Work, Trauma and Identity: A Perspective from Counselling Psychology

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I would sincerely like to thank the nine participants who took part in the pilot interview and main study. Their contributions to this research and willingness to share their time and personal experiences have been greatly appreciated.

City University Declaration

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Section A: Preface

The preface will introduce and provide an overview of the main components of the Doctoral Thesis Portfolio. The overarching theme of the portfolio is the importance of work to psychological health and identity and how this might be disrupted by traumatic experiences. This piece of work is timely given the increasing recognition of the role of work in promoting mental well-being. Work has been described as providing the opportunity for a sense of fulfilment and social interaction and is an important determinant of self-esteem and identity (NICE, 2009). Research has highlighted the salience of work to how people define themselves (Du Gay, 1996; Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), along with the ability to provide for oneself and the security of financial and physical safety (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2007). Gaining employment as a source of income is necessary for most people and threats to livelihood can have devastating effects on well-being (Lovell & lee, 2011). However, recent research commissioned by the mental health charity Mind (2013) revealed that work is fast becoming the biggest cause of stress in people's lives, having larger effects than debt or financial problems and negatively impacting upon mental and physical health.

This portfolio aims to increase awareness among clinicians of the need to be mindful of workplace issues when working with clients, taking into account the impact of traumatic experiences which affect the individual's work life upon psychological health and identity. The portfolio urges practitioners to take a broader perspective on what constitutes a traumatic event given the demonstrated traumatic impact of experiences such as workplace bullying and physical injury which affect the individual's work life. The portfolio thus focuses in different ways on three areas related to the topic of work, trauma and identity relevant to the practice of counselling psychology. Section B comprises an exploratory piece of research focusing on the experience of psychological difficulty as a result of being bullied in the workplace. Section D presents a paper for publication which explores further the impact of workplace bullying upon identity.

The following section presents an overview of each of these sections and their objectives. The preface concludes with a reflection on the personal journey I have undertaken throughout my training and the learning that has resulted.

Section B: Doctoral research

This section consists of an original piece of qualitative research that aims to explore in-depth the experience of psychological difficulty following being bullied in the workplace. My interest in conducting research in the area of workplace bullying stems from a personal and professional interest in the topic. An initial interest in the long-term psychological consequences of childhood bullying that persist into adulthood developed into a curiosity to understand what the psychological experience of bullying in adult life might be like. Having conducted a review of the literature in this area and found evidence of a link between workplace bullying and psychological difficulties, I was inspired to alter the focus of my research to explore how targets of workplace bullying might experience psychological effects. Additionally, I wanted to look at how this might have been overcome as this could offer implications for practice for professionals working with clients who have been affected by workplace bullying.

Despite intensive research into the topic of workplace bullying over the past twenty years which has highlighted the role of being bullied in the workplace in the aetiology of psychological ill-health, there has been little research into the psychological consequences of workplace bullying from a counselling psychology perspective. The study presented uses semi-structured interview data analysed by means of interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore in-depth the experiences of eight self-labelled targets of workplace bullying. There is a particular focus on how participants have experienced workplace bullying, how they have made sense of their experience, how they perceive effects on their psychological health, how they might explain such effects, and how they have coped with their experience. Four superordinate themes emerged from the analysis: 'Bullying as a Powerful Experience', 'Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying', 'Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity' and 'Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied'. The findings support the conceptualisation of workplace bullying as a traumatic experience and highlight the centrality of the devastating effects upon the identity and self-concept of the participants to their experiences of psychological distress. A rich description of the participants' experiences of psychological distress

following being bullied at work is presented and discussed in relation to existing literature and theory. Implications and applications for the clinical and research practice of counselling psychology and other health professionals are subsequently highlighted. These results stress further the need for the development of therapeutic guidelines which might be used with this client group similar to those established for victims of other traumatic experiences.

Section D: Paper for publication

This section presents a paper which will be submitted for publication to the British Journal of Guidance and Counselling. The paper presents part of the larger doctoral research and specifically focuses on the superordinate theme 'Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity'. This theme was chosen because it warranted further consideration as there has been little research examining workplace bullying and identity. I was particularly interested in how participants had learned to manage the threats to their identity and how these experiences might help inform the practice of counselling psychology. By drawing attention to this underexplored area, I hoped to make a unique contribution to the field. The findings provide support for the recently emerging literature surrounding the devastating identity threats posed by workplace bullying and may assist the understanding of psychological difficulty in the context of workplace bullying. These results are illuminated through discussion in relation to the existing literature and by linking the findings to identity theory. The paper concludes with implications for clinical practice along with directions for future research.

Personal Reflections

This portfolio represents the culmination of a four year process of training both as a practitioner and as a researcher. The three different sections of the portfolio reflect the personal and professional learning, discovery and transformation which have been intertwined with the formation of my own sense of identity as a Counselling Psychologist as I approach the end of my training and hopefully make the transition from trainee to fully qualified status. Through the process of conducting research,

writing a paper for publication and reflecting on my client work, I feel my own life, too, has been shaped by the past four years of training and learning, highlighting the role of work and identity in my own life. As someone who has had to undertake paid work outside of the course, I have often found managing my workload alongside the academic work on the course challenging. I have particularly struggled with completing the research thesis due to financial difficulties which meant that I have had to work two jobs, in addition to my placements. During the course, I lost my paid job working as a Trainee Counselling Psychologist in a clinical practice due to lack of funding and had to return to a lower paid job outside the field of psychology. This situation had implications for the way in which I viewed myself as a psychologist and I recognise that this posed a threat to my own sense of identity as I felt an incongruity between my role as a psychologist and my role in my job outside of psychology. In reflecting on my personal context, I realise that these experiences are relevant to my development as a Counselling Psychologist. Although the past four years have been incredibly stressful and demanding, I reflect that as the course is coming to an end, I feel more rounded and have a stronger sense of self both as a person and as a practitioner as I continue on the journey of discovery and development into the kind of Counselling Psychologist I am, and hope to be.

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Section B: The Research

Experiences of psychological ill-health following being bullied in the workplace: An interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Supervised by Dr Courtney Raspin

Abstract

Research exploring the psychological consequences of workplace bullying has demonstrated that exposure to bullying may have devastating effects on the health and well-being of those who experience it. However, the nature of this relationship remains virtually unknown and there is an increasing call for researchers to undertake a more interpretive and individualised orientation to the bullying phenomenon. There is little research into workplace bullying from a counselling psychology perspective and yet research developing therapeutic guidelines for models of intervention with targets of workplace bullying is essential given the impact of bullying upon psychological health. The current study therefore aims to consider the therapeutic needs of targets of workplace bullying by exploring how targets make sense of and give meaning to their experiences. It is hoped that this will provide insights into the ways in which workplace bullying can have detrimental psychological effects and point to potential interventions that may be utilised when working therapeutically with targets of workplace bullying. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the current study explores in-depth the experiences of eight self-labelled targets of workplace bullying. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to explore: how participants have experienced workplace bullying, how they have made sense of their experience, how they perceive effects on their psychological health, how they might explain such effects, and how they have coped with their experience. The findings comprise of four superordinate themes: 'Bullying as a Powerful Experience', 'Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying', 'Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity' and 'Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied'. These support the conceptualisation of workplace bullying as a traumatic experience with devastating impacts upon targets' sense of self. A rich description of the participants' experiences of psychological distress following being bullied at work is presented and discussed. Implications and applications for the clinical practice of counselling psychology are subsequently highlighted.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As the present study focuses on the experience of psychological distress following being bullied in the workplace, this review will take a perspective on the relevant literature concerning the psychological impact of workplace bullying along with theoretical explanations that have been presented for such effects. It will also consider the available literature in relation to working therapeutically with individuals who have experienced workplace bullying. The following chapter addresses the importance of researching workplace bullying by illustrating its serious effects on the individual and offers a rationale for the study.

Introduction to Workplace Bullying

Carroll Brodsky, a US psychiatrist, conducted one of the earliest studies of workplace bullying published in his book 'The Harassed Worker' (1976). His interviews revealed that such employees portrayed symptoms including nervousness, irritability, chronic fatigue, insomnia, tension, memory problems, physical pains, aggression, depression and self-hatred. The study, however, stirred little interest at the time and pioneering work was subsequently conducted in Scandinavia by Heinz Leymann in the early 1980s. His work with child targets of bullying in schools engendered an awareness of similar experiences in his adult patients. The concept, nature and significance of bullying at work, although seemingly endemic prior to this, then found its importance in the UK in the 1990s. A freelance journalist named Andrea Adams (1992) brought the issue to public attention through a series of BBC radio broadcasts; labelling the phenomenon 'bullying'. As a result of Adams' work, interest in and the study of workplace bullying intensified in the UK leading to the development of a large number of academic books, articles and self-help resources on the topic from within the psychological, human resource, management and organisational communities along with extensive media interest (Lewis, 2002). While Scandinavia and the UK continue to lead research in this area, as illustrated in the literature review, workplace bullying research is now conducted internationally (Zapf et al., 2011).

What is Workplace Bullying?

There is no one agreed concise and comprehensive definition of workplace bullying available in the literature (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). As a result, the terminology used to define and operationalise workplace bullying varies from author to author, discipline to discipline, and country to country and there has been a call for the development of a standard nomenclature (Crawshaw, 2009). Various concepts have been used in the European literature such as 'mobbing', 'harassment', 'bullying', 'victimisation' and 'psychological terror'. The term 'mobbing' continues to be used in Germany and the Scandinavian countries, while the term 'bullying' is more common in Britain (Einarsen, 2000; Zapf & Einarsen, 2001). Although the terms 'bullying' and 'mobbing' may have semantic nuances and different connotations depending on where they are used and therefore may be interpreted differently, for all practical purposes they refer to the same phenomenon and have been used interchangeably (Einarsen et al., 2011; Monks et al., 2009). The present review therefore draws on research referring to mobbing, bullying and harassment in the workplace. The term 'bullying' is the most widely used and understood in the UK literature (Einarsen, 2000) and thus is the preferred term for the purpose of this thesis. Following conventions in bullying research, those who experience workplace bullying are referred to as 'targets' and those who bully as 'bullies', or 'perpetrators' (Namie & Namie, 2000).

The international literature included in this review demonstrates that workplace bullying can have psychological consequences in many countries and cultures. However, cultural differences in the way in which bullying is experienced have been largely overlooked in the literature. It appears that cultural differences may influence the degree of distress experienced and the type of bullying that causes the most distress (Sidle, 2010). Care should thus be taken in the interpretation of results across cultures (Smith & Monks, 2008). It is therefore acknowledged that the findings presented may not be directly comparable and translatable across cultures. However, although bullying may be understood and interpreted differently depending upon the culture of the country in which it takes place (Escartin et al., 2011; Power et al., 2013), the European research tradition has been characterised by a high degree of unity regarding the concepts and features of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Workplace bullying has been defined as the "systematic persecution of a colleague, subordinate or superior, which, if continued, may cause severe social, psychological and psychosomatic problems for the victim" (Einarsen, 1999, p.17; Einarsen et al., 2011). This definition is considered to be useful as it identifies that workplace bullying often occurs systematically and repetitively over time and acknowledges the potential negative psychological costs that may result to individuals. Generally, bullying at work is covert, indirect and involves negative psychological rather than overt physical behaviours (Leymann, 1996; Mayhew et al., 2004). Although it is difficult to provide an exhaustive list of bullying behaviours, Rayner and Hoel (1997) grouped workplace bullying into five categories based on a review of the bullying literature. These include: Threats to professional status (e.g. belittling opinion, public humiliation, accusations of lack of effort); threats to personal standing (e.g. name-calling, insults, intimidation, devaluing with reference to age); isolation (e.g. preventing access to opportunities, physical/social isolation, withholding information); overwork (e.g. undue pressure, impossible tasks and deadlines, unnecessary disruptions); and destabilisation (e.g. failure to give credit when due, assigning meaningless tasks, removal of responsibility, repeatedly reminding target of mistakes, setting up to fail).

Workplace bullying is characterised by several features including: repetition, duration, escalation and power disparity (Einarsen et al., 2011). Being bullied at work involves situations in which targets are subjected to repeated, persistent negative acts that are intimidating, malicious and stigmatising on a nearly daily basis (Einarsen et al. 2011; Leymann, 1990; Rayner & Hoel, 1997). A further prominent feature of bullying is the prolonged nature of the experience. Studies have reported average durations of greater than twelve months (Zapf et al., 2011), eighteen months (Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001), three years (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996) and five years (Vartia, 2001). Bullying is usually a long-lasting process that escalates and intensifies over time 'wearing down' its targets (Einarsen et al., 2011). Bullying often begins with covert negative acts that are difficult to identify as bullying due to their indirect nature and gradually escalates to more frequent and harmful behaviours (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen et al., 2011). Another central feature of bullying is the perceived imbalance of power between the target and the bully that exists prior to the onset of bullying or arises as a result of on-going bullying (Keashly & Nowell,

2003). Typically, during the escalating process of bullying, the target ends up in an inferior position and perceives that they lack resources to retaliate or to stop the bullying once it has become an established mode of interaction (Einarsen et al., 2011; Leyman, 1990; Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002).

The Prevalence of Workplace Bullying

Prevalence figures for workplace bullying vary greatly between studies and countries. As there is no standard definition of bullying, each study uses differing definitions and measures of bullying and therefore measures different kinds of experiences. This has made assessing prevalence rates problematic. Nevertheless, workplace bullying has been found to be highly prevalent in the UK and several large-scale national surveys have documented the extent of bullying. Hoel et al. (2001) revealed that in their sample of 5288 employees from a wide range of workplaces in the UK, one in ten respondents (10.6%) had experienced workplace bullying in the six months prior to the survey. In 2006, Hoel and Giga found that 13.6% of participants in their study reported being bullied in the previous six months. More recently, in a meta-analytical study by Nielsen, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2010) an estimated global prevalence rate for workplace bullying was found to range from 11% to 18% depending on the measurement method used.

The Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying

Research exploring the psychological consequences of workplace bullying has demonstrated that repeated exposure to bullying may have devastating effects on the health and well-being of those who experience it. A link between workplace bullying and subsequent psychological consequences has been well established in the literature and bullying has been found to have significant psychological effects on targets even when controlling for the effects of other job stressors (Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2010). It has therefore been claimed that workplace bullying is a more devastating problem for targets than all other types of work-related stressors combined and it has been conceptualised as a severe social stressor and as a traumatic event (Hogh, Mikkelsen & Hansen, 2011; Vartia, 2001; Zapf, Knorz &

Kulla, 1996). Being bullied has been associated with impaired psychological, physical and occupational health; deterioration of interpersonal relationships and family functioning; and financial crisis (Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiadou, 2003; Rayner et al., 2002; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik & Alberts, 2006). Research exploring the psychological consequences of workplace bullying can be divided into quantitative and qualitative studies which will now be considered in turn.

Quantitative Studies

Early quantitative studies provided evidence that targets of workplace bullying exhibit symptoms of clinical anxiety and depression (Quine, 1999). More recently, Niedhammer, David and Degioanni et al. (2006) conducted a large scale study exploring the association between workplace bullying and depressive symptoms in 7694 employees in the French working population. Exposure to bullying was found to be a risk factor for depressive symptoms with more frequent exposure associated with a higher risk of depressive symptoms. This supports a dose–response association which the authors argue confirms the likelihood of a causal relationship between bullying and depressive symptoms. The results also showed that past exposure to bullying still had an impact on depressive symptoms demonstrating the long-term psychological effect of bullying. However conclusions as to causality could not be drawn due to the cross-sectional design of the survey.

Brousse et al. (2008) investigated the psychological effects of workplace bullying in a sample of 48 patients who had no previous psychiatric history presenting at a clinic for those experiencing workplace bullying. Interview and questionnaire data demonstrated that 81% of the patients showed high levels of stress, 83% presented with anxiety and 52% presented with depression at the initial consultation with one in four patients reporting suicidal ideation. The patients reported feelings of shame and guilt for having been bullied and presented with loss of self-confidence. The patient's symptoms furthermore influenced their capacity to return to work with 25/48 patients reporting a deep fear of returning to or approaching their workplace.

The severity of the effects of workplace bullying is clearly pointed out by Leymann (1996), who claimed that in Sweden approximately 10-20% of annual suicides were

related to being bullied at work and indeed the media have reported many cases of suicides related to workplace bullying (Hogh et al., 2011). Recent empirical studies have found workplace bullying to be a significant predictor of suicidal ideation. In an interview study of 102 targets of bullying, Pompili et al. (2008) indicated that bullied workers have a higher risk of suicide, even for those with no prior psychiatric disorder. The results showed that 48% of participants had no suicide risk, 31.4% had a low risk, 16.7% had a medium risk and 3.9% had a high risk. Suicidal ideation was associated with greater reported psychopathology along with hopelessness, rage and impulsivity provoked by workplace bullying.

Soares' (2012) study analysing the relationship between suicidal ideation, hopelessness and workplace bullying revealed an elevated and significant level of suicidal ideation in individuals who experienced bullying compared to those who had not experienced bullying. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between the duration of bullying and suicidal ideation indicating that exposure to longer-term bullying and higher frequency bullying intensified suicidal ideation. Suicide, however, is likely to have multiple causes and other factors are likely to interact with and influence suicidal ideation. Therefore it is impossible to identify workplace bullying as the sole cause of suicide.

Bullying has also been shown to impact the physical health and physiology of those targeted. Kivimaki et al. (2003) found in their longitudinal study of 5432 hospital employees that workplace bullying served as a risk factor for both depression and cardiovascular disease during the two year follow-up among those who were free from these at baseline. The targets had a four times higher risk of developing depressive symptoms controlling for gender, age, salary, weight and illness at baseline. The data showed a clear cumulative relationship between bullying and the incidence of depression with longer exposure to bullying associated with greater risk of depression. This supports the status of workplace bullying as an aetiological factor of mental health difficulties. Studies have also shown that targets of workplace bullying are more likely to have sleep difficulties (Niedhammer et al., 2009), insomnia (Moreno-Jimenez et al., 2008), and more often use sleep medication and sedatives compared to non-bullied respondents (Vartia, 2001).

Studies have also documented the physiological consequences of workplace bullying using biological measurements. Hansen, Hogh and Persson (2011) studied the relationship between bullying at work, mental health and cortisol secretion in 1944 employees from 55 workplaces in Denmark. Individuals who were bullied generally reported poorer psychological health and had lower levels of salivary cortisol when compared to the non-bullied reference group. This indicated chronic symptoms of a sustained physiological stress response in bullied individuals. A lower concentration of cortisol has also previously been observed in individuals with PTSD compared with controls (Yehuda et al., 1996). The authors speculate that experiencing bullying reduces cortisol secretion which may possibly be a sign of emerging poor health. In this way, experiencing bullying at work may be associated with measurable physiological responses that can contribute to the development of ill psychological and physical health.

Although it is debated whether workplace bullying can be considered to constitute an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to self or others as required by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) criteria for PTSD (American Psychiatric Association; APA; 2000); it has been documented that prolonged exposure to workplace bullying may in fact elicit symptoms of PTSD including avoidance, hyperarousal and re-experiencing symptoms (e.g. Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a; Tehrani, 2004). Targets also appear to present with symptoms associated with trauma including fear, anxiety, helplessness, depression and shock (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) conducted clinical assessments of 64 targets of bullying attending a Swedish rehabilitation clinic specialising in the treatment of PTSD in targets of workplace bullying. They diagnosed chronic and severe PTSD in 59 of the 64 targets and suggested that the severity of PTSD was statistically comparable to that reported in female victims of rape and prison camp survivors, and greater than symptoms experienced by train drivers who had killed suicidal persons on railway lines.

Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back (1994) interviewed 19 targets of severe workplace bullying in higher education. The targets were found to experience high levels of anxiety, depression, aggressive feelings, insomnia, loss of concentration, dejection, sociophobia and a sense of apathy leading the authors to conclude that

these targets presented with symptoms consistent with PTSD. Furthermore, the targets reported that these symptoms were a direct consequence of the bullying they experienced. However, Bjorkqvist et al. did not conduct a full assessment of PTSD symptoms using diagnostic procedures or criteria. Moreover, while participants' self-reports identified bullying as a cause of their problems the direction of causation is difficult to objectively establish.

Similarly, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004) investigated PTSD among 102 targets of workplace bullying recruited from two Norwegian national associations against bullying at work. Three out of four respondents reported symptoms above the recommended Impact of Event Scale (IES-R: Weiss & Marmar, 1997) and Post-Traumatic Stress Scale (PTSS-10: Raphael, Lundin & Waeiseth, 1989) threshold for PTSD and scored higher on the IES-R and PTSS-10 than three comparison groups (parents of schoolchildren involved in a fatal bus accident, UN personnel one year after returning from a war zone and a group of medical students having completed a stressful aspect of their training). The authors caution, however, that the findings are only indicators of PTSD as diagnostic interviews were not undertaken. Furthermore, as the participants were all recruited from two associations of workplace bullying, the sample could consist of more severely impacted individuals than is typical for targets of bullying.

Tehrani (2004) surveyed the workplace bullying experiences of 165 care professionals including occupational health nurses, counsellors and personnel professionals. Of the 67 care professionals that had been bullied in the past two years it was found that 44% were experiencing symptoms at a level consistent with a diagnosis of PTSD. However, although the respondents exhibited re-experiencing, avoidance and arousal trauma symptoms, the relationship between these symptoms differed to those found in victims of other trauma in that the symptoms of arousal and re-experience had formed a single cluster with avoidance remaining as a separate cluster. Tehrani (2012) points out that similar constellations of symptoms have been found in those experiencing domestic violence and victims of childhood abuse. Indeed it has been observed that bullying shares similarities with other forms of relational abuse such as domestic violence and that behaviours within these relationships may also meet the definition of bullying in that there is a power disparity and individuals are exposed to prolonged, repeated, negative threatening

behaviours from which it is impossible to escape (Monks & Coyne, 2011; Monks et al., 2009; Tehrani, 2012).

Individual bullying incidents are unlikely to meet the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) criteria for a traumatic event. However, it has been argued that prolonged exposure to traumatic experiences can lead to a cumulative form of traumatic stress (Scott & Stradling, 2006) and the studies reviewed here suggest that targets' symptoms appear to be compatible with a diagnosis of PTSD. Practitioners and researchers such as Tehrani (2004; 2012) have challenged the view that PTSD cannot be applied to targets of workplace bullying and suggest that the diagnosis of PTSD best captures the psychological symptoms experienced by targets. Therefore interventions traditionally employed to treat PTSD may be used effectively to help targets of bullying (Tehrani, 2004). In addition, Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002a) argue that the high prevalence of targets suffering from PTSD symptomatology stresses the need to develop therapeutic guidelines similar to those aimed at treating PTSD resulting from other trauma experiences.

A recent poll conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI: Namie, 2012) measured physical and psychological health complications occurring after exposure to bullying in a convenience sample of 516 individuals. The most common health problems resulting from bullying were: Anticipation of next negative event; overwhelming anxiety; sleep disruption; loss of concentration or memory; uncontrollable mood swings; states of agitation or anger; pervasive sadness; heart palpitations; insomnia; high blood pressure; obsession over personal circumstances; intrusive thoughts; loss of affect; depression; and migraine. Approximately half (49%) of targets reported being diagnosed with clinical depression, 30% reported being diagnosed with PTSD and 63% saw a mental health professional for their symptoms. This study suggests that targets of bullying experience an alarming array of psychological difficulties as a result of being bullied. However, this study would have been accessed by those seeking support for workplace bullying and who may therefore have been likely to be experiencing more severe effects.

