced volumes of articles that are read by academic scholars. But there has been no effort to disseminate literature to educate the public regarding bullying within organizations. Qualitative methodologies such as sociology, psychology and ethnography provide explanations whereas phenomenology interprets and describes lived experiences and meaning structures.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is an effective method for revealing and exploring employee's encounters with bullies. It can evoke victim's visceral lived experiences and meaning structures that arouse citizens to coalesce into a social movement that could decrease or eradicate bullying. Also, it is possible that phenomenology would kindle the public's awareness of organizations that allow bullying to exist in their work environments. The practical implication is that phenomenological research would stimulate the public's awareness of bullying and activate a social movement similar to the "Black Lives Matter," and "Me Too" movements.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of hermeneutic phenomenology is that findings cannot be generalized to other populations due to phenomenologists selecting a small number of participants (three to five). Researchers use protracted data collection, detailed analysis and nuanced interpretations which requires them to select fewer participants. A small number of participants supports researchers in initiating an iterative process until the essence of a phenomenon is known.

Sampling in phenomenology is not random because study participants are selected based on availability, experience and judgement which could interject sampling bias. Also, “participant reactivity” impacts the participants due to their being influenced or affected by the researcher. The participants may provide the responses they believe that the interviewer wants, or the participants may be hesitant in their responses. Replication of phenomenological studies is constrained because of the subjective nature of qualitative research. Causality cannot be confirmed, and researchers unique perspectives create the possibility for misinterpretations of phenomena.

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