The majority of evidence concerning the psychological effects of workplace bullying is based on self-report questionnaire data which may only provide indirect measurements of bullying and psychological ill-health. In contrast to this, Nolfe et

al. (2008) objectively evaluated the psychopathological effects of workplace bullying in 533 participants who approached a Work Psychopathology Medical Centre using clinical diagnoses according to DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) criteria. The most frequently reported diagnoses were adjustment disorders (58.3%) mood disorders (mainly major depression) (31.5%) and anxiety disorders (mainly PTSD) (8.7%). Furthermore, longitudinal studies offer the possibility of measuring exposure and effects at different time points, thus making it easier to conclude the direction of the relationship between exposure to bullying and health effects (Zapf et al., 1996). Recently, Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of the longitudinal relationship between bullying and mental health. Based on the findings from 13 samples (N=62,916) it was found that exposure to bullying at baseline was significantly related to a subsequent increase in mental health difficulties.

To conclude, the empirical evidence convincingly links bullying to serious psychological consequences for targets. However quantitative studies are not able to access individual stories about the psychological effects of workplace bullying and little research has qualitatively explored the experience of psychological distress following being bullied in the workplace. According to Tracy et al. (2006) research that aims to understand what bullying 'feels' like is vital both practically and theoretically in order to understand how and why bullying is so costly to individuals.

Qualitative Studies

Early qualitative studies and clinical reports demonstrated that emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, helplessness, irritability, depression and despair may result from being bullied at work (Leymann, 1990; Leymann, 1996). More recently, Lewis (2004) conducted a content analysis of unstructured interviews with 15 college and university lecturers who were self-selecting targets of bullying. The participants presented with feelings of powerlessness, humiliation, inferiority, withdrawal and hopelessness along with a range of emotions including anger, despair, sadness and exhaustion which Lewis described may have indicated the presence of depressive symptomatology. Lewis found predominant feelings of shame which appeared to last long after the bullying episodes had ended. Shame was attributed to being exposed as targets of bullying to colleagues, family and themselves along with

feelings of inadequacy and incompetence for failing to deal with the bullying. This made it difficult for the targets to confront the bullies or to report the incidents.

In order to explore the emotional costs of workplace bullying, Tracy et al. (2006) used metaphor analysis based on qualitative data gathered from focus groups, interviews and target drawings. They found that targets of bullying described their bullying experience as a nightmare, battle, water torture, and noxious substance and likened themselves to vulnerable children, slaves, prisoners, animals and heartbroken lovers. Interpretation of the metaphors revealed that bullying terrorised, humiliated, dehumanised and isolated those targeted.

In a grounded theory study, with ten British female targets of workplace bullying, Lewis and Orford (2005) found that participants related feelings of anxiety and a threatened sense of self to the breakdown of roles and relationships at home and work due to the bullying. This was especially the case where expectations of support both inside and outside of work were not fulfilled which subsequently reduced the target's resources and ability to defend themselves against bullying. The participants reported feelings of diminished self-worth and shame, and that the denial of support they experienced had been distressing and traumatising in itself. An important aspect of support was identified as 'believing in you' which offered participants some validation and protection of their sense of self. However, in the workplace, managers and even union officials failed to hear the targets or to take their problems seriously in contrast to participants' needs for others to listen and accept their accounts.

A further grounded theory study by Lewis (2006) demonstrated that experiences of bullying challenged targets' sense of self and assumptions about the world of work which Lewis argued is consistent with cognitive theories of trauma (e.g. Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Other qualitative research similarly supports the conceptualisation of bullying as a traumatic event which can result in PTSD symptomatology. van Heugten (2010) undertook a grounded theory study into the psychological impact of bullying with 17 social workers in New Zealand who had been targets of bullying. Psychological effects included professionally diagnosed depression, stress, anger, shame, humiliation, fear and anxiety along with hypervigilance, loss of concentration, loss of confidence and grief which van Heugten suggested appeared to

be symptomatic of PTSD. Ultimately however, most participants considered themselves to be wiser and more resilient as a result of their experiences.

In their grounded theory study of interviews with 20 targets of bullying Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) also found bullying to be perceived as a traumatic event causing the bullied person to be 'marked for life' which the authors argued frames workplace bullying as a serious psychological trauma with severe and long-lasting effects. The interviews showed that the targets experienced psychological symptoms just months after the onset of bullying which included guilt, shame, loss of confidence and self-esteem, inability to concentrate, sleep disturbance, mood swings, anxiety, depression, despair and fear. The targets described how they lived in constant fear of the bullies and lacked support from the workplace, stating that the target's view of the situation was often questioned and judged to be a misconception of events. Targets were unable to leave their job before obtaining a position elsewhere, however, as bullying continued they lost the necessary energy to look for other jobs and experienced a fear of applying for other positions. Some individuals were even forced to leave their employment due to their failing health. For some, thoughts of suicide were considered as a final solution when they were incapable of changing the situation and targets were left feeling worthless and that life was meaningless.

The study also demonstrated, however, that activities outside of work such as voluntary work or studying provided targets with strength and motivation and gave new meaning to life. Bullying also resulted in positive experiences, for example some targets reported that they had become more humble and attentive towards other people. Similarly, in Lovell and Lee's (2011) longitudinal case study with a target of bullying, significant improvement in health materialised after the target left their employment and took on a new job. The target was able to overcome the negative effects from bullying by utilising support mechanisms and engaging in activities which helped them to take more control of their life.

Hallberg and Strandmark's (2006) findings are also consistent with other qualitative research which has found that targets of bullying may develop fear surrounding beginning a new job. Mikkelsen and Iversen (2002, as cited in Hogh et al., 2012) conducted an interview study with 30 targets of bullying in the trade and commerce professions. At the time of the study 21 of the targets were unemployed mostly due

to their exposure to bullying and resulting poor psychological health. Targets perceived that they had lost the ability to work due to stress and fear associated with the workplace along with an intense fear of job interviews.

Quantitative research has shown that targets of bullying are 1.5 times more likely to take extended sick leave than employees who are not bullied (Kivimäki, Elovainio & Vahtera, 2000). A grounded theory study by O'Donnell, MacIntosh and Wuest (2010) used semi-structured interviews to investigate the experience of sickness absence among 18 Canadian targets of workplace bullying. The participants reported experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression along with feelings of anger, frustration, irritability, lowered self-confidence, powerlessness, hopelessness, fear, and isolation. The targets explained that the cumulative effects of on-going bullying, lack of support, failing health, and a declining ability to function in the workplace left them feeling that they could no longer continue at work. Sickness absence was beneficial in addressing health difficulties and gaining relief from bullying. Strategies used by participants as they attempted to regain their health included engaging in self-help activities such as relaxation, prayer, exercise, and seeking help from professionals.

MacIntosh (2005) conducted focus learning groups with 21 nurses whom had experienced workplace bullying. The nurses described that the experience of bullying affected all aspects of themselves and their lives, interfering with their overall functioning, and leaving a residual effect even when they were no longer being bullied. The physiological impact of bullying included frequent headaches, tearfulness, dry throat, gastrointestinal problems, changes in body weight, sleep disturbances, diminished energy, exhaustion, disrupted concentration, and hypervigilance. Most participants described feeling overwhelmed and experiencing fear, lack of joy and hope, declining confidence, and feelings of resignation, anger, depression, inferiority and disappointment. They spoke of feeling isolated and having no one to talk to and nowhere to turn. Many participants reported that they required counselling to assist in managing symptoms. Participants felt forced to leave their workplaces, incurring financial and occupational stress due to perceived career implications and feelings of loss. Some participants, however, received support from the workplace which was useful in reducing the incidence of bullying and also served to reduce feelings of isolation.

The qualitative studies listed here support the findings from the quantitative literature regarding the detrimental effects of workplace bullying on psychological health and explain what bullying is like on a more individual level. However, they are not without their limitations which mainly include issues of self-selection and generalisability. Self-selection may have attracted participants who may have experienced more severe psychological effects as a result of bullying. In addition, it is difficult to generalise from qualitative studies due to the small sample sizes utilised.

Explaining the Effects

A strong association between workplace bullying and subsequent psychological effects indicated by the quantitative and qualitative literature has led researchers to conclude that harmful psychological effects can result from being a target of workplace bullying and furthermore that these effects may prevail long after the incidence of bullying. This suggests that bullying is an aetiological factor for psychological difficulties. However, few theoretical models for how bullying is related to psychological ill-health have been proposed in the literature and there is no one explanatory theory regarding how and why experiencing workplace bullying may result in psychological distress.

Research into mechanisms that may explain the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological consequences has suggested that those with particular personality traits, for example neuroticism, may be more likely to experience depression and anxiety in response to traumatic events due to an inability to cope with stressors such as bullying (Ormel, Rosmalen & Farmer, 2004). Coyne, Seigne and Randall (2000) found that targets of bullying tended to be less extraverted, independent and more neurotic and conscientious compared to a non-bullied sample. Coyne et al. (2003) also found targets of bullying displayed a tendency to be easily upset, were more likely to experience difficulty in coping with personal criticism and were more anxious, tense, and suspicious of others in comparison with controls.

In the Brousse et al. (2008) study mentioned earlier 88% of patients presented with a neuroticism-related personality trait marked by a strong tendency to avoid direct

conflict and inadequate stress response strategies with this percentage remaining statistically unchanged at the one-year follow-up consultation. The authors report that this personality trait may explain an underlying vulnerability to bullying situations and the resulting mental health outcomes. A questionnaire study of 437 employees by Hansen et al. (2006) found negative affectivity (NA; a general proneness to experience anger, fear, sadness, and distress and to view the world, self and others in a negative way, Watson & Pennebaker, 1989) to partially mediate the association between bullying and health symptoms. Additionally, Moreno-Jimenez et al. (2007) found that social anxiety and assertiveness moderated the relationship between bullying and its effects on health with those presenting with high levels of social anxiety experiencing more negatively affected health and those with high levels of assertiveness experiencing less negatively affected health.

However, other studies have found that personality factors do not moderate the relationship between workplace bullying and psychological difficulty. Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004) found that both state NA and state positive affectivity (PA; a trait reflecting the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, determined and alert, Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) neither moderated nor mediated relationships between bullying and PTSD symptoms. Indeed Djurkovic, McCormack and Casimir (2006) found that bullying and neuroticism had independent effects on psychological symptoms and furthermore that the effects of bullying were greater than the effects of neuroticism indicating bullying as the principal contributor to psychological difficulty. These results suggest that the disposition of the target does not appear to influence psychological reactions to bullying particularly as bullying was found to have a greater effect on psychological health. This supports a view that workplace bullying is experienced as traumatic regardless of the target's disposition (Nielsen et al., 2008)

Furthermore, it is unclear whether and to what extent the targets' personality can be seen as an antecedent or a result of bullying. Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) suggested that as a result of bullying the individual may develop personality changes comparable to the hypervigilance, intrusion and avoidance symptoms characteristic of PTSD. It is likewise possible that symptoms such as low self-esteem could be either an antecedent or consequence of bullying (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Leymann (1996) cautioned that such symptoms were being misunderstood by health

professionals and organisations as being inherent in the individual prior to bullying rather than as the result of being bullied and mistakenly held to be the cause of bullying (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996). According to Leymann (1996) this often resulted in incorrect diagnoses such as paranoia, manic depression or personality disorder being given to the target as explanations for being bullied which contributed to the escalation of psychological distress. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002b) conclude that personality by itself does not predict the occurrence of bullying, however it may influence the interpretation of bullying behaviours and how bullying takes on a psychological meaning. Hoel, Faragher and Cooper (2004) consider that it is the subjective experience of being bullied that is implicated in the development of mental health problems. Thus it appears to be important to explore how targets of workplace bullying make sense of their experiences as the meaning of bullying to targets is likely to be critical in understanding the processes whereby their experiences lead to psychological difficulties.

In addition to personality factors, researchers have examined the coping strategies used by targets and have suggested that effective coping resources such as social support mediate the relationship between bullying and psychological distress (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004). Research, however, indicates that although most targets employ strategies to attempt to stop the bullying, these often do not appear to be effective in resolving the situation (Hogh & Dofradottir, 2001; Niedl, 1996; Zapf & Gross, 2001). In a study among German targets of severe bullying, Zapf and Gross (2001) revealed the only coping strategy deemed successful in improving outcomes was transferring to a different position or leaving the organisation. Advice given by participants in the study to other targets was to leave the organisation and seek support elsewhere. A more recent study by the Workplace Bullying Institute (2007) found that a high percentage of bullying situations were resolved by the targets leaving the organisation either due to quitting, being sacked or transferring to another job with the same employer.

Targets appear to suffer from a lack of support in the workplace which is central to coping with the experience of bullying and in mitigating psychological health symptoms (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Matthiesen et al., 2003). Failures of employers to recognise, provide support and resolve bullying may have further negative effects upon the targets' psychological health, for example by resulting in

self-blame and loss of confidence (Lewis & Orford, 2005; Niedl, 1996), and may contribute to explanations of how psychological difficulties result from workplace bullying. There is evidence that the way in which the workplace deals with bullying moderates the relationship between bullying and its effects on targets (Keashly, 2001). Support from co-workers and managers as well as the effective implementation of relevant workplace policies appears to help targets to deal with bullying at work and may cushion targets psychologically from the effects of bullying by conveying to them that the organisation values them and cares about their well-being (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2008).

Bullying has also been conceptualised as an extreme social stressor (Leymann, 1996; Zapf, 1999) and transactional stress models have thus been used to account for its impact on targets (Zapf & Gross, 2001). Adopting transactional stress perspectives (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), psychological reactions following exposure to bullying can be seen as a function of the interaction between the severity and nature of the bullying situation and individual appraisal and coping processes. Psychological difficulties as a result of exposure to workplace bullying may therefore, for example, be seen as the appraisal of the event as a threat to the targets' well-being and exceeding his or her coping resources as they are unable to resolve the bullying situation.

Additionally, researchers have examined possible explanations for the relationship between exposure to bullying and symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002a) propose that Janoff-Bulman's (1989; 1992) cognitive theory of trauma may account for the observed relationship. According to Janoff-Bulman (1992), PTSD is caused by the shattering of basic assumptions or core beliefs individuals hold about themselves, other people, and the world. Basic assumptions for example of the world as safe, the self as valuable and competent, and others as caring enable individuals to operate effectively in their daily lives. Following exposure to a traumatic event such as bullying, targets may experience a sudden incongruity between their prior views and beliefs and the new trauma-related information. Such abrupt changes in core schemas are deeply threatening and give rise to stress responses as targets may realise that the assumptions on which their lives were founded are no longer viable (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983). Hence, targets must rebuild new schemas which account for the experience of being bullied.

However, some targets have difficulty doing so and experience symptoms characteristic of PTSD (Janoff-Bulman & Schwartzberg, 1990; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a).

Indeed, researchers such as Rodriguez-Munoz et al. (2010) have found that targets of bullying show more negative beliefs about the world, other people and themselves. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002a) found targets of bullying regarded themselves to be less worthy, capable and lucky than their non-bullied colleagues, perceived the world as lacking in benevolence, justice and predictability, and other people as less supportive and caring. They suggest that targets of bullying may find it hard to understand and make sense of why they are exposed to bullying which may therefore threaten assumptions of a meaningful and comprehensible world. As a result of bullying, targets may perceive the workplace to be characterised by threat, danger and insecurity which may threaten the assumption of benevolence of the world and other people. Additionally, many targets of bullying at work experience threats to their sense of self-worth due to prolonged exposure to attacks which have gradually undermined their self-confidence. Whereas targets often report that they considered themselves to be assertive, independent and self-efficacious prior to the bullying, following being bullied they may reconsider this self-image to one of weakness and helplessness resulting in low self-worth (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a).

Hogh, Mikkelsen and Hansen (2012) explain the negative psychological effects of bullying using Williams' (1997) theory of social ostracism. They argue that bullying characteristically involves isolation and exclusion, exposing the target to social ostracism. They suggest that from an evolutionary perspective there is a basic fear in all humans of being excluded from significant others particularly as the survival of human beings depends on them being integrated in a well-functioning social group. According to Williams and Zardo (2005), ostracism threatens four fundamental social needs that enable individuals to function in their daily lives and maintain health and well-being. Applying the theory to bullying it is suggested that firstly, being bullied deprives targets of a sense of belonging. Secondly, bullying threatens the need to maintain self-esteem by implying that targets are unworthy of recognition and appreciation from colleagues and managers. Third, bullying threatens the need to feel in control of interactions with others, which may be difficult as targets are consistently unable to control and prevent the bullying situation (Rayner et al., 2002;

Zapf & Gross, 2001). Lastly, bullying threatens targets' need for maintaining a belief in a meaningful existence. Long-term frustration of these needs may lead to extreme anxiety, depression and even psychotic reactions as individuals experience this as a threat to survival (Hogh et al., 2012).

Finally, Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) propose a psychobiological model to explain the psychological effects of exposure to workplace bullying building on the Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). They suggest that the prolonged duration of bullying develops into chronic cognitive activation such as worry and rumination which over time may lead to prolonged physiological activation manifesting in health impairments (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). As discussed earlier, evidence suggests that exposure to bullying can result in measurable physiological changes in targets (Hansen et al., 2011). According to Nielsen and Einarsen (2012), the severity of psychological outcomes of workplace bullying is then dependent upon the interaction between the severity and nature of the bullying behaviour and individual characteristics and coping mechanisms consistent with transactional stress theories (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Counselling the Targets

Workplace bullying is particularly relevant to counselling psychology given its effects on psychological health. However, despite documentation of its health effects, research into the treatment and recovery of targets of workplace bullying has not been salient within the UK in contrast to countries such as Germany and Sweden where clinics specialise in the treatment of targets of bullying (Leymann & Gustaffson, 1996; Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011). This perhaps reflects the longer history of the recognition of and research into workplace bullying in these countries. The literature demonstrates that many targets experience a lack of social and occupational support and therefore health professionals are likely to be approached by individuals seeking help with coping with bullying and its psychological effects. There is little research literature available, however, on successful treatment approaches for targets to guide intervention in clinical practice and it has been reported that many professionals misunderstand or do not recognise the aetiology and consequences of workplace bullying (Tehrani, 2012).

In their article discussing interventions clinicians can utilise when working with targets of workplace bullying, Lewis, Coursol and Wahl (2002) suggest that it is critical to the diagnosis and treatment of targets for clinicians to be aware of the psychological consequences associated with workplace bullying because many clients are often unable to recognise that they are targets and are likely to seek counselling for conditions such as depression, stress, anxiety, panic attacks and PTSD. Lewis et al. advocate that it is essential for clinicians to communicate an understanding of the targets' experience and that this can be demonstrated by helping them name and understand their experiences. They propose that this serves to validate the experience of the client assisting them in regaining their self-confidence and self-esteem. Clinicians may also provide targets with information about workplace bullying, normalising their experiences and identifying strategies for dealing with bullying. Given the association between workplace bullying and suicide (e.g. Soares, 2012), Lewis et al. note that clinicians need to recognise that targets can present with these symptoms and be alert to signs that targets intend to harm themselves.

A published dissertation abstract of a qualitative study using content analysis of interviews with 11 counsellors by Skorek (2009) describes the interventions counsellors consider effective or necessary when working with targets of workplace bullying. Interventions included active listening and assessment of functioning, building self-esteem, providing validation of the target's experience, educating the target, coaching, creating an action plan, and awareness of workplace resources. However, the counsellors reported a lack of and need for education, training, and information related to workplace bullying. Most of the participants did not refer targets to workplace resources because these were deemed to be unhelpful.

Tehrani (2012) promotes an integrative model of counselling targets of workplace bullying which incorporates elements of debriefing, cognitive-behavioural therapy, Trauma Incident Reduction (Bisbey & Bisbey, 1998) and narrative therapy (see Tehrani, 2003). Five main elements are utilised throughout the counselling process: assessment; education; symptom reduction; integration and understanding; and rehabilitation and return to work. Interventions used throughout the therapy process include providing education on the biological basis of stress and trauma, providing coping skills, desensitisation to re-experiencing symptoms, reflecting on and

understanding the client's role within the bullying and creating a return to work plan. Tehrani (2012) discusses that working with targets of workplace bullying requires the clinician to understand the nature and players involved in the 'bullying drama' and that one-to-one counselling relationships can be counterproductive when dealing with bullying as systemic issues in the organisational culture which may have led to bullying remain unchanged. The research suggests, however, that health professionals working outside of organisations are likely to be approached by targets of workplace bullying and there is little information and training available for individual practitioners in organisational elements of workplace bullying.

A recent online survey by the WBI (Namie, 2013) entitled "Mental Health Professionals' Grasp of Workplace Bullying" found that of 178 self-selected targets of workplace bullying who had sought psychological treatment; 30% of therapists had a complete understanding of work environments and the harm bullying caused, 23% were sympathetic and understood the role of the employer but lacked the necessary experience to help the client change the system, 40% knew the term only and focused on what the client must change about themselves and 7% were unfamiliar with the term workplace bullying. Namie suggests that the results demonstrate that approximately 70% of mental health professionals would benefit from further education about workplace bullying. Especially significant from the results was the finding that therapists need to more fully grasp how workers cannot control negative aspects of the work environment and how that affects the psychological health of targets.

Meglich-Sespico, Faley and Knapp (2007) suggest that targets may therefore be treated for symptoms without addressing the underlying root cause of their health problems. To manage this they argue that health professionals would benefit from a comprehensive educational program that includes information about the aetiology, symptoms, consequences and resolution of workplace bullying. Targets of bullying have frequently indicated that therapeutic treatment that is not adapted to the specific requirements of bullying is unsuccessful in assisting them with their difficulties as therapists tend to have limited understanding of workplace conflicts (Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011). Given that clinicians work mainly with individuals, gaining knowledge of organisational issues involved in bullying is therefore important in helping individual clients to deal with their difficulties.

Tehrani and Vaughan (2009) present a case study utilising the integrative counselling model described above with a client suffering from severe levels of anxiety, depression and PTSD as a result of extreme bullying in the workplace. The client published her own perspective of her experience of bullying (Vaughan, 2012) and described feeling overwhelmed, not understanding what was happening to her, living constantly in a climate of fear, and suffering with panic attacks, feelings of worthlessness, loss of concentration, isolation and despair. Vaughan provides, from a client's perspective, aspects of therapy that are crucial for targets of bullying. She describes that therapy helped her to realise that her reactions and symptoms were consistent with those found in other targets of bullying and that she was not going 'mad'. Relaxation and visualisation techniques were useful in breaking the avoidance strategies she had constructed after the bullying experience and in preparing to return to work. The therapeutic alliance also enabled her to understand and explore what had happened and the impact her own behaviour and reactions could have had on the bully. She explains that targets need to feel heard and recognised and encourages that recovery and healing from workplace bullying is possible.

Research and clinical work in Germany and Scandinavia has resulted in the provision of specialist clinics for targets of workplace bullying. Schwickerath and Zapf (2011) describe a therapy concept based on their in-patient treatment of targets of bullying in a rehabilitation clinic in Germany. The therapeutic work is characterised by a process of stages and integrates cognitive-behavioural therapy with results from workplace bullying research. The first stage, 'distancing', involves acknowledging the issues of concern, emotionally stabilising patients and establishing the therapeutic relationship. The second stage, 'understanding', involves the development of an individual formulation of the patient's difficulties. Patients are given information about the main manifestations, causes and consequences of workplace bullying to help them realise that they are not alone with their experiences and that others have faced similar situations. The 'decision making' stage aims to aid with decision making regarding return to work. The final stage, 'taking action', refers to the acquirement of skills, for example strengthening self-confidence and reappraising thoughts related to the bullying experience by cognitive restructuring. An evaluation of the therapy programme undertaken by the

authors (Schwickerath, 2009 as cited in Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011) based on a sample of 102 patients showed a significant reduction of psychological symptoms when compared before and after the treatment.

Research suggests that a high prevalence of those who have been bullied will seek help from mental health professionals and therefore important implications for treatment can be drawn from the research studies discussed here. For counselling psychologists and other clinicians, an understanding of the process of bullying as well as the ways in which clients attempt to make sense of being bullied seems critical in enabling more effective treatment. However, to date there exists a gap in the literature relating to which interventions, models and best practices effectively assist targets of workplace bullying and it is argued that treatment approaches merit further research (Farmer, 2011).

The Present Study

Project Rationale

Despite intensive research into the topic, workplace bullying continues to be worthy of research due to its serious implications, both for individuals and organisations. The existing literature has established that a relationship exists between workplace bullying and psychological difficulties, and has described possible underlying mechanisms which may account for such a link. However, the nature of this relationship remains virtually unknown and there is an increasing call for researchers to undertake a more interpretive and individualised orientation to the bullying phenomenon (Tracy et al., 2006). There is little research into workplace bullying from a counselling psychology perspective and further research is needed developing models of intervention with targets of bullying. The current study therefore aims to adopt a phenomenological perspective to gain an understanding of how targets of workplace bullying explain how this experience may have affected their psychological health. It is hoped that this will shed light on the mechanisms whereby workplace bullying can have detrimental psychological effects and point to interventions that may be utilised when working therapeutically with targets of workplace bullying.

The use of a qualitative design may also provide conceptual contributions to the research body of counselling psychology, as qualitative data can provide rich information from which theories can be built and tested (Rayner et al., 2002), perhaps contributing to an explanatory theory that accounts for the psychological effects of workplace bullying along with models of intervention. The research itself does not set out to verify or create an explanatory theory or therapeutic model of psychological ill health following being bullied in the workplace. Rather, it attempts to provide a greater understanding of the individual meanings of being bullied in the workplace and how targets make sense of the psychological effects in order to inform interventions with those targeted.

To establish an accurate diagnosis and subsequently provide sufficient support and intervention, therapists need a thorough understanding of how bullying is experienced by the target and how exposure to bullying may influence the target's work, health and life situation (Vie, Glaso & Einarsen, 2012). Therefore it is vital that clinicians have an awareness of the possible influence of workplace bullying in the aetiology of psychological disorder, and have an understanding of why this occurs, in order to meet the needs of targets of workplace bullying in therapeutic practice (Einarsen, 2000).

Research Aims and Questions

The present study is aimed at Counselling Psychologists and other health professionals who may be presented with clients suffering from the psychological effects of workplace bullying. The study aims to gain an understanding of how and why workplace bullying is so costly to an individual's psychological health and aims to consider the therapeutic needs of targets of workplace bullying by asking individuals who have been subjected to bullying about their experiences. This is reflected in the question that drives this research: 'How do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their psychological health?'. The study is interested in the ways in which targets of workplace bullying describe the effects this may have had on their psychological health. Asking targets about their perception of how and why being bullied led to psychological distress can discover how targets make sense

of and give meaning to their experiences and present potential guides for planning appropriate treatment interventions in therapeutic work to assist targets.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Rationale for adopting a qualitative approach

As the review of the literature has demonstrated, research concerning the psychological effects of workplace bullying has been largely dominated by the quantitative paradigm. Large scale quantitative studies have established that a relationship exists between workplace bullying and psychological distress, however the nature of this relationship is virtually unknown. More recently, a growing number of qualitative studies have been undertaken; however these remain relatively few in number compared to the volume of quantitative research. There is little research into workplace bullying from a counselling psychology perspective and there is a need for research investigating therapeutic interventions with targets of bullying. The current study therefore aims to gain an understanding of how and why workplace bullying is so costly to psychological health and aims to consider the therapeutic needs of targets by asking individuals who have been subjected to bullying about their experiences. The research aim to focus on the individual's attempt to make sense of their experience pointed towards a qualitative approach. The study therefore employs qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of individuals who have been bullied in the workplace and how they make sense of effects on their psychological health.

Whilst quantitative research is generally concerned with the quantification and identification of cause-effect relationships guided by positivist notions (Smith, 2008; Willig, 2008), qualitative research focuses on the subjective experiences of the individual and is concerned with understanding rather than finding an explanation (McLeod, 1999; 2001). Smith and Dunworth (2003) suggest that while quantitative methodologies can give a 'snapshot' recording at two points in time, a qualitative study can provide a description of what is occurring in between the two points through a participant's account of the process. Quantitative research often utilises structured reporting methods whereby participants are only able to respond using pre-determined questions and answers. In this sense, a quantitative methodology would not meet the aims of the study as this would be unable to access the intricate nature of how individuals perceive and interpret experiences of workplace bullying

and psychological distress. Thus, a qualitative approach was felt to be most appropriate for the current study. It is hoped that this may provide meaningful insights into the psychological consequences of workplace bullying, allowing participants to define and explore issues important to them without being constrained by the concepts set out in questionnaires. In addition, a qualitative approach resonated with me as qualitative research shares many of the values of counselling psychology including an interest in the subjective experiences of individuals (McLoed, 2003). It is anticipated that such research will make a useful contribution to the field, complementing, enriching and contextualising the extant quantitative and qualitative research. It is hoped the findings gleaned can then be integrated with the existing research to inform interventions for those who have experienced psychological distress as a result of bullying in the workplace.

Introduction to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, commonly referred to as IPA (Smith, 1996). IPA is a recently developed and still evolving approach to qualitative research in psychology. The approach was developed by Jonathan Smith in the mid-1990s to create "a qualitative approach to psychology which was grounded in psychology" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.180) to return to the exploration of the subjective experiences and personal accounts of individuals which Smith perceived to be an area that had become neglected in psychology (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith, 2003). The aim of IPA is to understand the meaning individuals attach to their experiences and how they make sense of their personal and social worlds by looking at the individual's own account of the processes they have been through (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Thus IPA posits that an experience can be understood via an examination of the meanings which people impress upon it (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

IPA is informed by and draws on concepts from phenomenology, a branch of philosophy that has also developed into an approach to research in the social sciences (Smith, 2007). Phenomenology is concerned with the knowledge derived from the study of consciousness and individual experience (Willig, 2008). The IPA approach is phenomenological in that it involves the detailed examination of an

individual's lived experience, the meaning of the experience to them, and their sense-making of it (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Through close examination of individual experiences, phenomenological analysts seek to capture the meaning and common features of an experience or event (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

Smith et al. (2009) point to the contribution of leading figures in phenomenological philosophy whose work has been influential to the development of IPA, including Husserl (1931/1969, 1936/1970) and Heidegger (1927/1962). Husserl proposed that the most fundamental source of knowledge is experience and his work established the importance of studying individuals' personal understandings of this experience in order to learn about the world. Heidegger further conceptualised the phenomenological method as essentially an interpretative process and his work has been influential to IPA researchers who have drawn on the idea that the interpretation of people's meaning-making processes is central to phenomenological enquiry. Heidegger's work also highlighted the complex relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted. It is generally acknowledged that the researcher brings their 'fore-conceptions' (prior experiences, assumptions, preconceptions) to the encounter and interprets any new stimulus in light of their own prior experience (Smith et al., 2009).

The methodological recommendations taken from phenomenological philosophy have therefore provided IPA researchers with an epistemological framework that takes as its focus the content of consciousness and the subjective experience of participants. IPA acknowledges that an individual's experience cannot be accessed directly and therefore it endeavours to understand an experience by investigating how it is given meaning by the participant (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA recognises the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of the researched (Osborn & Smith, 1998; Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997) and that the production of an interpretative account of a participant's experience is co-constructed between researcher and participant (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). As a result, the phenomenological analysis produced by the researcher is always an interpretation of the participant's experience (Willig, 2008).

IPA therefore entails a 'double hermeneutic' whereby "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social

world" (Smith, 2004, p.40). Ricoeur (1970, as cited in Smith et al., 2009) distinguished between two interpretative positions: a hermeneutics of 'empathy' which attempts to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms; and a hermeneutics of 'suspicion' which uses theoretical perspectives to shed light on the phenomenon. Smith (2004) has suggested that IPA takes a centre-ground position, combining these two positions, which has been described as 'understanding'. Larkin et al. (2006) discuss the phenomenological component of IPA to 'give voice' to the concerns of participants and the interpretative component to contextualise and 'make sense' of these concerns from a psychological perspective. The first aim of the IPA approach is therefore to produce a description of the participants' experiences, which tries to get as 'close' to the participants' view as is possible. The second aim is to develop an interpretative analysis, which positions the initial 'description' in relation to the wider social, cultural and theoretical context (Smith & Osborn, 2003). At this stage researchers may draw critically on psychological knowledge and theory in order to illuminate the experience described (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009).

A key tenet of IPA is that the process of analysis is iterative according to the 'hermeneutic circle' in that a researcher may move back and forth through a range of different ways of thinking about the data. To understand any given part, one looks at the whole, and to understand the whole one looks to the parts. Therefore, interpretation is circular rather than completing each step one after the other (Smith et al., 2009). Due to the acknowledgement that a researcher's own views, assumptions and beliefs will influence the interpretation of a participant's account, IPA stresses the importance of reflexivity on the researcher's part and encourages the researcher to critically examine their own preconceptions about the phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) propose that while sometimes we can identify our preconceptions in advance, sometimes they will emerge during the process of engaging with the new object presented and having engaged with the text, the researcher may be in a better position to know their preconceptions. For IPA researchers, this notion helps to envision the bracketing of our assumptions as a cyclical process and as something which can only be partially achieved.

IPA is also committed to idiography in that it aims to gain knowledge and understanding of how particular lived experiences have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al., 2009) and does

not attempt to make generalisations at a population level, or to establish general laws of behaviour (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA locates generalisations in the particular and hence develops them more cautiously. It is argued that this detailed exploration of the particular can inform us of "the centrality of certain general themes in the lives of all particular individuals" (Evans, 1993, p.8), which can potentially enable moving from the particular to the universal (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

Rationale for Adopting IPA

IPA allows us to explore the nature of subjective experiences and helps us to describe and understand the participant's account of the processes by which they make sense of their experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This attracted me to this research method as it lends itself to the purpose of the research to examine how targets of workplace bullying perceive and make sense of their own experiences of psychological distress. Furthermore, IPA allows the researcher to draw on a range of social and theoretical constructs during that process (Larkin et al., 2006). Therefore adopting an IPA approach would allow the analysis of the participants' accounts to be informed and enriched by existing research and theories concerning the psychological effects of workplace bullying. There are also striking parallels between the aims, philosophy and practices of counselling psychology and IPA which both seek to explore, understand and make sense of an individual's experience, and contextualise this from a psychological perspective (Larkin et al., 2006).

IPA is increasingly being used to examine the experience of psychological distress (Adame & Hornstein, 2006; Chew-Graham et al., 2002; Howes, Benton & Edwards, 2005; Smith et al., 2009) and seeks to explore how the individual attempts to make sense of such experiences. Therefore employing IPA as an investigative method for this study had a particular appeal. To the author's knowledge, there are no studies using IPA to explore the psychological consequences of workplace bullying. The IPA approach was thus felt to be able to provide the opportunity to investigate workplace bullying from a new perspective by learning how those who have experienced it make sense of experiences of psychological distress.

It is recognised that with time it will be possible for subsequent IPA studies to be conducted with other groups and so gradually more general claims can be made which may lead to the ability to consider the essential features of the psychological experience of workplace bullying (Smith et al., 2009). In the meantime, it is argued that the detailed idiographic analysis which IPA offers can make important and powerful contributions. Through connecting the findings to the extant literature and psychological theory, the present study can shed light on the existing research concerning the psychological effects of workplace bullying. Audiences for IPA studies include clinicians and others whose practice would be enhanced by understanding how individuals live through and make sense of a particular experience. The reader can make links between the findings of an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience and the claims in the extant literature, and begin to think of the implications for their own work (Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is hoped that this study may help to promote a greater awareness among clinicians of the psychological effects of workplace bullying and point to ways of supporting those individuals who have experienced bullying in the workplace.

IPA as opposed to other qualitative methodologies

In considering the methodology for the current study, I also considered grounded theory and discourse analysis.

IPA vs. Grounded Theory

Willig (2008) notes that IPA and grounded theory share many features. Both approaches aim to represent an individual or group's view of the world and share similar analytical stages and terminology. However the goal of grounded theory is to develop an explanatory theory of social processes, studied in the environments in which they take place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus it has been suggested that grounded theory is therefore best suited to address sociological research questions, as it focuses on theory construction and social processes that account for phenomena. IPA adopts a more psychological approach focused on gaining a detailed understanding of the nature of individual experiences. Willig (2008) argues that IPA differs from grounded theory in its particular suitability for understanding personal

experiences as opposed to social processes. For the purposes of this study, it could be argued that a grounded theory approach could have been appropriate in order to build a theory explaining the link between workplace bullying and psychological distress. However the primary aim for the study was not to build a new theory or framework but rather to explore the lived experience of workplace bullying and as such I feel that grounded theory would not provide an appropriate method of analysis.

IPA vs. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is concerned with studying and analysing the uses of language (Willig, 2008). It aims to understand how people use discursive resources in order to achieve personal, social and political objectives in social interaction (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Within the context of this study, discourse analysis could have been employed to explore how targets of workplace bullying use discursive resources to construct their experience of the psychological consequences of workplace bullying. However the aims of discourse analysis contrast with this study's aim to develop a detailed understanding of a particular lived experience. Discourse analysis was therefore felt to be inappropriate as an approach to the current study. Furthermore, discourse analysis has so far been unable to offer possible bases for intervention (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Willig, 1999a). IPA however can offer applied researchers the opportunity to integrate research and practice (Reid et al., 2005) and the appeal of IPA was therefore in its unique contribution to psychology.

Limitations of IPA

Like all forms of qualitative research IPA suffers from conceptual and practical limitations (Willig 2008). Firstly, IPA has been criticised for not providing guidelines on how to specifically incorporate reflexivity into the research process and for not specifying how researcher's preconceptions may influence analysis. Smith and Osborn (2008) argue, however, that IPA is an approach rather than a rigid method, allowing flexibility to meet the researcher need and context. The role of language can also be problematic in IPA. As language is the means by which

participants attempt to communicate their experiences to the researcher, this indicates an assumption that language provides participants with the necessary tools to capture that experience. The ability of participants to successfully communicate the complex nature of their experience is a question that has been often asked of IPA. It has been argued that such detailed descriptions are very difficult to produce, particularly for participants who are not used to expressing their thoughts, feelings and perceptions in words. It is acknowledged then that interpretations are thus bounded by participants' abilities to articulate their thoughts and experiences adequately (Baillie et al., 2000; Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

A further controversial aspect of IPA is its use of the term 'cognition' to refer to the subjective quality of experience (Willig, 2008). Smith (1996) argues that IPA is concerned with cognition because it is concerned with understanding how a particular participant thinks and makes sense of a particular phenomenon. According to Smith (1996), IPA can thus be used to access underlying cognitions such as beliefs and attitudes which individuals use to make sense of the world. It is proposed therefore, that an understanding of a person's cognitions should allow us to make sense of their experiences. Criticism has been levelled at IPA's use of this term and whether the study of cognitions is compatible with phenomenological philosophy's focus on pre-cognitive aspects of experience (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008).

In rebuttal, Eatough and Smith (2008) conceptualise cognition as an aspect of lived experience and as meaning making itself. IPA therefore focuses on all facets of lived experience including beliefs, values, wishes, desires, feelings and motivations and how these may manifest themselves in the personal lifeworlds of individuals (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). IPA recognises that while cognitions are not transparently available from verbal reports, it endeavours to be able to elucidate the meaning-making involved in such thinking (Smith et al., 1997; Smith et al. 2009).

Epistemological Position

Epistemology is an area of philosophy concerned with the nature of truth and knowledge and it attempts to provide answers to the questions 'how, and what, can we know?' (Willig, 2008). By adopting an epistemological position for the research, one can gain a sense of the knowledge it is possible to find out, how this knowledge is created and how truth or reality is defined. However it is not always possible to identify epistemological perspectives in qualitative psychology's complex epistemological field (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA itself does not claim a distinctive epistemological position but was developed from a broad base of theoretical influences including phenomenology (Moran, 2000), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), social cognition (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Smith, 1996) and social constructionism (Burr, 2003). As such, it is characterised by epistemological 'openness' (Larkin et al., 2006). My own stance in relation to IPA in the current work constitutes an attempt to join a critical realist perspective with a social constructionist epistemology. In this section I will explore my orientation to a middle ground between a critical realist and social constructionist epistemological stance, informed by a phenomenological perspective. I hope to illustrate how such a stance has contributed to my choice of methodology and analysis.

Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) and Smith (1995b) have suggested that qualitative methodologies can be classified on a continuum representing their epistemological positions. At one end are 'realist' epistemological positions, which assume that the accounts participants produce in interviews provide a factual account of the individual's experience and bear a direct relationship to their 'real' experiences in the world outside of the interview. At the opposite end are 'radical constructionist' approaches which see the account as a text produced in the specific setting of the interview. Such relativist approaches propose there is no reality existing outside of human interpretation and therefore, the account produced may have no relationship to either a world outside (the factual record) or a world inside (beliefs, attitudes etc.) (Smith, 1995b).

At one end of the continuum; social constructionism (Burr, 1995) is a relativist approach concerned with understanding and explaining the influences of the social, historical and cultural context on the processes by which people describe and explain

their experiences (Halling & Lawrence, 1999). Social constructionism rejects the positivist belief that there is an objective reality that scientific methods help us understand (Lynch & Bogen, 1997). It is believed that the external social world and people's mental states are actively constructed through discourse in interaction (King, 2004). The social constructionist position recognises that the meanings individuals subscribe to events are the products of social interactions and emphasises that experiences must be understood within this context. The research setting is thus seen as a form of social interaction (Bachman & Schutt, 2007).

At the other end of the continuum; critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975/2008) is a realist approach which accepts that there are stable and enduring features of reality that exist independently of human conceptualisation (Willig, 1999a), but also acknowledges an inherent subjectivity in the production of knowledge (Madill et al., 2000). Differences in the meanings individuals attach to experiences are considered possible because they experience different parts of reality. Critical realism contends that "the way we perceive facts, particularly in the social realm, depends partly upon our beliefs and expectations" (Bunge, 1993, p.231). Critical realists assume that participant data can therefore tell us about reality but they do not view this as a direct mirroring (Harper, 2012).

IPA could be said to be consistent with a social constructionist stance in that it recognises the importance of language, cultural and social processes in influencing how individuals make sense of lived experiences, and appreciates that talk may be action oriented and functions to achieve particular social goals (Eatough & Smith, 2008). However IPA also suggests that this represents a partial account of what people are doing when they give an account of their experience and does not take into account the psychologically rich aspects of experience. Individuals also instil these events with meaning such that an individual's world cannot be reduced to social constructions and thus IPA has been described as taking a "light constructionist stance" (Eatough & Smith, 2006b, p.485).

IPA can also be said to be consistent with a critical realist stance in that IPA also operates from the assumption that people's accounts tell us something about their private thoughts and feelings and these in turn are implicated in people's experiences. According to IPA, participants can experience and make sense of the

same 'objective' conditions (e.g. a particular disease, process or social event) in radically different ways because such experience is shaped by the thoughts, beliefs, expectations and judgements that the individual attributes to it (Willig, 2008). The critical realist approach adopted by IPA is also consistent with my affiliation with cognitive-behavioural therapy as a Trainee Counselling Psychologist, whereby I believe that the same experience can have many different interpretations and therefore affect individuals in different ways. This also resonates with the literature that suggests that the experience of workplace bullying is subjective which may explain individual differences in the psychological reactions to being bullied (Hoel et al., 2004).

Between these two positions one may consider therefore that what respondents say is at least in part a reflection of what they think about the topic and has some significance and psychological 'reality' for them beyond the bounds of the interview (Smith, 1995b). However at the same time it is recognised that the text produced in the interview situation is shaped by that context. Smith (1995b) proposes that this approach can be described as adopting a phenomenological perspective (Giorgi, 1995). Therefore, from a phenomenological perspective, knowledge is neither realist nor relativist. Phenomenology occupies a position in between these approaches and acknowledges that while experience is 'real' for the person, it is always a product of interpretation and therefore constructed (Willig, 2008).

As described, I find myself poised between a critical realist and a social constructionist epistemology. IPA offered a solution for bridging these positions and I therefore approach the text using an IPA framework based on a phenomenological perspective. This allows the adoption of a middle position between treating interview data as a 'factual account' and regarding it as an 'interaction structure' Smith (1995b). I take the view in this research that while an interview account cannot provide direct access to a participant's experience and can only therefore analyse ambiguous representations of experience, e.g. talk and interaction (Reissman, 1993); there is "a relationship between people's ambiguous representations and their experiences" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p.3). It is suggested that while knowledge is constructed between the researcher and the researched, and therefore always only partially known, it is possible to grasp something of an individual's experience through a research encounter (Doucet &

Mauthner, 1999). Such a perspective allows the research to have wider implications for practice and social change so that it is not confined to the description of constructions and philosophical debate (Parker, 1992; Willig, 1999a).

Research Strategy

Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted in order to assess whether the proposed interview schedule was an appropriate and feasible medium for eliciting information regarding individual experiences of workplace bullying consistent with the IPA approach undertaken. Initially, the questions were piloted with the gatekeeper for the research, who reviewed the questions for clarity and relevance. The pilot interview was then carried out with an individual known to me who had been a target of workplace bullying. This allowed me to practice the interview technique and to explore how participants might present their stories and respond to questions. This also provided an opportunity to gain feedback from the participant as to how they found the experience of the interview and allowed me to anticipate potential difficulties such as participant distress. I noted the need for sensitivity during the interviews as some questions did evoke emotional reactions during the pilot interview. Conducting the pilot interview therefore helped me to feel more confident and prepared regarding the rest of the interviews, and thus hopefully contributed to the facilitation of the participants' revelation of their experiences.

From the pilot interview I also recognised that the original interview schedule was too lengthy and that more in-depth information could be gained with fewer questions. The initial schedule consisted of 12 questions. Following the pilot interview, the scheduled was reduced to 8 questions. Some questions were grouped and used as prompts for the main questions. I also noted the need for a more flexible use of the interview schedule, rather than asking questions in the order of the schedule and to match questions to the participants' responses so that the interview process felt more natural. I hoped that this would help participants to expand further upon their responses and aid in eliciting more detailed information.

<u>Sampling and Participants</u>

Data collection for IPA is usually based on purposive sampling whereby participants are selected because of their expertise in the phenomenon being explored (Reid et al., 2005). This means that the group of participants is homogeneous to the extent that they share the experience of a particular condition, event or situation for whom the research question is relevant (Smith & Osborn, 2003), in this case having been bullied in the workplace. In accordance with the recommendations of IPA, eight participants were recruited for the main sample with one additional participant recruited for the pilot interview.

Participants were recruited who would be able to attend interviews in Kent, Essex and London for ease of access to the researcher. Consistent with the definition of bullying and previous research (e.g. Einarsen, 1999; Rayner & Hoel, 1997), participants were included on the basis that they had experienced bullying in the workplace for a period of longer than six months within the last five years. For ethical and professional reasons, individuals who were currently experiencing workplace bullying, or who were involved in proceedings such as tribunals due to workplace bullying, were not included in the study

The sample consisted of one male and seven female participants (see Appendix D for participant demographics). Smith and Osborn (2003) highlight the necessity to be pragmatic with regards to sampling and acknowledge that the sample is always dependent on who is willing to be included in it. It is acknowledged then, that any insights gained from the data may be specific to the sample. The aim in qualitative research, however, is not for generalisability, but rather for transferability of findings to groups in similar settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

<u>Recruitment</u>

Five participants were recruited from a national support association for targets of workplace bullying. Participants were contacted via referral from the founder of the support organisation, who acted as gatekeeper by posting the advertisement for research participants in the support organisation's online forum. This is included in Appendix A. Those who were interested in taking part were asked to e-mail the

researcher to express their interest. Once prospective participants had made contact with the researcher, criteria for inclusion in the study were checked and participants who met the eligibility criteria and wished to participate were then sent an information sheet (Appendix B), demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix E). The consent form was then signed upon attendance at the interview. Three participants were recruited via 'word of mouth', and emailed directly by the researcher, following the same procedure. Once email consent was given, arrangements were made to carry out the interviews at each participant's convenience. Participants were provided with any further information upon request. Interviews were undertaken in hired premises, such as hired meeting rooms, the location of which depended on the geographical location of the participant. This provided a quiet and private space for the interviews, and ensured the researcher's safety.

The response to the recruitment strategy was swift and I received a large number of responses, both nationally and internationally. Initially I was overwhelmed as to how I would choose participants from the large number of responses; however it transpired that most people who expressed an interest unfortunately did not meet the inclusion criteria for the research, in particular due to experiencing on-going workplace bullying. In all of these responses, only four were from men. Two of the men did not respond to emails providing further information and one did not respond upon having been sent the consent form. The existing literature suggests that there is little gender difference in the prevalence of workplace bullying (e.g. Hoel & Cooper, 2001). I have reflected that perhaps the lack of male participants reflects the lack of males accessing the support organisation, and it is widely recognised that men underutilise support services (e.g. Leong & Zachar, 1999; Mackenzie, Gekoski & Knox, 2006).

It is acknowledged that the use of the term "bullying" within the research has the potential to have led to the recruitment of individuals who identified themselves as having been "bullied" in the workplace and excluded those who may not have labelled themselves as having been bullied but yet who may have experienced behaviours typically associated with workplace bullying. Indeed, studies have shown that some individuals do not conceptualise their experiences as bullying despite their experiences meeting definitions of workplace bullying (Nielsen et al.,

2009). Furthermore, studies that use self-labelling to identify targets of bullying consistently report lower prevalence rates than those that present participants with lists of negative acts (e.g. Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Salin, 2001). It is not known, however, whether individuals who self-label, and those who do not label themselves as being bullied, experience differences for example with regard to the severity of bullying and the psychological outcome of this, and whether self-labelling influences the subjective perception of the bullying situation and subsequent psychological distress. The literature suggests that labelling oneself as a target of bullying may influence how bullying is experienced and reacted to (Vie, Glaso & Einarsen, 2011). However, few studies have empirically tested the extent to which self-labelling as a target of workplace bullying may influence the relationship between exposure to bullying and psychological outcomes. In a Canadian sample of nurses who had experienced workplace bullying, Out (2006) found that targets who labelled their experiences as bullying reported more psychological distress than targets who were similarly exposed to bullying behaviours but did not label their experiences as bullying. It has also been found, however, that naming one's experience as bullying may be important for targets in identifying the problem as external to themselves and in gaining validation of their experiences, enabling them to maintain or recover self-worth and competence (Lewis & Orford, 2005). It appears that intense exposure to bullying behaviours at work may also be related to considerable harmful effects on psychological health independently of whether the experience is labelled as bullying or not (Vie et al., 2011).

The implications of this for the present study may be that the sample of individuals who participated in the research differed in some way from individuals who experienced bullying behaviours but did not label themselves as being bullied and thus did not participate. Quantitative research studies exploring the psychological consequences of workplace bullying often include a list of behaviours typically associated with workplace bullying (e.g. the Negative Acts Questionnaire; Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009) in order to measure exposure to bullying at work. An alternative method of recruitment for the current research could have been to have included a list of bullying behaviours, for example those presented by Rayner and Hoel (1997) in the advertisement for the research and to have asked individuals to participate on the basis of identifying themselves as having experienced such

behaviours. This might have facilitated the recruitment of individuals who had experienced bullying behaviours but who did not necessarily define their experience as bullying. I have reflected that this might have increased the number of male participants, as men may be less likely to identify themselves as, or want to admit to being, a target of bullying but may identify themselves as having experienced such bullying behaviours.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken to explore how participants had experienced workplace bullying, how they made sense of their experience, whether they perceived effects on their psychological health, how they might explain such effects, and how they coped with their experience. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed using the guidelines suggested by Smith et al. (2009) and was informed by a consideration of the research question and existing literature concerning workplace bullying and psychological distress (see Appendix F for the interview schedule and discussion of how this was constructed). The schedule was used to flexibly guide the interview process through the proposed topics, enabling a flow of dialogue between the researcher and participant. This allowed the freedom and flexibility to further explore novel and unexpected areas not considered by the researcher as they arose without rigidly prescribing the responses participants could give (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Initial questions were designed to allow the interviewees to "recount a fairly descriptive episode or experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p.59) asking them to reflect on their experience of workplace bullying. It was hoped this would enable the participant to raise aspects of their experience that were of significance to them, thus consistent with the type of data IPA aims to produce (Smith, 1995a). Later questions attempted to elicit more in-depth responses about their experience of workplace bullying and psychological distress. The framework of the questions intended to facilitate the participants' own meaning making process rather than to direct or prescribe responses, although it is acknowledged that the data gained is always a function of the questions asked in an interview (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

The challenge facing the researcher is to create the conditions that facilitate the revelation of such experiences. Interviewing methods are strikingly similar to the practice of counselling psychology (Ponterotto, Kuriakose & Granovskaya, 2008), and therefore my training as a Trainee Counselling Psychologist provided me with the empathy skills required to generate rich data within this emotive topic. It is acknowledged that qualitative interviews may have a therapeutic impact on participants as reflecting on past experiences may lead to the adoption of a different perspective on their experience (Kvale, 1996). I intended to draw upon my skills as a Trainee Counselling Psychologist to conduct the interviews therapeutically, by providing participants with a space where they felt able to describe and reflect upon their personal experiences (Birch & Miller, 2000). I hoped that this may be achieved by providing the core conditions of empathetic understanding, unconditional positive regard and congruence (Rogers, 1957). It was also important to make the boundary of the interview relationship clear by informing participants that the researcher would not be providing a therapeutic intervention, but could signpost them to appropriate help if necessary.

Interviews lasted approximately one to two hours and were recorded on a small digital recording device. The interviews began by reiterating the information provided in the information sheet, explaining the process of the interview and encouraging participants to talk freely and openly about their experiences of workplace bullying. Participants were then asked if they still wished to continue and requested to sign the consent form. Participants were advised that if at any time they felt distressed by the interview process or wished to take a break, they could request a break in the interview. In addition, they were reminded that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not wish to and could opt out of the research at any stage. Before closing the interview, the participants were given a final opportunity to add anything else about their experiences. At the end of the interview participants were debriefed about their experience of the interview. This was not tape recorded. They were then given information containing a list of contact details for support groups, counselling services and telephone help-lines along with contact details for the researcher and supervisor (Appendix G) should this be required. The participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage before the completion of the research.

Smith et al. (2009) advise that the semi-structured interview in an IPA study should be led by the participant, however guided by the researcher with minimal questions and prompts. I aimed to abide by these guiding principles, although I recognised that my novice status as a researcher meant that I noted a tendency in myself to want to ask more questions of the participants. During the interview, participant concerns or priorities were followed up as recommended by Smith and Dunworth (2003) and I occasionally summarised participants' accounts and sought clarification. However I often found it difficult to strike a balance between this and minimising my own influence on participant responses. I now reflect as to whether the data obtained may have been restricted and prescribed due to the questions asked in the interview. The interview schedule was constructed very early in the research process and having now gained more experience with qualitative interviewing, I have reflected that the research schedule may have contained too many questions despite reducing the number of questions following the pilot interview, and the questions asked may have been too directive. In order to remediate this in future studies, I would ensure that participants were given more of an opportunity to talk freely and to explore their experience themselves. Nevertheless, I believe that the interviews elicited rich enough data to illuminate the experiences of the participants and to allow for a 'good enough' interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, 2007).

On the whole, participants engaged with the interview and showed a willingness to express their experiences and opinions. Participants reported being hopeful that the research could help highlight the psychological effects of being bullied in the workplace and that this in turn may lead to changes in company attitudes or legislation regarding workplace bullying. The participants hoped that therefore they would be able to help others through their participation. This provided me with assurance that this study was a potential way of allowing targets of workplace bullying to have more of a voice and that participants were gaining something from being involved with the research.

Transcription

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcripts captured all spoken words including false starts, laughs, broken words or

sentences as well as vocal utterances, as recommended by Smith and Osborn (2003), in order to work from a transcript as close to the original dialogue as possible. Any identifying features of participants were altered at the time of transcription in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. After transcription, each original recording was saved on a password protected hard drive and stored in a locked filing cabinet. As the transcripts are detailed accounts of participants' experiences and thus contain much personal and confidential material, I have not included them in the appendices. Verbatim quotes are, however, used to illustrate points made in the Results chapter.

Analytical Strategy

The interview data was analysed using IPA procedures as detailed by Smith et al. (2009). Each transcript was analysed in turn before moving on to the next transcript. Transcripts were read several times in order to become immersed in and familiar with each account during which notes were made in the right hand margin of the transcript recording the researcher's initial thoughts and reflections. These included summary statements and descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments. Transcripts were then re-read and emergent themes were documented in the left hand margin by converting the initial notes into concise phrases which captured what was represented in the text. This process involved moving to a more interpretative level of abstraction whilst remaining grounded in the interview data. Themes were identified by using labels which captured the essential quality of what the participant actually said rather than attempting to find themes that would fit a pre-existing theoretical viewpoint, as asserted by Smith (1999).

The emergent themes were then listed in the order they appeared in the text. Connections were made between them to create theme clusters by grouping themes which appeared to be connected and labelling these with titles capturing the overarching concept of the clusters to create superordinate themes. The themes were clustered through abstraction, whereby similar themes were put together and labelled with a superordinate theme title, and through subsumption whereby an emergent theme became a superordinate theme as it helped to bring together related themes (Smith et al., 2009). Throughout this process, continual checks were made referring

back to the original transcripts to verify the themes still reflected what the participants had actually said and made sense in relation to this. A table of superordinate themes together with associated subordinate themes was then produced along with compiled files of supporting verbatim transcript extracts for each theme with the identifying page and line number. This process assisted the examination of the internal consistency and relative broadness and specificity of each theme as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). The emergent and superordinate themes were not considered to be fixed at this point and indeed evolved through the process of analysis.

This process was then repeated for all eight interviews identifying similarities and divergences with existing themes and testing newly emergent themes against earlier transcripts. When all eight interviews had been analysed, the superordinate theme clusters for all interviews were examined and further clustered together to create a master list of superordinate themes and component subordinate themes for all participants which captured the experiences of the participants as a whole. At this stage, any themes that were not well represented and did not reflect shared experiences were dropped from the analysis and similar themes were merged and collapsed into one to create superordinate and subordinate themes. Themes were included on the basis of the richness of the extracts from which the themes emerged, whether the themes served to illuminate other aspects of the account and whether they were relevant to the research question. It is acknowledged that such decisions are likely to be influenced by the researcher's own interests, research question and aims for the study which reflects the co-creation of IPA results between participant and researcher (Larkin et al., 2006). The final model of themes provided a framework with which to understand the participants' experience of workplace bullying and psychological distress and from which a narrative account was generated interweaving participant extracts with detailed commentary. A consideration of the results in relation to the existing literature was not considered until after the write-up and was guided by the emergent analysis. This ensured that the analysis was organised around the themes emerging from the transcripts rather than attempting to find themes to fit existing literature and theory (Smith, 1999). Where emergent themes were influenced by prior psychological knowledge or

theory, this was noted in the reflexive diary. An audit trail with respect to each stage of the analysis is included in Appendix H.

Undertaking the analysis took longer than expected and was filled with uncertainty and anxiety as it was unclear as to how the end product would appear and at times I felt overwhelmed by the quantity of the data. On reflection, possibly due to my novice status as researcher, my analysis was extremely inclusive and I included too large a number of emergent themes which had to be reduced considerably making organising the data more difficult and time consuming. In completing further IPA studies, it may be helpful to use the research question more efficiently in order to focus the analysis and identification of emergent themes.

Ethics

Ethical considerations are paramount, particularly in qualitative research which characteristically involves participants divulging personal and often sensitive information. All necessary procedures were taken to ensure participants' best interests in accordance with British Psychological Society (BPS, 2005; 2011) and Health Professions Council (HPC, 2008)/Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2012) ethical codes. Full ethical approval was granted for this research by the Department of Psychology of City University (see Appendix I). In order to obtain informed consent for participation, it was ensured that participants were fully informed about the nature and process of the research, and how their data would be used. They were provided with a description of the study, procedure, and topics that would be included in the interview. Participants were informed that their responses would be confidential and would only be seen by the research team (researcher, supervisor and independent auditor). It was emphasised that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study, without giving a reason and that their data (e.g. recordings, transcripts) would then be destroyed. Participants were told that the research report would include verbatim extracts of the interview transcripts, but that these would be edited for anonymity with any personal identifiable details removed. Additionally, participants were informed that the research findings would be submitted for publication. Participants' data was stored according to the requirements of data protection legislation (BPS, 2010). All signed

material such as consent and demographic forms have been kept securely in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home and will be destroyed when the research and assessment have been fully completed.

It was acknowledged and ensured that participants understood that talking about experiences of workplace bullying and psychological distress could be potentially distressing. Participants were assured that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not wish to and that they could to stop the interview or take a break at any time. It was intended that if at any time the researcher observed that the interview was causing undue distress, participation would not be pursued. Thankfully, such a situation did not occur. After the interview, the participant's experience of the interview was discussed in order to monitor any negative effects. Participants were provided with a debrief sheet signposting them to sources of support should this be required. Participants were also provided with an e-mail address for the researcher and supervisor should any questions or concerns arise before, during or after the study.

Personal Reflexivity

Personal reflexivity involves an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the research process and requires the researcher to reflect on how his or her "own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research" (Willig, 2008, p.10). This allows researchers to become aware of their own preconceptions so that attempts can be made not to impose them on participants (Finlay, 2002b). Additionally, this affords the opportunity to consider how the researcher's own reactions to the research context and the data may facilitate certain insights and understandings (Willig, 2008). The following account is a reflexive statement which acknowledges the assumptions and preconceptions I carried with me into the research process. I hope to make evident the motivations and interests that I have introduced into the research (Gough, 2003) so that I might attempt to engage with the participants' accounts in a fresh and open manner (Finlay, 2008).

I was initially interested in pursuing research into the long-term psychological effects of childhood bullying that persisted into adulthood. My initial motivation to undertake research into bullying stemmed from personal experiences of bullying in childhood. I reflected on my own experience of bullying and how this might have impacted upon my self-esteem growing up and how my experiences might have shaped me as an adult. My interest further developed following conducting a critical literature review outlining the literature on the short and long-term psychological effects of childhood bullying which suggested that bullying in childhood might have detrimental psychological effects that extended far into adulthood (e.g. Gladstone, Parker & Malhi, 2006). At the time of writing my research proposal, however, I was working in a service treating PTSD following road traffic accidents and during my reading around the disorder, discovered that other traumatic experiences such as workplace bullying could potentially lead to PTSD (Scott & Stradling, 2006). Having conducted a review of the literature in this area and found evidence of a link between workplace bullying and psychological distress, I began to think about what it would be like to be bullied as an adult, and potential differences between childhood bullying and bullying in adulthood. I was inspired to alter the focus of my research to explore how targets of workplace bullying might experience psychological distress. Additionally, I wanted to look at how this might have been overcome as this could offer implications for practice and increase the usefulness of the research.

I imagined that as an adult, individuals might have more coping resources and therefore the effect on an individual's well-being may not be as severe as in childhood. Indeed I had conversations with others who simply did not believe that bullying occurred between adults and who perceived that adults should be able to 'deal' with such situations. I learned later that many participants had also not realised that bullying could happen in adulthood. The conversations I had confirmed to me that while there appeared to be a great amount of literature on the subject; the 'lay' person had little idea as to the existence and effects of workplace bullying. On a personal level, I do not know what it is like to be bullied as an adult, and therefore do not have 'inside' experience of this, however, I feel my experience of bullying in childhood has made me more than the average 'outsider'.

As a result of my personal, professional and academic experiences described above, I am aware that I bring an assumption of a link between workplace bullying and psychological distress to the research. I also bring my own assumptions about what it must be like to be bullied as an adult in the workplace, largely based upon my own experience of bullying, the media portrayal of workplace bullying, and my reading of the literature in this area. I assume that bullying may impact people in different ways, both positively and negatively. I also assume that it may have had an impact on their sense of self-esteem and the way they see themselves. I imagined for example, that if an individual's work was constantly undermined, this would impact their confidence and efficacy at work. I have also assumed that the experience may affect the way targets' view others and may lead to mistrust of others in the workplace.

IPA recognises that preconceptions that are brought by researchers to the research process may have a potential impact on the quality of the interview and on the data subsequently obtained (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). I acknowledge that my assumptions described above have shaped the questions asked in the interview schedule, and that these in turn may have subscribed the experiences that participants have reflected upon and the themes elicited in the analysis. For example, asking participants questions regarding the way they see themselves and others may have led participants to reflect on the impact of bullying on their sense of self or relations with others when in fact this was not central to their experience of psychological distress following workplace bullying. It may therefore have been beneficial to have asked a more general question about psychological effects and to have let the participant talk at more length about what this meant to them.

My preconceived view of a relationship between workplace bullying and psychological distress may have led me to exaggerate the negative psychological impact of workplace bullying. This may have affected my decisions regarding which material to follow up in the interviews and the interpretations made during analysis (Finlay, 2002b). I may have been inclined to hear material that was relevant to my assumptions and overlooked possible themes that did not relate to these although every effort was made to acknowledge when interpretations were influenced by prior assumptions, psychological knowledge or theory in the reflexive diary. However, it may also be the case that a pre-understanding of the impact of

bullying enhanced my understanding and empathic response to participants, which may have facilitated the development of the research relationship and allowed participants to be more open. I clearly acknowledged the harmful effects of workplace bullying and advertised the research as an opportunity to tell the story of such experiences. This may have acted as an advantage for participants to feel able to share their experiences and facilitated this within the interviews.

I recognised that it would be important for me to be aware of my biases and preconceptions, both those known in advance, and those that became apparent during the course of the research. In order to monitor these, I kept a reflexive journal exploring how they may have influenced the choice of research questions, the direction and process of the interview, and the analysis. I recognised that despite my efforts to reflect upon my assumptions prior to undertaking the research, I might not yet be fully aware of all my pre-conceptions regarding the research and acknowledged that these might be revealed during the continued research process.

Evaluating the Research

Madill et al. (2000) argue that the criteria for evaluating qualitative research need to fit the specific epistemological and ontological framework of the methodology, as each approach has different assumptions about the nature of knowledge and role of the researcher. IPA encourages flexibility in adapting the method to the researcher's own way of working and the particular topic of investigation (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2008). However, this increases the challenge of demonstrating validity (Yardley, 2000). I have chosen to follow Yardley's (2000) guidelines for assessing quality in research as these can be applied to any qualitative study irrespective of the methodology employed (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) have also described how these can apply to an IPA study. Yardley (2000) proposes four principles in assessing qualitative research: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. It is in line with these guidelines that I aim to demonstrate the quality of the current study.

<u>Sensitivity to context</u>

Sensitivity to context may be established through demonstrating a consideration of relevant literature, the socio-cultural setting of the study and the material obtained from participants (Smith et al., 2009). This study aims to demonstrate that following a review of the literature, a gap in the current research regarding the psychological consequences of workplace bullying was identified and led to the formulation of the research topic and question. This further conceptualised the rationale for the current study and for undertaking IPA. The workplace bullying literature relevant to the current study was outlined in the Introduction chapter. The theoretical literature underpinning the principles of IPA was also presented in the Methodology chapter in order to orient the study. The analysis was reviewed in light of existing research to provide a critical interpretation of the findings and consideration was also given to how findings could contribute to clinical practice.

The research maintained sensitivity to the context of participants by giving consideration to the socio-cultural context within which the lived experiences of participants occurred, for example by contextualising the participants' accounts with information provided in the demographic questionnaire. The researcher's role and influence in the process of the research were considered and this was supported with a reflexive account. Sensitivity to context was also demonstrated by establishing rapport with the gatekeeper for the research in order to gain access to the sample. The gatekeeper was also involved in the piloting of the interview schedule to ensure the questions were appropriate and to anticipate possible reactions to the questions.

Efforts were also made to remain sensitive and empathetic to each participant's individual experiences throughout the engagement with them (Shinebourne, 2011). Using my therapeutic skills as a Trainee Counselling Psychologist, I aimed to ensure that I demonstrated empathy towards participants and that they were put at ease. Additionally I hoped to address the power differential between researcher and participant by placing the participant as the expert of their experience. I also hoped to demonstrate sensitivity to context through sustained attention to the participants' accounts during the process of analysis and through offering interpretations grounded in verbatim transcript extracts, thus allowing the reader to evaluate the interpretations being made (Smith et al., 2009).

Commitment and rigour

Yardley (2008) describes that commitment involves in-depth engagement with the topic and developing methodological competence. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that commitment may be demonstrated through attentiveness to participants during data collection and taking care over the analysis. I aimed to demonstrate sufficient depth and insight with the analysis through sustained engagement with the participants' accounts. It is hoped that this is demonstrated in the excerpt of transcript analysis included in Appendix I. As a novice to IPA, I have endeavoured to develop skill in the method by attending lectures on IPA and conducting reading of the literature and published guidelines for conducting IPA research (e.g. Smith et al., 2009).

With regards to rigour, Yardley (2008) refers to the degree of thoroughness in the data collection and the depth and breadth of analysis. The process of participant recruitment and interview procedures are described in the Methodology chapter. I aimed to demonstrate that participants were carefully selected to consider the research question and that interviews were conducted in line with the principles of IPA. I also strove to conduct a thorough and systematic IPA analysis which moved beyond descriptions of participants' accounts to a more interpretative analysis illuminating both individual and shared themes. It is acknowledged that the rigour of this study may have been affected by my novice status as a researcher and also by practical constraints in terms of time and the available sample. Every attempt however has been made to carry out the study in a thorough and careful way drawing on available training and supervision.

Coherence and transparency

Coherence refers to the extent a study is consistent in terms of the arguments it presents and whether these are truly representative of the data (Madill et al., 2000). There should be coherence between the research study and the underlying theoretical assumptions of the employed approach (Yardley, 2008). I have aimed to illustrate the theoretical underpinnings of IPA and to ensure the research remains consistent with these. Again, every effort has been made to ensure that the arguments presented are

coherent and verbatim extracts from the original data have been provided to check the validity of the interpretations. I have also been mindful to emphasise that any interpretations made are the attempts of the researcher to make sense of the participants' experiences. Finally, I have also aimed to ensure coherence by reading each section of the thesis carefully, putting myself in the shoes of the reader to check whether the thesis presents a coherent argument.

Smith et al. (2009) state that transparency relates to how clearly the stages of the research process have been described. I have endeavoured to provide a clear and systematic description of the research process and to provide sufficient details of the methods used. I attempted to describe how participants were selected, how the interview schedule was constructed and interviews conducted, and also to explain the steps of the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). I have aimed to enhance the transparency of the analysis by keeping a paper trail of the data during stages of analysis. This is included in Appendix I. The data is presented using subheadings and tables to assist the reader in following the interpretation (Yardley, 2008). Verbatim extracts from the transcripts are included to enable readers to evaluate the fit between the data and its interpretation (Yardley, 2008). The position of the researcher as co-constructor of meaning is an important aspect in determining the credibility of the data. This is demonstrated in this study by including a section on personal reflexivity to illustrate as far as possible the researcher's values, interests and assumptions and how these may have influenced the research process.

An audit was also undertaken to attempt to improve the validity of the research. The audit was conducted by a final year Trainee Counselling Psychologist who was also using IPA for her doctoral research. The auditor's task was to ensure a logical and systematic path through the chain of evidence in order to check the credibility of the final report (Smith et al., 2009). Consistent with the principles of IPA, such validity checks do not aim to produce a 'true' account of an individuals' experience but instead are implemented to ensure the credibility of the final account.

Impact and importance

Yardley (2008) proposes that there is no value in conducting research unless the findings have the potential to make a difference. The relevance of this study is outlined in the Introduction chapter. It is hoped that by highlighting the subjective experiences of targets of workplace bullying, this might lead to a better understanding of the psychological consequences of workplace bullying. A consideration of how this research can contribute to clinical practice is included in the Discussion chapter. It is hoped that this study may help to promote a greater awareness among clinicians of the psychological effects of workplace bullying and to point to ways of supporting those individuals who have experienced bullying in the workplace.

Chapter 3: Results

<u>Outline of Chapter</u>

The analysis of the interview transcripts generated data providing a rich and encompassing portrayal of the experience of being bullied in the workplace and a number of themes emerged through the process of analysis. In developing an interpretative account of the participants' experiences, priority was given to those themes which seemed most illuminating, pertinent and significant to the research question and to the participants' experiences of psychological distress following their experience of bullying. It is hoped that this will answer the research question: 'How do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their psychological health?' Whilst the study endeavoured to answer the research question as comprehensively as possible an exhaustive presentation of all of the findings is beyond the scope of this work. The following section constitutes an interpretative account of the participants' experiences and is intended to highlight some of the important, relevant and interesting issues which have arisen from the research process.

The themes that follow form one possible account of how targets of workplace bullying experience psychological distress. As discussed in the methodology section, IPA emphasises that interpretations made are attempts to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It is acknowledged therefore that the following account is a partial and subjective interpretation and that other researchers may have highlighted and focused on different aspects of the accounts. While the themes presented were common to each of the eight accounts, there were also areas of divergence, some of which are also commented upon in the analysis.

The following section aims to present, explore and discuss the themes emergent from the analysis organised into four superordinate themes: Bullying as a Powerful Experience; Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying, Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity; and Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied, which are then broken down into a number of constituent subordinate themes. Each theme is considered to be central to the exploration and interpretation of the research

question: 'How do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their psychological health?' For clarity and simplicity of presentation, each superordinate theme and the subordinate themes within them have been presented as distinct. However, these theme groupings do not necessarily fit neatly into discrete categories and there is much overlap between and within the themes. This is a tribute to the complexity and richness of the participants' experiences and substantiates the cohesiveness of the results overall.

The findings are presented in this section solely with the interpretative analysis and without further theoretical discussion or integration of the relevant existing literature. A large proportion of the section is devoted to direct quotations from the transcripts for which analytic interpretations are offered. This structure was chosen in order to ensure close engagement with the participants' lived experiences and to give voice to both the shared and individual experiences of workplace bullying. Theoretical discussions and linkages of the findings to relevant literature follow separately in the next chapter, entitled 'Discussion'.

The format of this analysis is to firstly list the superordinate themes along with the constituent subordinate themes. Each theme is then introduced in turn, providing a selection of illustrative quotes from participants interwoven with a detailed exploration and analytic interpretation. This reflects the double hermeneutic of IPA methodology in which the participants' subjective perception and interpretation of their experiences are accompanied by the researcher's own interpretation of this narrative. Wherever possible, a variety of participants are quoted to avoid bias towards any specific participant. In some cases a sequence of quotations is presented from a single participant within the context of a given theme to offer a deeper insight into the participant's description of their experience. Where this has been undertaken, multiple page and line numbers are given. This creates a more holistic view of the participants' experiences and also accounts to the recurrence of the themes throughout the transcripts. Due to the limitations of space, it is impossible to present quotations illustrating the themes for all participants. A summary table indicating the presence of the themes for all participants is included in Appendix I as part of the audit trail.

The participant quotations used within this section have been lifted directly from the transcripts and are written in italics. To ensure confidentiality, participants have been given pseudonyms and all personal or identifying information has been either removed or altered. The source of all quotations included is indicated by participant pseudonym followed by page and line number from the original transcripts. For the purpose of this research, minor changes have been made to the text extracts. Minor hesitations, word repetitions and utterances such as "erm" have mostly been removed. Text in brackets () indicate explanatory text that has been added by the author. Square brackets [] indicate that a small chunk of text has been omitted because it was not felt to be directly related to the theme discussed and did not aid the reader's understanding. These measures were taken to enhance the coherency and readability of the selected excerpts.

Overview of Themes

As described above, four superordinate themes emerged from the analysis. These were identified as follows:

• Bullying as a Powerful Experience

• Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying

• Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity

• Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied

The first superordinate theme, Bullying as a Powerful Experience, explores the essence of what participants described their experiences of bullying to be like which served as a backdrop for the explanations participants gave for why their experience led to the psychological consequences experienced. It is divided into four subordinate themes: Feeling Isolated, Feeling Powerless, Living in Fear and Dread, and Trying to Make Sense.

The second superordinate theme, Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying, relates to participants' descriptions and explanations of the psychological consequences they experienced as a result of being bullied. This theme also relates

to perceived positive outcomes that resulted from the experience. It is divided into six subordinate themes: Shock and Disbelief, Excessive and Ruminative Thinking, Experiencing Depression, Experiencing Stress, Becoming Fearful of Returning to Work, and Positive Psychological Effects.

The third superordinate theme, Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity, explores how participants' experience of workplace bullying had a devastating impact upon their sense of self and was experienced as a threat to identity. It is divided into three subordinate themes: Impact on Self-Concept: A Destroyed Self, Experiencing the Loss of a Valued and Expected Self, and Rebuilding a Sense of Self.

The fourth superordinate theme, Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied, relates to the ways in which participants reported coping with both their experiences of bullying and the psychological consequences they suffered. It is divided into three subordinate themes: Experiences of Support: Lack of Support and the Importance of Validation, Concentrating on Other Aspects of Life and Having a Corrective Experience.

The table below illustrates the four superordinate themes and the constituent subordinate themes together with the frequency of participants who reported the themes.

Superordinate and Subordinate Themes	Frequency of Participants who Reported Themes
Bullying as a Powerful Experience	
Feeling Isolated	7
Feeling Powerless	8
Living in Fear and Dread	6
Trying to Make Sense	8
Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying	
Shock and Disbelief	7
Excessive and Ruminative Thinking	8
Experiencing Depression	7
Experiencing Stress	7
Becoming Fearful of Returning to Work	5
Positive Psychological Effects	7
Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity	
Impact on Self-Concept: A Destroyed Self	8
Experiencing the Loss of a Valued and Expected Self	6
Rebuilding a Sense of Self	5
Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied	
Experiences of Support: Lack of Support and the Importance of Validation	8
Concentrating on Other Aspects of Life	4
Having a Corrective Experience	6

Table 1. Table of Themes

The table below provides a summary of participant details to facilitate the reading of this section.

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupation in which Bullying Occurred	Context of Bullying
Liz	Female	55-64	Support Work	Being Publicly Reprimanded Personal Criticism Being Spied on Criticism of Work Performance Withheld Promotion Intimidating Behaviour Removing Areas of Responsibility False Accusations Unfair Dismissal
Patrick	Male	55-64	IT	Withheld Promotion Undervaluing of Effort Derogatory Personal Comments Criticism of Work Performance Being Publicly Reprimanded
Natalie	Female	35-44	Reception	Derogatory Comments about Participant to Others Vandalising Personal Property Unreasonable Work Demands Blocking Leave Requests
Angela	Female	55-64	Procurement	Blocking Leave Requests Exclusion from Meetings Social Exclusion Intimidating Behaviour Malicious Telephone Calls False Accusations Stealing Possessions Being Spied On Non-Cooperation with Work Requests Being Publicly Reprimanded
Nina	Female	25-34	Police Administration	Criticism of Work Performance Setting Impossible Objectives Being Publicly Reprimanded Intimidating Behaviour Discrediting Ideas Controlling Movements Withholding Information
Hayley	Female	55-64	Nursing	Interfering with Professional Actions Non-Cooperation with Work Requests Undermining Authority Intimidating Behaviour Belittling in Meetings Withholding Areas of Responsibility Criticism of Work Performance False Accusations
Kate	Female	25-34	Public Relations	Exclusion from Communication Discrediting Ideas Spreading Rumours
Sophie	Female	35-44	Administration	Exclusion from Communication Replacing Work with Menial Tasks Non-Cooperation with Work Tasks Unrealistic Work Demands Criticism of Job Performance

Table 2. Participant Characteristics

Superordinate theme one: Bullying as a Powerful Experience

These themes form the basis of the participants' descriptions of what the experience of workplace was like. Participants spoke about both the bully and the bullying experience itself as something greater and more powerful than themselves. They described themselves as being isolated and having a lack of control, options and power to change or leave the situation which was associated with a sense of feeling trapped and imprisoned. Due to their circumstances, the participants were forced to remain in a situation in which they lived in daily fear and dread of going to work and which offered no means of relief or escape. The experience of being bullied stimulated attempts to search for an explanation to understand the situation and why it was happening to them. However, in the absence of any possible explanation, participants often came to blame themselves and to perceive that the fact they were being bullied meant that there was something 'wrong' with them. The participants also presented aspects of this experience as explanations for their feelings of psychological distress to be discussed in later themes. This provides us with an understanding of why bullying appears to feel so devastating and why participants experienced such pain and despair.

Feeling Isolated

The experience of being singled out and targeted for bullying created a sense of isolation, rejection and alienation from others. This section examines this experience and its impact upon the psychological well-being of participants.

Below, Liz talks about a sense of isolation as part of the context of the bullying she experienced whereby she was provided with no support, supervision or guidance with which to undertake her work.

I just felt as if I didn't know if I had any sort of place there really.

I didn't know where I was based, I didn't have a kind of manager at all, I was just sort of adrift really.

(Liz: 19,741-732; 21,852-854)

Her statements suggest that Liz felt as though she did not know where she fit in at work and convey a sense of not belonging. She speaks of a lack of identification with a 'place' at work. This implies that she is not able to classify herself as having a position within the workplace suggestive of not being part of the workplace and being isolated. Her use of 'adrift' likens Liz to a ship floating and drifting without being moored or steered conveying a sense of being separate and unconnected to the workplace. Liz describes that she was not being managed and therefore not kept on course or guided where to go suggesting that Liz felt aimless and without direction or purpose.

Angela talks more explicitly about the bullying actions of others who deliberately attempted to alienate her leaving her feeling isolated. She describes pointedly being excluded from both professional and social activities within the workplace as well as being physically moved and therefore restricted from contact and interaction with others.

He then held the meetings and didn't invite me. I wasn't even included in the meetings and things that I'd been in before.

She'd walk past in the morning, turn her back on me and say "hello" to the people on the other side.

I think it's nobody there to help you. It's isolation, they isolated me by even taking me and putting me down the other end, it was just total going to work in isolation.

(Angela: 3,105-107; 4,125-127; 20,833-836)

When asked what she felt it was about the experience of bullying that led to the psychological consequences she experienced, Angela described that it was the difficult nature of experiencing a complete lack of support and being isolated. Angela experienced bullying from both colleagues and management and here she conveys an image of herself as being set apart with everyone against her pervading a sense of isolation and loneliness throughout the account. The way Angela talks about her experiences suggests the bullying occurred daily and was constant implying she felt this way every day.

Nina refers to a sense of isolation from others due to making comparisons with others who are 'happy'.

You look at other people and they are happy and you just think "oh my God", you know. You are so envious or jealous or like upset that other people are laughing when you are in such a bad way. Very isolating, so isolating, such a lonely experience.

(Nina: 21,877-881)

Nina discusses having become envious and jealous of others' happiness denoting painful feelings of resentment and bitterness along with a longing to feel happy herself. These comparisons serve to highlight Nina's own feelings of unhappiness and difference from others which appears to have led to the loneliness experienced. Nina's language use of 'very', 'so' and 'such' emphasises the intensity of her isolation and loneliness.

For Hayley, her feelings of unhappiness also stemmed from feeling excluded and isolated and she goes further to say that these feelings derived from feeling alienated

and devalued as a person. She reports not knowing who to trust and who she was able to talk to and that this therefore resulted in feelings of loneliness.

You just know that you are very unhappy and you ask yourself why you are unhappy and it's because this person is not treating you as a person. You know because she can be so nice to her so called friends but you are like an alien, you are not a person.

If the bully already has a group that means that you don't know who you can talk to. You feel really lonely.

(Hayley: 8,316-320; 10,397-399)

Hayley relates her feelings of unhappiness to being treated differently to colleagues and invokes feeling degraded as if she were not treated as a human being. She highlights the contrast in the treatment of herself and others by saying that she was regarded as an 'alien', emphasising her feelings of separation and estrangement from others. Connotations associated with the word 'alien' can be twofold. Firstly, this can be taken to mean that Hayley was both treated and felt as if she was strange or abnormal. Indeed it seems that the bullying she experienced was dehumanising and reduced her self-worth. Secondly, it appears that Hayley also felt that she had been excluded and 'alienated' from the team.

It's not like I wanted to be any more important than anybody else but I just felt that I was on the outside.

It just made you feel that you were not needed there, you did feel that whereas other people had certain importance, I didn't, because I'd been turfed out.

I didn't feel part of the team and it's because I'm not being given the same responsibilities and I feel like I was almost being phased out you know and undervalued and it just makes you feel at an all-time low.

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Hayley caveats that she did not wish to be treated as more important, but as equal to others suggesting she did not feel she had the same value as others in the workplace. It seems that to Hayley, her colleagues were treated as if they were worthy of significance and value whereas she was made to feel of little value suggesting a loss of self-worth. Feeling 'on the outside' depicts an image of looking in on the team from the outside and feelings of isolation. She reports not being involved in work tasks and being continually overlooked for promotion, development and responsibility, which left her feeling 'phased' and 'turfed out', gradually being excluded from the team due to being neither needed nor wanted. All of these descriptions convey a sense of experiencing isolation and she describes that this led her to feel at an 'all-time low' which denotes a twofold meaning of feeling of little value along with a sense of feeling dejected and depressed. Hayley offered these feelings of isolation and being devalued as an explanation behind the psychological consequences of stress and depression she experienced.

Kate discusses her feelings of isolation and separation from others by suggesting that she felt singled out by the bully and like Hayley, she felt she was the only person being treated in this way.

"Don't you notice that that person isolates me from everything? That he refuses to give me information for work that's happening?".

His very sort of "everyone in this room loves me and I hate you". So it was as though everyone in the room channelled their love to him and he channelled it all back to them but he hated me, you know I was the one that was just over the other side of the room.

Kate stresses the difference in her relationship with the bully as compared to that of her colleagues' by contrasting the 'love' he had with 'everyone', to the 'hate' which was directed only towards her. Kate also emphasises her physical isolation from others, giving an image of being on her own on the other side of the room to everyone else. Kate describes that she feels the isolation she experienced was very pointed and obvious to others, however notes that when she tried to report the bullying, this apparently had gone unnoticed. Kate's appealing question 'don't you notice?' seems to convey a sense of desperation and disbelief at this. It seems that Kate may feel that other people 'loved' the bully despite being aware of the way he treated her, possibly expressing a sense of betrayal by her colleagues further cementing her feelings of isolation. In other parts of the transcript, Kate goes on to say that this treatment led her to believe that there was something wrong with her as she was the only one who was treated this way.

In the extracts below Sophie describes that similarly to Hayley, being isolated and ignored led her to feel that she was not accepted or wanted at work.

It was all just really little things but very demeaning and just very uncomfortable and feeling really not accepted and not wanted there.

She would just completely ignore me if I asked her something, she would just say "I don't have the time now", she would hardly say "hello" to me.

I guess it's the feeling like an outcast or not belonging, or not being part of something that you want to be part of and not being liked and I think it's quite essential, I believe that we all want to be liked and we all want to be accepted and we all want to be respected. Bullying takes all of that away. It creates quite a horrible isolation, I guess that's what really makes it difficult for people.

(Sophie: 6,222-224; 10,415-419; 18,716-721)

Sophie describes that although the incidences of bullying appeared to be small, these built up over time and were experienced as 'demeaning'. This gives a sense that Sophie felt ashamed and almost unbearably uncomfortable to be in the rejected and excluded position of isolation as an 'outcast'. It was this feeling of not being liked or being part of something that she wanted to be part of that made the situation particularly difficult for her and this extract demonstrates the loss of connection with others, acceptance and respect that is inherent throughout the participants' stories. Sophie provides this sense of isolation and loss of acceptance and respect as an explanation for the psychological difficulties of depression and low self-worth she experienced.

Feeling Powerless

Participants described a power disparity between themselves and the bullying experience often speaking about the bully as all powerful contrasted with themselves as small and powerless. A sense of inescapability permeated the participants' accounts and they reported feeling imprisoned and unable to stop the bullying. They discussed having a complete lack of power to change their circumstances with little chance of feeling better and little option but to remain in the situation. This section demonstrates the lack of control targets felt they had in changing the situation and the psychological distress resulting from this.

Below Liz invokes a powerful metaphoric image of her experience of bullying as a prison. This suggests she felt in a state of forcible confinement and captivity and conveys how this led her to feel trapped with no other choices but to remain in the situation.

I just didn't see a way forward I was really sick actually and afraid [] so I went back to work, I had to go back to work they only paid you for two months, I had a mortgage, I couldn't go on without pay.

There was nowhere to go and that's what he did with the staff you know it was like being in a terrible prison really somehow.

(Liz: 12,449-458; 29,1179-1181)

For Liz, due to her own financial circumstances there was no other option but to remain in the situation and Liz reports feelings helpless and forced to endure this fate. This extract highlights the practicalities most participants faced which made it extremely difficult for them to address the bullying or leave the situation as there was no realistic option but to remain in their jobs. Nearly all participants reported wanting to leave the situation but feeling unable to do so due to restrictions placed upon them financially. Liz describes that not only was she unable to leave the situation, she was also unsuccessful in stopping the bullying as her grievances were not found.

I couldn't do anything about it, the Union washed their hands of it, absolutely hopeless.

(Liz: 24,967-968)

Liz describes that the Union 'washed their hands' of her case despite the fact she was still being bullied leaving her unsupported and powerless. Liz reports that this leaves her feeling hopeless and despairing with no hope or possibility for a solution to the bullying situation.

Liz goes on to present her feelings of powerlessness as an explanation leading to the psychological consequences she experienced.

It's that feeling of being utterly powerless because you can't, you don't understand why it is happening, not really, and it's horrible it makes you feel like shit, like you shouldn't be alive. And it's this feeling of you can't do anything about it because

when it happened to me in this job, whoever I went to for help, ended up blaming me somehow you know, firstly it was completely ignored and the next time I was deemed to be a troublemaker and so on.

(Liz: 28,1111-1118)

For Liz, not being able to understand why the bullying was happening also led to a sense of powerlessness. She reports this situation made her feel 'shit' and like she 'shouldn't be alive'. These are strong statements possibly conveying that Liz experienced suicidal ideation, feeling there is no point to being alive and furthermore like she had no right to be alive. Indeed Liz discusses being blamed, ignored and not being believed or helped by the organisation, conveying to Liz that she was the problem and not wanted in the workplace perhaps leading to a loss of self-worth. It appears that Liz tried to address the bullying with her organisation and also considered leaving her job, neither of which appeared to be viable options. She was left feeling that nothing could be done and with a prevailing sense of hopelessness and powerlessness.

Similarly, Angela describes feeling trapped and having no way of changing her situation conveying feelings of powerlessness and helplessness.

So in the end it was I am on a hide into nothing, there is no way out of this because it has grown and so many people now. The only way out was to leave.

It was a no brainer because there was nowhere to go, I mean it was the helplessness, helplessness was the feeling of what can I do, nothing except wait for this you know.

(Angela: 21,851-853; 21,869-872)

Angela describes her situation as a 'hide into nothing', a phrase portraying that Angela believed herself to be in an impossible situation in which nothing could be changed to improve it. The situation had 'grown' indicative of the escalating nature of bullying described by most participants. This suggests the situation became so large and powerful it was therefore more difficult to fight. Angela describes herself as having no control or power to change things in the face of this and that her only option was to leave. This decision was a 'no brainer' indicating the decision was simple to make given the lack of other options. These extracts tell of the lack of hope experienced by participants and the powerlessness and helplessness at not knowing what to do to in order to solve the bullying problem. Angela's explicit use and repetition of the word 'helplessness' emphasise Angela's feelings of vulnerability and her lack of power to defend herself against the bullying.

Similarly, Nina describes feeling trapped without options and power to remediate her situation. Again, the only viable option for Nina was to leave, however she described elsewhere in the transcript not being able to find another job which left her no way out of the situation.

I knew the only thing I could do was leave. If you are now in that position it's very hard to claw back from.

I couldn't leave the job so I was absolutely utterly trapped, I went in every single day.

God the amount of times I just wanted to walk out of there and never go back but I couldn't, I couldn't, I was so trapped.

(Nina: 5,191-193; 17,717-719; 19,799-801)

Nina's use the idiom 'claw back' gives the impression of moving forward with difficulty requiring a tremendous amount of effort and demonstrates the struggle in resolving the situation if somebody has become a target of bullying indicated in all

of the transcripts. Nina's voice is despairing as she describes herself as being completely trapped and prevented from escape, therefore unable to find relief from bullying and forced to face this on a daily basis.

So you know my own experience was very much it was great at the beginning, and then it just like slowly the gas got turned on and after a while I would have been boiled alive because I just couldn't get out. So I was just thinking "my God, how am I ever going to get out?". I didn't think I was going to get out, I actually didn't think I was going to get out, I just thought I was going to have a mental breakdown.

(Nina: 22,926-929)

Nina presents a metaphoric story comparing her experience of bullying to being in a pan of water that slowly heats, boiling you alive before you realise it is happening. By figuratively asserting that her experience was like this, Nina implies that she did not realise she was being bullied at first as the bullying progressed gradually but that ultimately the bullying resulted in extreme feelings of pain. The repetition of not being able to 'get out' implies feelings of desperation that there was nothing she could do to escape and Nina's emotions of fear, pain and despair are vividly apparent in her metaphorical language. Her use of the exclamation 'God' conveys strong emotions and gives emphasis to her feelings.

The points of comparison between bullying and a slowly heating pan of water gives the impression that the experience was harmful and psychologically damaging to the extent that Nina was fearful the bullying would cause her to experience a 'mental breakdown'. This term has pejorative connotations and portrays an image of a person as having become unable to function in daily life due to severe depression, stress and anxiety. The term describes the experience of 'snapping' under immense pressure and Nina appears to use it to describe the intense distress she felt due to experiencing workplace bullying.

Patrick's extract below demonstrates the dynamics of power within the organisation he worked. He makes reference to the 'blaming' culture of the organisation whereby there was a tendency to look for one person that could be held responsible for a problematic situation. He describes that he was at the bottom of the hierarchy and appears to use this to make sense of his bullying situation.

The bullying starts from top down and I was at the grass roots so got the lot. I don't know if you've heard of the expression 'kick the cat'. The husband gets kicked at work, he goes home he kicks the missus, the missus kicks the kids, the kids kick the cat [] and even if you are not specifically to blame for something going wrong, you will get the blame because you happen to be at the bottom of the heap.

(Patrick: 1,8-20)

Patrick uses expressive and idiomatic language in order to express his feelings of powerlessness. The term 'kick the cat' means to release frustration by snapping at an innocent person following a bad day at work. The implication is that Patrick is the cat and his use of 'grass roots' and 'bottom of the heap' paint a picture of himself as being and feeling small, lowly and powerless against a more powerful bully and organisation.

By creating a parallel between workplace bullying and domestic violence, Nina's extract below further emphasises the power and control element which appears to be inherent in workplace bullying and the subsequent feelings of powerlessness invoked in the targets.

It's like DV (domestic violence) *and this had so many parallels. You know again it's the sort of control aspect, you can't do anything without permission, your emails are checked before you send them off.*

I felt I didn't know what was right or wrong because the parameters kept changing.

I think that when you are so demoralised that you don't even know if you are coming and going anymore [] because for me it was just a total breakdown of trust in myself. Because I didn't know and again akin to DV, because like, I don't know how, is this right, have I said that right, have I spoken to you in the right way and then like bang you now, and although that bang in a physical sense never comes, it does come, it comes in a psychological sense.

(Nina: 7,285-288; 8,299-300; 21,852-860)

Nina likens the bully to a perpetrator of domestic violence. Domestic violence is defined by the NHS website as 'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse' seen as a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour through which the abuser seeks power over their victim (NHS, 2013). This definition can easily be applied to the experiences of bullying described in these extracts. Nina describes being unsure of how she is expected to complete her work duties due to the bully constantly changing the goalposts for her work and not knowing how he would react to every move she made. Subsequently, this led to feeling 'demoralised' and a loss of trust and confidence in herself and her ability to complete her work. It appears that she questions herself and her behaviour and exists in a state of uncertainty as to whether she will 'upset' the bully and lead herself to being abused. The abuse is psychological rather than physical yet nonetheless this is experienced as a blow as if she is being hit and appears to have negative psychological consequences.

Living in Fear and Dread

All participants reported that their daily experiences of bullying and their inability to escape or change the situation meant that they existed in a state of fear and dread about going to work and when at work, their day was permeated with fear, worry and anxiety. Participants described their experiences as similar to a nightmare from which they could not wake and presented feelings of horror and fear at feeling forever trapped.

Liz likened her experience to that of a frightening and unpleasant dream from which she was unable to wake or escape from and similarly describes that bullying was experienced as being trapped in a tortuous situation.

It was like living in a nightmare you know.

It was just torture.

(Liz: 8,313-314; 9,320)

These powerful metaphors depict the bullying experience as akin to having to endure severe pain and emphasise the participants' feelings of being trapped, powerless and with no hope of escape. Liz repeats the word 'nightmare' throughout her transcript emphasising the sense of fear, torment and anguish experienced.

Like Liz, Hayley parallels being bullied with living in a nightmare signifying the frightening nature of her experience.

I still have to come to terms with the personal sacrifice, if I can use that word, the kind of nightmare I've gone through, the aftermath of the investigation.

(Hayley: 1,26-29)

Hayley's words are suggestive of severe pain and trauma that she is yet to start to accept, deal with and come to understand. The word aftermath conveys an image of a catastrophic disaster and it is the consequences of this disaster, the psychological effects, which are difficult to cope with. Hayley's extract demonstrates the enduring theme throughout participants' accounts that it was not only the bullying experience, but also the organisational response that was damaging to psychological health. Hayley describes that she sacrificed her own well-being by initiating an investigation

into her bullying, emphasising the difficult nature of the investigation, and it appears that she lost a piece of herself through enduring such torment.

Nina's extract describes how the torturous nature of her experience left her feeling extremely distressed and unable to undertake her work.

It was like minute by minute, it was an excruciating experience I was very tortured on a minute by minute basis, very nervous I couldn't actually function, if a person came and asked me a question I didn't know what the right answer would be.

(Nina: 15,597-601)

Nina illustrates the constant nature of her bullying, a theme picked up in all of the interviews. For Nina, the experience was 'minute by minute' suggesting that her experience of pain and mental suffering was constant and time is broken down into these smaller units to signify the intensity of her painful experience. Like Liz and Hayley, Nina compares the experience to undergoing torture which evokes the image of being subjected to intense pain and suggests that the experiences have equally harmful psychological consequences. Nina goes on to describe feeling unable to complete her work as a result of the distress and confusion engendered by the bullying experience illustrating the negative impact workplace bullying had upon participants' work performance.

Natalie's extracts go on to emphasise the feelings of dread and anxiety that going to work thus engendered in participants.

That sinking feeling of not wanting to go to work, that I thought "no I've got to deal with" and frustration really as well.

It was the knowing that you were going to face that for the day, it was "what am I getting today?" sort of thing and the lack of being able to do anything about it and lack of being listened to by the firm I think probably that's the frustration of that.

 (Natalie: 12,454-457; 14.524-528)

These extracts capture a 'sinking' feeling of dread suggestive of uneasiness, apprehension and discouragement. Natalie suggests that she experienced anxiety, worry and uncertainty about what she may have to deal with at work and that as a result she did not want to go to work. It appears for Natalie the bullying was constant and it was certain that she would be bullied each day.

Natalie also talks of her additional feelings of frustration that the bullying was not dealt with and was ignored by the organisation leaving her facing bullying every day. Natalie described that it was feelings of dread and frustration at continually having to endure the bullying with no support or intervention from the organisation that led to the negative psychological consequences she experienced.

More distressingly, Angela described a point where the bullying she experienced progressed to more serious incidents and physical aggression. She expressed fear as to how this might progress further and for her physical and psychological safety.

When she started pushing me against walls and that I went to the manager and said "this is getting silly, you know what's next a cup of coffee over me?".

Because who can sit and work under those conditions, being spied on, people taking off your desk, you can't leave your food in the fridge because something might happen to it, you're in danger of someone shoving you around.

In the end I got up one morning and I couldn't go to work and I went to see her (GP) *and I was just in tears. And I said "I can't face it".*

(Angela: 4,128-130; 11,436-440; 19,790-791)

Angela talks about the difficulty in working under such conditions of fear and scrutiny. The word 'danger' suggests Angela feared the possibility of suffering harm or injury. The cumulative impact of her experience was that she felt unable to go to work and unable to face the bullying. For Angela, constantly living in fear and experiencing bullying was linked to not being able to cope. Angela discusses feeling unable to deal with the difficult circumstances she experienced and her language and repetition of not being able to cope conveys a sense of hopelessness and desperation along with a plea for help. The tears she describes indicate the level of distress and how overwhelmed she was left feeling by the bullying which Angela later discusses led to negative psychological consequences.

Nina emphasises the prolonged duration of her experience of bullying and the harshness of her language using the word 'shit' stresses the extremely unpleasant nature of the experience she had to face every day.

I think I was in there for eighteen months, a long time on a daily basis dealing with shit.

It impacted on my ability to even have fun or go out it was just like, I felt the time was always ticking up to the point I had to go back to work. When I took time off I was afraid of going back to the point of feeling sick, I used to feel like I was going to throw up when I got into (train station).

It's just like, you perceive you are going towards a threat, and it was a threat to my well-being and my mental health and it was like a bad time, I was going towards a bad time eight hours a day and that was a lot.

(Nina: 21,862-864; 18,733-738; 22,894-898)

Nina goes on to describe the physical feelings of extreme dread and anxiety she experienced when going to work and the journey into work as anxiety provoking in

itself to the point she felt physically 'sick'. She illuminates this further by describing the source of the feeling as because she perceived she was heading towards a 'threat' that could cause impending harm to her mental health. This echoes Angela's description of feeling as though she was in danger and highlights the harmful psychological effects of workplace bullying.

Indeed it seems that work felt dangerous for Nina and her feelings of fear and dread could not be contained to the work context, impacting upon her ability to even enjoy herself outside of work. This indicates that workplace bullying can have far more wide reaching consequences upon an individual's life than solely in the workplace. Nina's reference to the ticking of a clock is a somewhat threatening phrase suggestive of a 'ticking time bomb' conveying a sense of fear and anxious anticipation. For Nina time was constantly running out as she counted down the minutes and seconds to disaster.

For Kate, feelings of dread were related to experiencing uncertainty as to how the bully would act towards her on any given day and she describes that his mere presence was enough to cause her a great degree of anxiety and fear. It seems that the bully was able to affect Kate emotionally just by being present as he had come to be associated with such feelings of fear.

When it's the daily, it's daily basically, you then build a certain sense of dread about being in that room and seeing him every day. Because you just don't know, is he going to say something to you that day, is he not, and a lot of the time he wouldn't but it was his presence that actually in the end got to me.

When he walked in once unexpectedly, I'd been all chatty chatty chatty [] and I literally just sat there in silence again [] because I instantly, my walls went up, my barriers just flung up as if there was some kind of state of emergency in my head [] But the immediate sense of fear, I wasn't expecting to see him.

(Kate: 23,950-955; 12,475-486)

Like other participants, Kate describes developing a feeling of apprehension and fearful expectation of being bullied, leaving her not wanting to go to work. In this extract Kate also describes an instance of becoming panicky and alarmed at the bully merely walking into the room. She reports almost becoming dumbstruck and the image of her sitting in silence contrasts with her description of herself as 'chatty' prior to the bully's entrance. Kate describes an almost traumatic reaction to the bully whereby she appears to go on high alert as if there is a 'state of emergency', thus highlighting the intensity of the panic and alarm she felt and the seriousness of the threat she perceived to herself. The alarm in Kate's 'head' is similar to the notion of an alarm triggered in the brain in individuals experiencing post-traumatic stress and she put up defences in order to protect herself by avoiding the bully.

Trying to Make Sense

Prominent within each participant's account was a lack of understanding of why they were being bullied. This appeared to prompt a search for an explanation and it appeared important to the participants to be able to give a reason for the bullying in order to make sense of this. Some participants tried to explain bullying behaviour by making reference to the culture of the organisation in which they worked or by understanding the bully's own psychological issues. It appeared that these strategies were protective to the participants' sense of self although they acknowledged that this did not lessen the psychological impact of bullying. The need to know why they were being targeted along with the absence of a meaningful explanation for their experience was experienced as frustrating and bewildering and in some cases led participants to question and blame themselves.

The extract below epitomises the experience of most participants, telling of the desire to understand the situation but finding that they can never do so.

I have had a year to reflect since getting the sack and I want to try to understand it, I think it's actually, I think it's beyond my understanding really.

(Liz: 1,35-37)

Patrick explains further that at the time of the bullying it was difficult for him to understand what was happening to him due to the covert nature of the bullying and he experienced uncertainty and worry as a result.

It's a nagging feeling that is in the back of your mind that there is something wrong and you can't pin it down. And you agonise over it and because it's so insidious, it's in the background and you are feeling uneasy but you don't know why you are feeling uneasy because it is very difficult to rationalise your situation.

(Patrick: 23,913-919)

Patrick describes experiencing a 'nagging feeling' suggesting he was persistently troubled by worry. He reports agonising over this which suggests he spent a long time ruminating about the behaviour he experienced. He describes bullying as 'insidious', highlighting the gradual and covert nature of bullying and that he could not identify or make sense of what was happening to him. Patrick describes later that this, along with his experiences of loss due to being bullied discussed later, led to extreme stress and harmful physical effects.

Angela captures the participants' motivation to understand and explain their situation and why they became targets. She describes however that any reasons she can provide for the bullying do not change the fact that the bullying occurred or the harmful psychological consequences suffered.

There's so many things you can say as an excuse and as a reason, but it didn't affect the fact that she did it and others joined in.

I also think they were trying to protect their own jobs. They saw me as a well-paid person. (Bully) *thought that if I left, he would get that position and the money []. So they thought they were saving their own jobs and I was the one that was going to be sacrificed. [] That's all I can tell myself that they had these other reasons and I was the one that suffered.*

(Angela: 16,646-648; 25,1033-1046)

For Angela, bullying was seen as an intentional effort to drive her from the workplace. She evokes the image of being sacrificed, which suggests that she endured a loss so that the bully might gain an advantage. This sense of sacrifice is echoed later whereby Angela describes experiencing a complete loss of her sense of identity as a result of the bullying and it appears that it was her sense of self and identity that was sacrificed.

Her use of the words 'excuse' and 'reason' suggest that Angela is searching for a cause or justification for the bullying against her. It appears that obtaining an explanation is important to participants in being able to console themselves and put their minds to rest. Finding an explanation that draws upon the bully's own issues may be protective to the self as one can locate something lacking in the bully rather than in one's own self.

Kate describes below how participants' search for an explanation inevitably led them to question themselves and their own behaviour in order to try and make sense of the situation.

Why did he choose me out of all the people in that room to be the person to pick on and be horrible to? Why did I stand out?

If I'd done something to provoke a reaction, then you can understand it and then you can understand a situation. The other thing is that you can't understand, you can't make sense of the situation so it leaves you feeling very confused.

I would have a glass of wine with my housemate and I would just say about these incidents, "I don't know why he is just so mean, I don't know what the problem is, what's the problem, I haven't been horrible to him".

 (Kate: 15,605-607; 20,847-851; 23,943-947)

Kate's search for an explanation for her bullying experience appears to centre upon finding a cause or reason for why she was singled out as a target over other people in her workplace. Kate describes that she could make sense of the situation if she had provoked it with her own behaviour, however she describes being unable to find something in her own behaviour that might have caused the bully to dislike her.

The absence of being able to place a reason upon the bully's behaviour appears to lead to an even greater sense of confusion and uncertainty for Kate and makes the situation more difficult for her to comprehend. Kate provides this as an explanation for the psychological difficulties she experienced. There are many unanswered questions throughout the extracts conveying both Kate's desire and inability to understand her experience of bullying and emphasising that Kate has tried to think of every reason that might explain the situation. However, Kate has come to the conclusion that she has not found the explanation she seeks and that it is not helpful to her to try.

I've thought about it from every single possible angle and I gave up in the end because it wasn't getting me anywhere.

(Kate: 24,981-983)

While Kate described that she would be able to make sense of her experience if she had provoked it, Sophie appeared to have made sense of her experience by blaming

herself and perceiving that she had done something to bring the bullying upon herself.

I think a lot of it was really trying to figure out what I did wrong to make these perfectly reasonable people so hostile towards me over a period of time when really they started off being nice. They started off as being so and yeah I still think that I must have done something that provoked it in some way.

(Sophie: 12,497-502)

Sophie suggests that she is engaged in an on-going process of trying to make sense of her experience even years after the bullying occurred. Sophie's explanation turns to self-blame and she holds herself responsible for being bullied because she perceived she provoked the bully in some way. For participants, it appears that this self-blame led to a loss of confidence and impacted upon their identity as they perceived there to be something wrong with themselves to have provoked such behaviour.

Superordinate theme two: Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying

These themes relate to participants' descriptions and explanations of the psychological consequences they experienced as a result of workplace bullying. Participants described an overwhelming mixture of reactions including shock, disbelief, excessive and ruminative thinking, depression, anxiety and stress. Participants also discussed that the experience left them feeling humiliated and fearful of being bullied again. This caused them to feel wary and cautious of getting another job and indeed some participants felt unable to work again. This theme also relates to perceived positive outcomes that resulted from the experience.

<u>Shock and Disbelief</u>

There was a shared experience of initial shock and disbelief amongst all of the participants consistent with experiencing a traumatic reaction to the bullying. They described a sense of intense shock and horror at having become a target of bullying and disbelief stemming from not being able to believe that such behaviour could occur in the workplace.

In the following extracts Liz captures the shocking and traumatic impact that workplace bullying had upon her and the sense of bereavement she was left with.

I just was horrified, I thought "how can this be happening, it isn't true, it's not true".

You know the disbelief of being accused of stuff that you haven't done and not being able to prove it, to be honest I'm still mystified by that.

(Liz: 23,903-904; 27,1095-1097)

Liz uses strong words of 'horror' and 'disbelief' to emphasise the shock and distress she felt as she struggled to comprehend her situation. During Liz's bullying experience, false allegations were made against her and Liz describes the disbelief that despite the allegations being untrue, she was unable to prove this and lost her job as a result. The repetition of 'not true' and 'mystified' conveys disbelief and confusion and it is impossible for Liz to make sense of this. Liz's feelings of disbelief also suggest an inability or refusal to accept that the situation is really happening and indeed Liz likens the experience of bullying and the loss of her job to suffering bereavement.

Just numb almost you know like the first stage of bereavement when you can't even, you can't acknowledge it because it doesn't feel real, I just had to keep telling myself you know.

(Liz: 29,1152-1195)

Liz appears to be grieving the loss of her job and the person she once was. It seems that Liz attempts to make sense of her feelings by using psychological terminology and referring to the stages of bereavement first proposed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her 1969 book "On Death and Dying". The first stage of grief is shock and the initial reaction to a loss is usually to deny the reality of the situation. This can be seen as a normal reaction in order to protect oneself from being overwhelmed by emotions. Liz describes feeling emotionally numb and unable to acknowledge the reality of her situation, perhaps in order to prepare herself for the sense of loss she would experience due to her new conception of self as someone without a job.

Similarly, Hayley describes feelings of shock and disbelief that the bullying was allowed to occur and defines this sense of shock as leading her to feel emotionally upset.

I just cannot believe that I have been treated so badly, I just can't believe how that was allowed to happen because, you know, I'm really sorry (tearful).

So the reason I'm upset is because actually I have innocently been going about my business to the best of my ability and this has happened and I'm quite shocked by it all because I just can't believe how that happened really because it's not like I've done anything wrong you know.

(Hayley, 22,872-875; 23,885-889)

Hayley, like most participants, expresses disbelief that another person could treat her so badly and indeed becomes tearful at this point in the interview indicating the

strong emotional impact the experience continues to have on her. That this was 'allowed' to happen suggests that she was not helped by her organisation and echoes Liz's experience that she had not done anything wrong yet allegations were made against her and believed. By saying 'innocently' and 'to the best of my ability' Hayley appears to be defending her self-worth and that there has been no wrongdoing on her part, also emphasising the shock experienced.

Carrying on from Hayley's extract, Natalie also expresses shock and disbelief that bullying could occur between adults in the workplace when one has certain expectations of adult behaviour at work.

Quite shocking because you just think "this can't be happening to me at this age", you know this is ridiculous.

(Natalie: 2,53-54)

For Natalie, bullying as an adult seems 'ridiculous' and as something that only happens between children, suggesting the very thought of this is absurd and outrageous.

Kate illuminates this further by describing a sense of shock at the deep emotional impact being bullied had on her which affected her sense of self as a strong and confident person.

It destroyed my confidence and I think it was a shock to my system, how much it hurt, because I consider myself to be quite a confident person. And for them to, yeah it was a shock to myself what he did, how it affected me.

I don't know whether it's part of being an adult and not expecting it to happen gives it an even deeper sense of shock. Because I think by the time you're an adult you

just expect people to act with some dignity, it just doesn't seem the done thing. And because you don't do that to people, it seems the most abnormal thing to have done to you [] and because I would never ever ever imagine doing that to anybody else, when suddenly someone comes along, he might as well have just punched me in the face quite honestly every day for six months.

(Kate: 19,769-773; 20,834-845)

Her use of the phrase 'shock to the system' emphasises a feeling of being shocked to her core. Most participants described a sense of shock, disbelief and subsequent shattered assumptions about how they felt people should behave at work showing how fundamental assumptions about the world's meaningfulness and benevolence may be shattered by traumatic events such as workplace bullying. For Kate, not expecting to be bullied as an adult and having expectations for others' behaviour in the workplace gave the experience a deeper sense of shock as her experience of bullying violated these assumptions and conflicted with her own morals for behaviour. Because, as Kate attests, she would never behave in this way towards others, it was felt more keenly when it happened to her which emphasises the shock and disbelief experienced. Kate equates the bullying she experienced in physical terms of abuse to describe how the bullying felt to her and for the reader this conveys a sense of Kate's shock and makes the bully's behaviour appear all the more shocking.

Excessive and Ruminative Thinking

Participants spoke about how not being able to understand or explain their situation and not knowing how to resolve it led to a tendency to think excessively and ruminate in perceived attempts to make sense of and work out how to stop the bullying. Participants described how thoughts about the bullying tended to repeat over and over and emphasised the recurrent, intrusive and uncontrollable style of their thinking. Ruminating about bullying events in the past appeared to lead to depression while rumination about potential incidents of bullying and how to deal with these led to anxiety.

Pointing to how extensively bullying pervaded participants' thinking, Nina describes a constant preoccupation with the bullying, framing this as a consuming experience which was all she could talk about to the exclusion of other things in her life. Her repetition of 'all' that she could talk about and her emphasis on thinking about it from getting up to going to sleep highlights the persistent intrusion of the bullying into her thoughts and life.

It was all I could talk about, it was all I could talk about all the time.

It ate away at me and I let it, and I thought about it all the time, I was lying there thinking about it, getting up that's the first thing I thought about.

(Nina: 7,258-259; 12,476-478)

Nina describes that the bullying situation 'ate away' at her, an idiom which evokes images of being consumed bit by bit suggesting that Nina was troubled constantly by thinking about the bullying. Nina speaks about the experience as gradually wearing her down and further says that she 'let' the bullying eat away at her suggesting that she felt a lack of power over her thoughts and to return to an earlier metaphor used by Nina, that she 'tortured' herself by continually thinking about the bullying.

All your friends are hearing just one thing and it's not that they don't want to support you, but my God they do probably think "Jesus".

(Nina: 21,874-876)

Like other participants, Nina spoke about how bringing the bullying home impacted upon other areas of her life. Nina was concerned as to impact her constant need to speak about the bullying had on her relationship with her friends. This appears to be another source of stress for Nina as she perceived herself to annoy others by

complaining all the time, emphasising the extent to which the bullying permeated her life outside of work.

Similarly to Nina, Kate talks about ruminating excessively about the bullying situation to the extent of having no space left in her mind to think about anything else.

For a little while, around when it first started it was all that occupied my mind, it just took over every part of my mind, I had no room in my head for anything else apart from this situation.

(Kate, 20,824-827)

Kate emphasises that the bullying took up all of her concentration indicating that she thought about the bullying frequently to the detriment of other parts of her life. Kate talks about her mind as being 'occupied' suggestive of being seized and controlled as if by military invasion. It seems as if her mind had been taken over by an enemy force over which she had no control and was something to be defended against the harmful effects of bullying.

Below, a series of extracts from Natalie's narrative encapsulates the nature of the rumination experienced by participants and the further impact of this upon her psychological health.

It was that sort of voice in your head type of thing that was really annoying, it was a bit "for God's sake let it go". So you would play things round in your mind and sort of think "could I do that, or could I do this" or you know, trying to deal with it.

Just trying to work it out and work it out and that was tiring, to be quite honest.

(Natalie: 12,460-464; 14,544-545)

Natalie experienced rumination as a voice in her head trying to make sense of the experience, going over different options that she might take and trying to work out a way of dealing with the bullying. She describes this self-talk as 'annoying' and conveys feelings of frustration with the extent to which she was thinking about the situation along with constant feelings of worry. Natalie told herself to 'let it go' which is an idiomatic expression suggesting she wanted to be able to stop trying to control and think about the bullying, yet felt a need to think about the bullying in order to solve the situation. Natalie speaks later about how she was able to cope with rumination by throwing herself into her work in order to 'shut the voice up' and the benefits of this for her psychological health in 'Concentrating on Other Aspects of Life'.

Natalie goes on to talk about the impact of continually ruminating about the bullying upon her sleeping pattern and psychological health.

Things like sleeping, quite disturbed sleep, to the point when it was at its worst, night sweats, really quite physical symptoms which worried me, the fact that I was starting to get physical symptoms was a real sort of "oh god you need to go to the doctors, this is you know not something you can now deal with".

Yeah and waking up in the middle of the night and whatever thing that had happened would be going through your head.

(Natalie: 12,435-440; 14,540-541)

Natalie's physical symptoms of stress were experienced as worrying and as an indicator that the effects she experienced were severe and needed outside help to manage. This suggests she felt overwhelmed and unable to cope by herself. Natalie presented the excessive rumination caused by being bullied as an explanation of

what it was about workplace bullying that led to the psychological consequences she experienced.

Much like Natalie, Hayley also experienced deleterious effects upon her sleeping pattern due to playing the daily events of bullying over and over in her mind.

I ended up every night, I could not sleep, it was just like a tape recorder [] keep playing again and again and again.

(Hayley: 3,90-94)

Hayley likens her thoughts to a tape recorder playing bullying events over and over. This, along with the repetition of 'again', emphasises the repetitive nature of her thinking suggesting that for Hayley, the psychological impact of bullying manifested at night in disturbed sleep and rumination. Hayley describes that this was 'every' night, emphasising the constant nature of the bullying and the psychological effects suffered. She speaks elsewhere in the transcript about being so preoccupied with her bullying situation that she missed the fact that her son was experiencing difficulties of his own. She reported feeling shame and deep regret at this, illustrating the further psychological consequences experienced as a result of the impact bullying had upon participants' wider lives. Again this suggests preoccupation with bullying to the exclusion of other aspects of life and illustrates the extent to which bullying had taken over the participants' lives.

Experiencing Depression

All participants reported experiencing at least some difficulties symptomatic of depression as a result of their experiences of bullying. They reported low mood, feelings of worthlessness, loss of motivation, withdrawal from activities and social contact along with intense feelings of hopelessness and marked suicidal ideation.

In the context of the extract below, Patrick reveals his coping strategy of working harder in response to criticism regarding his work performance in an attempt to stop the bullying. He describes trying to give the bullies what they wanted and seeking approval and recognition for his work. This had been withheld from him as his efforts had been constantly undervalued and he had been continually overlooked for promotion.

It used to screw me up really really badly because I was spending so much time trying to make an impression, wasting so much time trying to make an impression at work, I became very much a workaholic and my social life really really suffered and it was a very lonely period.

(Patrick, 12,495-500)

Patrick describes feeling 'screwed up' suggesting he felt incredibly confused, distressed and anxious about his bullying situation. He describes working extremely hard and being so preoccupied with work to the exclusion of everything else in his life such that his work became his life. This was to the detriment of the loss of his social and family life and he suffered feelings of loneliness as a result.

Patrick describes that he was 'spending' time trying to make an impression at work and then alters this to 'wasting' time as it seems that despite his hard work and effort, his work was never good enough or valued yet he continued to strive to work harder. When he could not achieve the sought after recognition he describes how he spiralled into depression as a result of this 'vicious circle'.

The less recognition I got, the harder I worked and this was a vicious circle and I used to get into a depression spiral as well, like you get depressed, therefore you get depressed therefore you're depressed and even more depressed and so on and I found it very difficult to break out of that.

(Patrick: 12,501-506)

Patrick's account is evocative of entrapment in cyclical and ruminative thinking characteristic of depression. The rhythm of the words Patrick uses and the repetition of the word 'depression' give the impression of a spiral downwards, sinking into depression with the thoughts going round and round in his head causing his mood to become lower. This thereby led Patrick to experience more depressive thinking creating a vicious cycle which he describes was difficult to overcome. It seems that continually striving for the approval of his bullies yet never achieving this led Patrick to experience depression and also to think and behave in ways which maintained his depression.

Nina talks about experiencing a loss of motivation and belief in herself which are both symptomatic of depression and characteristic of participants' accounts of their psychological difficulties following workplace bullying.

I tried to do other things to motivate myself and go and see people but like who would want you when you are down there, how are you going to self-promote to another level to somewhere else. I'm sure it took everything out of me to try and just be happy in the interviews like nothing was going wrong []. If I was sat in front of you and you were interviewing me right now and I was saying well I don't know, I think I can do it. What are you supposed to say to somebody else when you don't even believe in yourself. How are you supposed to do anything or go anywhere when all you know for sure is how shit you feel.

(Nina: 22,898-910)

Nina talks about experiencing difficulty motivating herself to undertake activities she previously enjoyed and in being sociable with others due to her perception that others would not wish to be around her. Nina went for job interviews when trying to

escape her bullying situation but describes struggling to promote herself because she experienced a loss of confidence in herself and her abilities as a result of workplace bullying. She describes experiencing self-doubt and feeling so depressed that she found it exhausting to 'perform' in interviews, to present as happy when she was feeling so low and to put forward her strengths, attributes and skills when she had lost belief in these.

A loss of self-confidence was reported by most participants and is explored in further detail in the theme 'Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity'. Nina's quote highlights the devastating impact bullying had on participants' and the subsequent deleterious impact upon their mood. It appears that Nina was experiencing symptoms of depression defined by the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) as diminished interest or pleasure in activities, depressed mood and feelings of worthlessness. Indeed Nina describes feeling so 'shit' that she feels unable to do anything, emphasising the depths of her feelings of depression.

Kate talks about how workplace bullying affected her life both at work and outside of work and she describes experiencing a loss of interest and withdrawal from activities and social contact due to not feeling able to make the effort, again symptomatic of depression.

It affected most parts of my life, like there was loads of stuff that I just gave up on entirely. I gave up on loads of stuff, I just couldn't be bothered, didn't have it in me anymore, just very very slowly, so in some ways I wasn't even noticing it myself until, I wasn't staying in touch with people, I wasn't making an effort with myself, I didn't care, I didn't buy new clothes I didn't try and put makeup on, I didn't really care, all that sort of thing.

I lost interest in even caring about who I was in my career, I didn't care about getting further, I didn't care about learning new things. And that was part and parcel as well of the way he made me feel and the way he acted around me as though everything I said was stupid.

(Kate: 20,816-824; 9,373-377)

Kate presents a detached and disinterested picture of herself. She describes not caring or attaching importance to her career indicating a loss of pride and concern for herself and the future. This contrasts with Kate's description of herself prior to the bullying, presented earlier in the interview, as enthusiastic and ambitious about herself and her career. Kate may also have lost belief in herself and it appears that by 'giving up' Kate has given up on the career and identity she wanted for herself. She describes a sense of feeling demoralised and attributes the cause of her loss of interest and motivation to the bully causing her to feel 'stupid', leaving her not wanting to contribute at work and losing the inclination to progress in her career. Kate later details part of her recovery from the impact of workplace bullying was to buy new clothes and make-up representing the reestablishment of her self-pride.

'Giving up' implies a sense of hopelessness, and suicidal ideation was also sometimes reported by participants. Liz gives an example of the extreme impact workplace bullying had upon her psychological health, leaving her feeling unable to get out of bed and contemplating death linked to the loss of identity she experienced after being subjected to bullying at work.

I just literally took to my bed, I could barely get up, I couldn't get up.

It was hard to get myself out of bed, but you know I don't know what happened, it's just you kind of lose all faith in myself and you know I had completely lost faith in myself and I just didn't, you know I was just thinking about death, I just thought I'm going to be dead soon, and you know I'll smoke more and drink more and just sit about and eat rubbish and hopefully I'll keel over with a heart attack.

(Liz: 29,1147-1149; 30,1195-1201)

Liz reports finding it difficult to get out of bed due to a loss of belief in herself and a loss of energy for life, perhaps because she had nothing to get up for due to the loss

of her job. Her account is extremely distressing and sad and she talks about a loss of faith in herself to be able to do anything. Such symptoms are akin to the cognitive and physical symptoms associated with depression such as lethargy and feelings of worthlessness. Liz conveys a sense of despondency and hopelessness about her future which brings to the forefront the damaging impact of workplace bullying and reflects intense distress as Liz articulates thoughts of self-destruction.

Nina's extract below highlights the sense of being overwhelmed and unable to cope with the bullying which presented in each of the transcripts, for Nina, to the extent that she had thoughts of suicide.

I hadn't thought about suicide since I was about 18 and I thought "my God, I don't know if I can cope with this anymore".

I was just thinking "I can't deal with this anymore, I really can't deal with this anymore".

(Nina: 17,703-706; 17,714-715)

Nina talks about her experience at this point in the context of previous experiences of depression. She describes having thoughts of suicide due to feeling that she could no longer cope with being bullied and the psychological consequences of this. Her continual repetition of not being able to cope conveys a sense of desperation and hopelessness. Taken in the context of her whole experience, Nina talks about continually living in fear and dread of bullying and feeling there was no way out from this. It seems that she suffered a loss of hope and intense feelings of despair at seeing no way forward with no possibility of a solution to the situation.

Experiencing Stress

Participants talked about how the experience of bullying led them to experience severe stress, exhaustion and burn out with the constant fight against the perceived uncontrollability of the bullying.

Below, Patrick describes how after experiencing bullying in the workplace for a number of years, the 'psychology' or psychological explanation was that the combination of stressors he experienced caused severe stress and Alopecia characterised by complete hair loss to his entire body.

The psychology of it all was all coming at the same time all on top of me, plus [] there was the added stress of the work itself, so [] it just came from all directions and the psychology was basically I didn't know who to trust anymore and the result of that was so insidious that all my hair just fell out. [] I noticed all the hairs had gone from everywhere and it took six weeks. I know that it was the stress from so many different directions all at the same time that caused it.

(Patrick: 8.327-340)

The term 'stress' is suggestive of a state of tension, anxiety, worry and depression and Patrick's extract emphasises the overwhelming amount of stress he was under at work due to being bullied. Patrick's repeated use of the word 'all' and the description of the stressors as 'on top of him' conveys a sense of feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope due to a heavy burden placed on him which he was trying in vain to hold up. There is a sense of extreme pressure and that this placed a great emotional strain on Patrick which he eventually gave way to. Patrick goes on to discuss the further devastating impact the loss of his hair had on his self-image and confidence and this is explored in 'Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity'.

Below, Angela discusses that her experience of bullying caused her to experience stress to the extent that she took sickness absence from work on two occasions.

The end result was that I was off for two periods with stress for six weeks at a time and when I came back to work after the first time it got worse. Anyway by then I'm just a basket case but it really got worse because then they were talking about restructuring and redundancies.

In the end I got up one morning the first time and I thought I can't go in and the second time I went back because they said we will move this that and the other and they didn't and it was worse and it just got to the point I said if I stayed there much longer I'd have dunno, been really ill.

(Angela: 2,43-47; 15,607-612)

Like Patrick, Angela conveys a sense of being overwhelmed by a number of stressors and emphasises the escalating and cumulative nature of the bullying and of the related stress she experienced. Angela describes that the situation impacted upon her deeply to the point that she became unable to continue at work and risk being 'really ill' with more severe perceived consequences upon her psychological health. Angela describes herself as a 'basket case', which gives an impression that she was suffering from extreme nervous strain and emotional exhaustion. The phrase also implies that Angela felt unable to cope due to the stress. Angela explains that it was the number of stressors experienced and feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with these that led to the experience of severe stress.

Following on from this, Liz explains how experiencing the stress of bullying left her feeling exhausted and burnt out.

I was coming to the edge of being able to do it, I was so completely burnt out with it, you know exhausted.

(Liz: 16,640-642)

Liz gives the impression of being extremely tired and drained both physically and mentally of her resources and therefore unable to cope with the bullying. She describes 'coming to the edge' of being able to continue to go to work and deal with bullying suggesting that she was on the verge of burn out. 'Burnout' is a psychological term referring to long term exhaustion and diminished interest in work. 'On edge' can be taken further to mean highly tense and unable to relax due to worry, perhaps suggesting that this was how Liz felt. A person can also be said to be 'on the edge' when they are close to becoming mentally ill suggesting Liz may have felt distressed to the extent of being close to having a 'nervous breakdown'.

Nina describes that due to her bullying experience, she too felt as if she might suffer from a 'nervous breakdown'.

I was having counselling there and she turned around and said "look you are suffering from burnout and you need to leave this coercive environment because it's getting you down, you need to be off for two months" [] and she said "you are almost getting to the point where you are going to suffer from a nervous breakdown".

(Nina: 3,128-136)

Similarly to Liz, Nina's therapist told her that she was suffering from 'burnout' to the extent that it would be vital for her to take sickness absence from work. The word 'coercive' is suggestive of a controlling and intimidating work environment and again has similarities with domestic violence. Nina was told this was having deleterious effects upon her psychological health to the point that she was nearing a 'nervous breakdown'. This can be defined as a period of mental illness resulting

from severe depression, stress and anxiety suggesting that Nina experienced such negative effects upon her psychological health.

Becoming Fearful of Returning to Work

Experiences of bullying left participants fearful of returning to the workplace and of being bullied again. They described experiencing a loss of confidence in themselves along with a loss of faith and trust in the workplace. Some participants were able to return to work, however described feelings of fear, worry and apprehension at this. For others, their experience meant that they felt unable to work again.

It's left me feeling obviously really, well I haven't applied for a job, I've missed lots of opportunities you know because I just feel, if I come across the same thing it's just very off-putting actually.

 (Hayley: 21,804-808)

For Hayley, the prospect of getting another job is daunting and intimidating as she worries she may be bullied again. Hayley describes that due to being bullied and the resulting fear she has been left with, she has missed out on a number of job opportunities and there is a sense of disappointment and focus on the things that she could have done if she had not been bullied. This highlights the fear associated with the workplace, as this is enough to prevent her from having a chance for employment and promotion.

I haven't got another job because I don't know if it's worth the hassle because it's brought me down so much, do you know, I'd rather not have anything you know, ok everyone needs a job to earn money but I'd rather not even have money if I'm going to come up against people like these two.

(Hayley: 23,893-898)

Hayley weighs up the possibility of being 'brought down' and going through the psychological consequences of being bullied again against receiving an income and decides that she would rather not have any money than go through this again, demonstrating the truly aversive nature of her experience of bullying.

For Kate, it was not until she was faced with entering a new workplace that this fear set in. Below Kate describes being offered a temporary position to which she agreed at first and then felt frightened as to how she would be treated.

A month into being made redundant, out of the blue a friend called me and said can you come and be, help us out and just temp here for three weeks [] So I went "right ok yeah cool I'll do it, put me down". And then I put the phone down and literally thought "oh my God, oh my God what is it going to be like there, how are these people going to be, I'm really quite scared".

It wasn't until I was faced with having to go into another situation and working for a different team professionally that I suddenly started to think "can I do this, will they be horrible to me, is there someone there that is going to pick on me".

(Kate: 16,656-666; 19,782-786)

Kate was enthusiastic at first at being offered a job, however when she began to think about what this would mean, she was struck by sudden fear and alarm. The repetition of the exclamation 'oh my God' emphasises the fear and apprehension felt. It seems that the bullying experience left Kate both questioning herself as to whether she could undertake the job and worrying whether she would be bullied again causing her to become fearful about returning to the workplace.

Kate takes the risk and takes the job however, like Hayley, participants such as Angela and Sophie were left feeling unable to work for a long time, if again.

The upshot is I've not worked since. I did come out and I did think about getting another job but when I went to the agencies all they were offering me was the same job on the same level and I didn't want to go back to it and I haven't. In the end I thought I can manage on what I am getting and I haven't got the confidence to go back to work, I just haven't.

(Angela: 26,1050-1056)

For Angela, the outcome of her experience of workplace bullying is that she has been left feeling unable to return to work due to the loss of belief in herself and perhaps also a loss of faith in the workplace. Angela describes that she can 'manage' on the money she has, however this implies that she can only just get by and 'make do' on this amount. This suggests that similarly to Hayley, for Angela even this is preferable to getting another job conveying her strong desire not to return to the workplace as a result of being bullied.

For Sophie, her experience of bullying meant that she felt fearful of returning to work for a long time after her experience and indeed even now she feels fearful about entering new workplaces.

I basically took a year off, but I never really intended to take that year off, it was just, I was getting so worried about the whole thing happening again and I was so traumatised by it that I just basically since I didn't have to, I didn't get another job.

Sophie (6,244-248)

Sophie describes that she was left 'traumatised', suggesting she was so emotionally disturbed by her experience of bullying that the fear, dread and terror associated with the workplace is enough to prevent her from getting a job. Sophie describes below that even after a year and experiences of other workplaces, she is still 'petrified' that she will be bullied.

Whenever I go to a new place, I still am petrified that maybe the same thing will happen. Maybe they won't like me, maybe I will act in a way that is going to cause them to, you know I would irritate them and then they would just want me out. I do worry about that.

 (Sophie: 9,373-377)

In contrast to Kate's extract, Sophie focuses on ways in which she herself might provoke bullying, rather than that there may be a bully in the workplace. It appears that for Sophie, her fear of returning to the workplace stems from feeling that she was in some way to blame for being bullied.   There are a number of 'maybes' in the extract which suggest that Sophie is thinking about lots of different possibilities for why she might lead other people to bully her, for instance being 'irritating'. Indeed it appears that Sophie has come to perceive herself in this way and believes that there is something wrong with her that will inevitably lead her to be bullied. This suggests the impact of bullying on Sophie's sense of self-assurance has been immense. Ultimately for Sophie her experience of bullying means she has been left feeling inadequate, self-blaming and unsure of herself which she has taken into her future workplaces.

For some participants, it seems that the psychological impact of the bullying experience affected them in such a profound way that even years after the actual experience the aftereffects of this persist. Indeed, taken together, the psychological symptoms reported were characteristic of experiencing post-traumatic stress (DSM-IV-TR, APA, 2000). The participants were confronted with an event which involved

a threat to their psychological health and in some cases, their physical integrity, to which they responded with intense fear, helplessness and horror. Participants also experienced recurrent and intrusive distressing thoughts and recollections of the bullying along with intense psychological distress and physiological reactivity at exposure to cues that resembled aspects of the bullying. They described persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the bullying, markedly diminished interest and participation in significant activities, feelings of detachment from others and a sense of a foreshortened future with many feeling that they were now unable to pursue their career. The participants experienced increased arousal as indicated by sleep disturbance, difficulty concentrating and hypervigilance. Furthermore, the duration of their symptoms spanned a period of longer than one month and caused clinically significant distress and impairment in their social and occupational functioning.

Positive Psychological Effects

The participants' stories indicated that for some, the originally psychologically damaging experience of bullying appeared to have been transformed into something with positive implications. Their accounts illustrated personal transformations which included becoming stronger and more confident along with increases in their perceived ability to cope with adversity. They described learning from the experience so that they might be able to deal with bullying more effectively in the future. It appeared that by framing their experience in a more positive light, participants were able to maintain definitions of the self which were positive and worthwhile.

It's been a learning curve, shame it happened so long but I think I've become stronger as a person because of it.

(Natalie: 7,264-266)

Natalie sees her experience of workplace bullying as having made her psychologically stronger implying a positive transformation of her sense of self. For

Natalie, the experience has been a 'learning curve' suggesting that she has gained knowledge and new skills from the experience and she goes on to talk about feeling able to deal more effectively with workplace bullying should it occur in the future.

If it did happen again I would nip it straight away I think, I don't think I would put up with the same again. And I probably even would address it quicker, as in if it meant that I had to bite back straight away I probably would more now.

(Natalie: 17,655-660)

Part of feeling stronger for Natalie means that she feels she would now respond differently to being bullied and has a greater confidence to stand up for herself. This implies that she no longer feels so powerless. Natalie discussed earlier her regret at putting up with the bullying when other colleagues had 'bitten back' and had been able to put a halt to the bullying. By referring to her perception that she would now 'bite back', Natalie suggests that she is more able to defend herself as she had perceived her colleagues were able to. Participants spoke of their bullying experience as growing and becoming completely impossible to then address. Natalie reports that she has learned to put a stop to the bullying while it is in its early stages before it can develop into something more serious by employing a metaphorical idiom alluding to 'nipping' a flower bud before it blooms in order to stop the plant from growing bigger.

Natalie illuminates the positives resulting from the bullying situation further by stating that the bullying actually served as a motivating experience giving her the impetus to pursue a different more fulfilling career.

On the positive it made me actually get up and get on with something else rather than dwelling on all of that.

In that respect it probably did give me a kick up the bum to, the bullying has become positive, the way it was meant to happen.

And it has led me to a different career that really was a direct result you know when you can just pinpoint, right I need to go and do something.

(Natalie: 7,249-251; 15,575-577; 18,676-678)

This positive consequence appears to be the result of Natalie's coping strategy during the bullying to distract herself by enrolling in college and throwing herself into the work. By focusing on something different, Natalie explains that she is able to stop dwelling on her work situation and it appears that this put a stop to the cycle of rumination she experienced. By experiencing bullying, Natalie was able to realise that the job she was in was not the career she wished to pursue and prompted her to build a new career for herself. Natalie now looks back on her experience somewhat philosophically and describes that she feels the bullying was supposed to happen and led her to where she was 'meant to be'. Natalie implies that she would not have experienced this self-discovery had she not experienced bullying. This appears to help Natalie to look at her experience in a more positive light, lessening the psychological consequences associated with the bullying.

Similarly, Nina reiterates having become stronger as a result of her bullying experiences.

At the end of the day, I don't know if I consider myself a victim, I'm definitely a survivor of these experiences.

(Nina: 4,172-174)

The term 'survivor' has connotations of strength and perseverance following a traumatic experience whereas 'victim' has more negative connotations of helplessness and passivity in the face of mistreatment. By identifying herself as a survivor rather than a victim, Nina is perhaps able to maintain a positive self-concept

following the damage that had been caused to her sense of self by her experience of bullying.

During the interview Nina mentioned attending therapy to deal with her bullying experience and that she had learned to reduce her need to seek approval which she felt had led her to be bullied in the first place. She discussed that she felt by seeking approval she was 'giving' her 'power' away, leaving her open to being manipulated and controlled by the bully as they had picked up that her self-esteem depended upon pleasing them.

Actually before I think I was [] not greatly confident and [] on top of that I've got to manage what you call approval seeking behaviours, definitely me before the bullying, approval seeking behaviours. I needed approval from my bosses, I needed them to say you're ok. I don't need that now.

(Nina: 14,559-565)

By using therapy to build an inner confidence that is not dependent on the approval of others it appears that Nina no longer has to validate herself in this way. The bullying experience prompted her to address this in therapy and Nina refers to this as a positive consequence to have resulted from her experience of bullying.

Further illuminating this, Liz describes that having gone through the experience of bullying she now feels able to deal with anything.

I just feel a lot more confident and I just think you know actually I feel a bit like sort of battle scarred as it were, if you see what I mean, you know I don't actually care about anything anymore because I don't have to go through that anymore and nothing can damage me as much as that did.

(Liz: 25,1003-1009)

Liz describes a positive consequence of the bullying experience is that she now feels stronger and more confident in herself. She describes being 'battle scarred' which suggests being wounded and damaged by the bullying but also gives the sense of being a survivor after a battle. Liz presents herself as being wounded but hardened. She does not feel anxious about things anymore because she survived the bullying experience and can therefore survive anything. Battle scarred can also mean seasoned, experienced and wiser which suggests that perhaps Liz feels she has learned something from the experience.

Similarly to Natalie, Sophie discussed that her experience of bullying stimulated self-reflection which prompted her to study for a degree and change careers. However unlike Natalie, this was not seen as a positive result of the bullying experience.

Well it made me realise that job is definitely not for me [] so I think in some way it pushed me towards (degree) *and maybe pushed me towards the type of work I am doing now but I can't really see that is positive. [] for me it's not positive to basically recognise my limits.*

(Sophie: 17,698-708)

Seeing the bullying experience as having resulted in something positive has been interpreted within the extracts as being protective to the participants' self-concept and in lessening the psychological impact of the experience of bullying. Sophie discusses later feeling 'inadequate' as a result of being bullied and that this persists to this day. It may be that while other participants have been able to incorporate the bullying experience positively into their self-concept, due to the nature of her experience, Sophie cannot see this as positive and her sense of self remains negatively affected by the experience.

By looking at the experience more positively and demonstrating that something good came from the situation, the participants were perhaps able to lessen the psychological consequences associated with it, maintaining a positive self-concept and allowing them to move on from the experience. Conversely, participants who did not see their experience as having any positive outcomes appeared to experience more long-term psychological consequences. This suggests that in working therapeutically with targets of bullying it may be helpful to assist clients in conceptualising the positive consequences of their experience.

Superordinate theme three: Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity

These themes relate to a further psychological consequence of workplace bullying which emerged unexpectedly from the analysis and warranted its own superordinate theme. All participants recounted how their experience of bullying had a devastating impact upon their sense of self and it appears that bullying was experienced as a threat to identity. For some participants, being bullied resulted in a loss of confidence whereas for others it resulted in a complete loss of identity. The participants described experiencing the loss of valued parts of themselves and who they had hoped and planned to be. They talked about their losses by recalling who they used to be before the bullying and highlighted the changes that being bullied had inflicted. This promoted distress and a sense of grief pervaded their accounts. Leaving the bullying situation appeared to lead to a process of rebuilding their identity and reclaiming their lives. Some participants managed this by beginning new careers or hobbies which appeared to lead to the reclamation of their confidence and sense of self. While some were able to rebuild a sense of identity others had not yet recovered and there was little sense of identity reclamation. This helps us to understand the experience of psychological distress resulting from workplace bullying as participants experienced significant losses to their sense of self and identity.

Impact on Self-Concept: A Destroyed Self

Participants described a devastating impact upon their sense of self as a result of being bullied which ranged from a loss of confidence to a complete loss of who they were and of the person they had once thought themselves to be.

All participants spoke about deleterious effects on their self-confidence as a result of being bullied. Below, Patrick describes a twofold loss of confidence, both as a direct result of the bullying and then further as a result of losing all of his hair. He describes therefore that he strove to find ways of maintaining a sense of self-worth.

Why I was endeavouring to keep a pride in my work, is that the bullying, the psychological consequences was lack of confidence.

 (Patrick: 16,651-653)

Patrick's use of the word 'endeavoured' suggests an exerted effort to maintain his sense of worth indicating that in the face of being bullied this was a difficult task to undertake. This was achieved by keeping a sense of pride in his work whereby he could gather self-worth from a feeling of achievement in doing his work well. It appears that having a sense of self-efficacy at work was protective against the psychological consequences of bullying and ensured that Patrick did not suffer a complete loss of confidence.

I mean I was incredibly un-self-confident when I lost all my hair and everything, I mean oh… (deep breath).

(Patrick: 17,685-687)

Patrick further discusses the dramatic and irreversible damage to his physical appearance and the resultant significant loss of confidence he experienced. It could be surmised that experiencing such a great change would impact upon his sense of physical identity and Patrick's pause and deep breath emphasises the deep emotional impact this had upon him. He goes on to describe how he addressed the loss of confidence in his appearance and this is discussed in 'Rebuilding a Sense of Identity'.

Similarly, Sophie describes how having her work performance continually criticised by the bully impacted upon her beliefs about herself. She was left feeling a 'failure' and that both she and her work were not good enough despite reassurances from management more senior to the bully that she had been good at her job.

I did feel like a failure, I did feel that I, even though I left and I wasn't sacked and I do believe that I did a good job and the senior management all said that they really liked my job and were happy with it, I still felt like a failure. I definitely felt completely inadequate and I still do until this day and this was a long time ago.

(Sophie: 6,230-238)

It appears that due to constantly being exposed to criticism at work, Sophie came to internalise the bully's messages and to believe that she is incompetent and inadequate at work. These extracts demonstrate the deep psychological impact being bullied had upon participants' sense of self-efficacy at work. Furthermore these effects are long-reaching and Sophie describes still feeling inadequate to this day.

Natalie captures the experience of most participants as she describes how she came to lose confidence in herself as a result of not feeling able to effectively deal with and resolve the bullying situation.

I got so frustrated with the whole thing and my confidence sort of went really low obviously, because I just thought "why can't I just deal with this?" you know, sorry it's going to get me a bit saying that (tearful).

(Natalie: 2,67-71)

Natalie criticised herself and there is a sense that she felt she should be able to handle the situation, highlighting a sense of shame in her inability to cope. Natalie speaks elsewhere about comparing herself with colleagues who she perceived dealt with bullying more effectively. It seems that this had a great impact upon her sense of self and she felt weak and lost confidence in herself as a result. This appears to continue to have an emotional impact upon Natalie 'saying that' and she becomes tearful during the interview.

Nina described a complete lack of confidence as a result of being bullied and illustrated the gradual loss of this to the point where she felt nearly destroyed altogether. Nina's account captured much of the participants despair in relation to the deterioration in their self-regard.

I think that nearly destroyed me, that destroyed me you know you could have scraped my confidence off the bottom of a barrel.

 (Nina: 7,294-296)

Nina vividly recalls feeling destroyed by the bullying suggesting she felt damaged, devastated and overwhelmed by her experience. To 'scrape' suggest to gather with difficulty and it suggests that Nina found it difficult to pull together a sense of confidence after being bullied.

And every day you just feel like you are sacrificing a bit of yourself you know they are chipping away at your confidence.

Nina: (19,797-799)

Nina describes that she sacrificed herself, which may be suggestive of Nina's assertion in other parts of the transcript that she had no other choice but to go into work knowing that she would endure the daily loss of her self-confidence.

It whittles you down until you are just nothing.

It breaks you down to the point that you don't value yourself.

(Nina: 21,864-865, 21,876-877)

Nina figuratively describes having become broken down suggestive of being separated into pieces and giving a sense of being completely destroyed. Broken down can also mean to have become distressed or upset and describes going to pieces due to the pressure of internal stress. This echoes Nina's sentiments earlier when she described feeling she would have a 'breakdown'. Nina describes that the end result was that she no longer believed in herself and lost all self-worth.

Nina's use of 'whittle' and 'chipping away' and the associated connotations of being cut by a knife, could be interpreted as being symbolic of her experience, representing notions of losing her self-esteem and her sense of self as she was worn down by the experience until there was little left and she became 'nothing'.

Liz's case in particular shows how devastating workplace bullying can be to identity and captures the participants' struggle to assimilate their experience of being bullied at work into their self-concept. Liz describes feeling that her whole sense of identity was completely destroyed as a result of her experience.

It's that feeling that I'm not there anymore. You know I've been destroyed really, knocked out. Because as I said my whole identity was based around the fact I had this job. You know, no husband, no children kind of thing, your identity is what you do.

(Liz: 30,1203-1207)

There is a sense that the person Liz thought she was now ceases to exist. She spoke earlier about the experience of being bullied as similar to a bereavement and it seems that she was grieving the death of her identity. Liz explains this further stating that as she is not married and does not have children she cannot define herself with labels such as 'wife' or 'mother' and so the person she defined herself to be was based upon her job. By placing the definition of her whole identity solely on her job, when Liz lost her job as a result of the bullying, she was unable to find a source of self-worth or identity elsewhere. The impact of this was that her whole sense of self was destroyed. This highlights the importance of work to how people define themselves and the shocking and traumatic nature of the experience of bullying for targets.

Angela describes that the impact of the devastation of her sense of self was that she had completely changed as a person and is not the same person she once was. Angela experienced such a change in her self-concept that this appears difficult for her to comprehend and she is no longer sure of who she is. Angela describes losing confidence and part of herself as a result of feeling that every aspect of her personality was attacked during her experience of bullying. For Angela, like many participants, this loss of confidence led her to question aspects of herself.

Basically as a person, it devastated me, I'm not the same person, this isn't me.

It just totally devastates your personality, it takes you apart and it makes you question every aspect with you, your life, everything. It's just so devastating that you

can't believe unless you've experienced it, how inward it makes you, it really takes
you inward []. A lack of confidence in yourself when people are pulling you apart in
every way.

 (Angela: 14,565-566; 19,773-777)

Angela describes feeling taken apart echoing Nina and Liz's comments about feeling devastated and destroyed and highlighting the highly destructive and damaging impact of workplace bullying on her sense of self. Angela's extracts convey a sense of severe shock, distress and grief and like Nina and Liz, there is a sense of her becoming psychologically overwhelmed and traumatised by her experience.

It appears that Angela's experience was so extreme she now questions her own behaviour and whether it was something about herself that provoked others to bully her in an attempt to make sense of her situation. She explains how as a result of this she has become introverted and withdrawn from others as she has become cautious of 'provoking' bullying behaviour.

You stand now and question everything you do. [] I'm sitting there and thinking no
keep your mouth shut, you know sit there, be careful, don't be too outgoing.

(Angela: 19,761-763)

This has left Angela watchful of her own behaviour and holding herself back as if to protect herself from attack and harm. This is not only restricted to the workplace but has also shaken her sense of self in all areas of her life.

Kate similarly describes losing parts of herself due to being belittled. The extracts emphasise the humiliation Kate experienced as a result of being bullied, commonly reported by the participants.

He made me feel about two inches high and it made me wither basically.

I think I almost broke down and cried at one point because I felt so humiliated, like belittled and squashed I suppose.

(Kate: 4,134-135; 5,205-207)

Being bullied made Kate feel small, degraded and inferior and she experienced feelings of shame and a loss of confidence as a result. Her use of the word 'wither' portrays an image of a flower dying and of Kate losing her vitality and becoming less of the person she once was. Kate describes herself as feeling 'squashed' which conveys a sense of how small and flat she felt. Kate describes that the combination of these feelings led her to feel emotionally distressed to the point of breaking down. Indeed she describes her experience as 'soul destroying'.

It was just soul destroying actually [] it was like working with the Dementors from Harry Potter, they would just suck the life out of you, and I did feel like my lights were going out quite honestly and it was like gradually I was just getting dimmer and dimmer.

I actually look back on that person that I was for a while and think who was that?

(Kate: 13,522-526; 20,829-830)

Kate powerfully analogises her bullies to the Dementors in the Harry Potter story. Dementors are mystical creatures who suck the peace, hope and happiness out of their victims (Rowling, 1999). Through her use of this analogy, Kate describes feeling that her 'lights' were going out, as if she was losing her soul and the vitality in her character. Kate felt as if she was becoming 'dimmer', conveying a gradual loss of herself and becoming a shadow of her former self. Kate emphasises the destruction and loss of her identity to the extent that she no longer recognised the person she was due to the great change in herself caused by being bullied. Kate hints

that she was only this person for a 'while' and we see later in the analysis that Kate begins to rebuild her sense of identity.

In stark contrast to every other participant, Natalie reported that while her self-confidence was lowered, she did not experience such a negative impact upon her sense of identity.

I didn't take it personally because she was doing it to other people, I wasn't the only person so I felt ok in myself.

(Natalie: 4,147-149)

Natalie was able not to take her experience personally because she was not the only person to be bullied by the bully. She was therefore aware that the bullying was not a personal attack and so the experience did not impact upon her self-concept negatively. Natalie describes that she could also understand that it was the bully's own issues which led her to bully and not due to some perceived fault in herself.

I could logically work out why things were happening and that they weren't personal.

I was lucky in at least I was aware that it wasn't my fault in that respect, so I didn't lose my own self-respect as it were, which was good.

(Natalie: 12,446-449; 17,635-637)

Natalie was thus able to avoid the impact experienced by other participants of perceiving there to be something wrong with her that provoked her to be bullied which was protective to maintaining a sense of self-worth and respect.

Experiencing the Loss of a Valued and Expected Self

Following on from the deleterious depiction of workplace bullying on their identities, participants further described that the loss of themselves and their jobs led to emotional pain resulting from the loss of the person they valued themselves to be along with interruptions to their anticipated futures. The participants' stories of their loss were unique to their own circumstance but what unites them is the sense of loss they all experienced. The pervasive sense of loss and grief indicates that participants were preoccupied with their past selves and with what they had lost through their experience.

Liz's story eloquently highlights this theme and the life-changing impact of her experience of bullying. She describes feeling bitterness and regret due to the loss of planned future goals for herself and goes on to describe that as a result, she experienced the loss of a valued life that she was no longer able to lead and a person that she would no longer be. For Liz, this related to ideas of grief and mourning mentioned earlier in the analysis for the part of her self that had 'died' during her experience of bullying.

I just think that my bitterness and regret was what was it that I did wrong because you know I had these goals, I wanted to go on and work as a (Profession) *and get more qualifications and I'm not going to be doing that now, []. But I could have had a proper career when I did the degree and sort of like a life that I wanted to progress. But it just seemed that it was impossible to carry on with that.*

 (Liz: 27,1084-1093)

Liz saw her job as advancing the career she wanted for herself, however, as she was forced to leave her job she perceived that it would now be impossible for her to pursue her career as she would not be able to get a job in the profession. It seems from Liz's story that these goals were her purpose in life yet she will no longer be able to achieve these things she once lived for. Below, Liz lists the things she felt

were now impossible for her to achieve and there is a sense of grief and disappointment for her lost self and opportunities.

This person I thought I was, you know this person with this interesting job that had money coming in every month, you know could go on holiday, and this that and the other, that person doesn't exist anymore.

(Liz: 29,1157-1161)

Liz presents as somebody who had lost everything and conveys a sense of longing for what could have been. Liz suffered the losses of a valued life and identity that were important to her and allowed her to gain the things she wanted, which had given her a sense of worth. Liz talks about this person as if they have died and she mourned the life and identity along with the associated sense of self-worth which had been taken away.

Similarly, Hayley describes a sense of bitterness and hurt and amplifies the sense of loss she experienced by describing that the bully will go on to achieve the things that she herself will not. Hayley describes herself as a 'loser' and conveys painful feelings of loss and longing for the job she valued and the subsequent loss of her financial position.

At the end of the day, it's me that's the loser because obviously I have been put out of a job that suited me and I liked, sorry (tearful).

She is going to go on and earn lots of money and get promotions and actually deep down she hasn't been a very nice person to me at all.

(Hayley: 20,769-771; 27,1074-1077)

There is a sense of injustice within the extract that the bully will go on to achieve when Hayley is suffering the consequences for the bully's actions. Hayley pauses and becomes tearful during the interview indicating that this still has an emotional impact upon her and she continues to feel the loss from this.

Although Kate was able to rebuild her career following the bullying experience she too described experiencing a great sense of loss.

I thought this was my big break in life. They picked me for this new role and I was over the moon.

The fact that I thought it was my dream job and it became a nightmare quite honestly, yeah that was harder.

(Kate: 3,98-100; 19,768-769)

For Kate, the job was a 'big break' and a 'dream' indicating that this was important to her and represented what she had hoped to achieve for herself. Kate conveys being overjoyed at being offered the job by evoking an image that she floated high off the ground. Kate describes elsewhere that the bully then 'knocked the stool' from under her contrasting with her sense of being 'over the moon' and emphasising how far she fell and how much she had lost. Kate further juxtaposes her 'dream' with the subsequent 'nightmare' the experience became highlighting the loss of what she had hoped for and the difficult nature of her experience. This echoes the participants' likening of their bullying experience to a 'nightmare' in 'Feeling Powerless'.

For Patrick, there was a sense of loss underlying his entire experience of bullying including the loss of the things he valued along with the loss of parts of himself.

My experience was a matter of loss. A loss of appreciation for what I was doing and the efforts I was making, loss of self-confidence because of continual negative criticism.

(Patrick: 23,906-909)

Patrick describes losing a sense of recognition and confidence at work, which he strove for and was highly valued as an affirmation of himself and the efforts he was making. Earlier in the section Patrick also highlighted the loss of his confidence associated with the loss of his hair.

For Angela, the experience of bullying completely changed her personality and she experienced the loss of the part of her personality expressed by her 'sparkle' which conveys a sense of brightness and animation.

My friend said "you've lost your spark, your little sparkle, you no longer come forward like you used to and laugh and joke about things, the whole time you're holding back now", and that's how I do feel, very careful, I don't like what it has done to me, not at all (tearful).

(Angela: 19,763-769)

Angela reports that she is now reserved and guarded and the contrast between her old and new self highlights feelings of loss associated with the loss of a valued self. Angela becomes tearful about this during the interview suggesting that she continues to grieve her past self even years after the bullying has ended.

Rebuilding a Sense of Self

This theme demonstrates that following the destruction of their identities some participants described a shift toward rebuilding or reclaiming their identity as opposed to grieving the loss of their old and anticipated selves. Participants crafted new futures for themselves and reported getting new jobs, changing careers and engaging in new activities and a process of self-development in order to rebuild themselves and their lives. This appeared to offer a sense of regaining some of what the experience of bullying had removed and promoted a sense of closure. However, some participants had not yet recovered from their losses and there was little sense of identity reclamation. It will be seen later that having a corrective experience whereby participants were able to get new jobs in which they were not bullied was facilitative in rebuilding their self-confidence and sense of identity. Taken together, these themes illustrate that accepting the loss of self and building new goals can be an adaptive approach to coping with the experience of being bullied and can re-introduce a sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

Liz describes that her process of recovery was gradual and that whereas previously her job was her 'life', she had undergone a reappraisal of her life and came to the realisation that there was more to life and perhaps more to her own identity than this.

I'm just beginning after a year now, it's a year since I lost my job, to think actually you know there is more to life and to rediscover stuff I think I did know before somewhere along the line. Yeah I just forgot about all those years that I was in that situation.

(Liz: 31,1224-1229)

For Patrick, following the loss of his hair caused by the stress of his bullying experience, rebuilding his sense of self meant coming to an acceptance of his

physical appearance. Below, he describes becoming involved in a self-development program in order to repair his lost confidence.

The whole of Level 2 is about accepting you as you are and as other people see you. I actually found that quite devastating but now I have no problem looking in the mirror, tough. I mean I don't care, I don't care what I look like and I don't care what other people think either. So that was healing for me.

(Patrick: 18,702-707)

Patrick describes the process of acceptance as 'devastating' indicating that perhaps he found it overwhelming and upsetting to see himself as he was and that the path to acceptance was by no means an easy one. It seems however that rather than lamenting his loss, he came to a sense of peace with his body and Patrick discusses that he is now comfortable with his outward appearance.

Patrick goes on to describe a change of career following his experience of bullying in which he left his previous career and began working in a healing capacity.

I found that actually this was incredibly rewarding to get into trying to help people and heal people.

I found that in order to, it's a bit of a cliché really, but in order to find healing myself I learnt how to heal others.

(Patrick: 13,533-535; 14,567-568)

Patrick's accounts convey a sense of rediscovery of self and what he wanted to do with his life. It suggests that in the process he rebuilt his confidence and healed the wounds caused by bullying. It appears that Patrick received the highly sought sense of recognition in this role which was never achieved in his previous job. This was

central to maintaining his self-esteem and sense of value and thus in rebuilding his identity.

Kate also reports that she took steps to make positive changes to her life in order to rebuild her lost self-confidence.

I could feel myself sinking so I took proactive steps in going to the library and getting books, start reading and swotting up on subject matters that I hadn't looked at for a year. And I joined a netball team where I met new people, because meeting new people was I suppose part of the confidence boosting thing again because I used to meet new people in my other walks of life, in other jobs I'd done all the time. And suddenly I wasn't meeting anybody and the people I was working with wasn't very nice []. But it was part of rebuilding me and being part of a team that worked I suppose.

(Kate: 17,718-729)

Kate describes this as part of a plan she put in motion in order to 'rebuild' herself. To rebuild suggests a restoration to something's original condition after it has been damaged or destroyed. For Kate, being part of a team that was able to work together was important in rebuilding herself and restoring her confidence in herself and others following her opposite experience of this in the context of her bullying. Kate describes this process as 'rejuvenating' which is suggestive of reclaiming her old self and becoming more lively and full of life as she had described herself to be prior to experiencing bullying.

Kate suggests that by not feeling herself, she felt she became a different person throughout her experience of bullying and that the process of reclaiming her identity was gradual.

It took me a good six to eight weeks to feel as though I was myself again and I am doing some freelance work now, and in the time I've been off I've studied loads and I've got all sorts of ideas and I'm writing new strategies and I feel like myself again for the first time in a year.

I feel far more confident about myself and my future.

(Kate: 8,320-325, 17,703-704)

Kate spoke throughout the interview of her previous dedication to her career, however, that her experience of bullying led to a loss of confidence and enthusiasm for her career. Therefore for Kate, studying and focusing on her career was important to becoming herself again. By being able to return her focus to something that was previously important to her, it appears that Kate reclaimed her confidence and enthusiasm along with her hopes and goals for her future.

Natalie described earlier that although she did not lose her sense of self, her confidence was lowered as a result of bullying. Similarly to Patrick, Natalie describes how a change in role following her experience of bullying helped to rebuild her confidence.

I'd always been interested in (profession) *so I went back to college as I thought "I need to get out of the job I was doing".*

It's something I already did as a hobby so it has pushed me to be more confident. And the actual tasks we were given, just because I suppose I hadn't been in that situation like giving talks or giving you know feedback and things like that, that all broadened me beyond belief you know.

(Natalie: 3,79-81; 15,561-566)

Natalie describes that being bullied motivated her to reconceptualise and establish a career in a more fulfilling area. Going back to college 'broadened' Natalie suggesting that by experiencing and attempting new things she was able to redevelop her sense of self and increase her confidence in her abilities.

Superordinate theme four: Coping With the Experience of Being Bullied

These themes relate to the ways in which participants described coping with both their experiences of workplace bullying and the resulting psychological consequences. Most participants described going through a period of not being able to cope and a need for support from others. However all of the participants received a lack of support from their workplace. They described feeling frustrated in their attempts to report bullying and described that the lack of support they experienced had further negative impacts upon their psychological health, leading them to feel increasingly isolated, trapped and hopeless. The combination of this, along with the identity crisis outlined in the previous theme, led participants to further question their sense of self. Participants also described possible underlying reasons that might leave targets of bullying reluctant to seek support. Outside of the workplace participants commonly sought support from friends and family and some participants attended therapy. The most important aspect of support that emerged was the validation of the bullying experience whereby the experience was believed and acknowledged to be damaging to psychological health. Participants reported coping with the bullying situation by focusing on their lives outside of work. Following being bullied, having a corrective experience in a new job was facilitative in restoring a sense of self and confidence and in going some way to repairing the psychological consequences caused by workplace bullying.

Experiences of Support: Lack of Support

These themes demonstrate the lack of support in the workplace available to those being bullied which was mentioned by all participants. It was generally felt that the organisations for which they worked did not acknowledge or

provide adequate support or investigation into bullying. Participants described feeling they were therefore forced to deal with the bullying on their own but described feeling unable to cope with this. The following extracts explore the participants' experiences of lack of support and the subsequent impact of this upon their psychological health.

Below, Natalie expresses her anger at her workplace for not dealing with the bullying and for not even acknowledging its existence despite the fact that she reported the bullying.

I felt a bit angry that the employers themselves hadn't really stepped in and dealt with it.

The firm didn't want to go there, they were really sort of "yeah ok deal with it so we'll push it under the carpet" you know.

(Natalie: 1,26-27; 5,176-178)

Natalie paints a picture of her concerns being belittled and that she was told she was being unduly offended and upset.

It was met with a really sort of blank no help, "oh it's a personality clash", or it's "are you being oversensitive?" So of course then you get paranoid about your own behaviour.

(Natalie: 4,118-121)

Natalie describes that as a result of the organisational response she then questioned herself and experienced paranoia as to whether she was really being bullied or if she was just imaging it. Natalie later described that it was the feeling of dread associated

with continually having to endure the bullying with no support or intervention from the organisation that led to the psychological consequences she experienced, namely ruminative thinking, anxiety and a loss of self-confidence.

Angela also presented the lack of support she experienced as causal of the psychological consequences she experienced.

I really couldn't believe it was happening and that it gained momentum and got so bad and nobody was prepared to help me.

Really I feel so badly about nobody helping me.

It's the feeling of no support, no help, nothing and whoever you turn to, there's no help there.

(Angela: 1,4-7; 13,529; 19,780-782)

Angela conveys a sense of intense distress and disbelief that nobody came to her aid even though the organisation and her colleagues were aware of the bullying. Her transcript evoked a sense of betrayal by people she thought she trusted and she reported feeling isolated and demoralised as a result. She reports that the bullying 'gained momentum' which gives an image of the bullying as increasing in power and strength and of Angela as powerless to do anything about it. Angela described trying to turn to others for support, suggesting a need for support and that she felt unable to cope with the situation by herself, however her extracts emphasise the lack of help available to her.

My partner wasn't as supportive because he was sort of saying "well you're on such a good salary, rise above it, pull yourself together". I said "it's not easy to pull yourself together, imagine sitting on your own all day, with nobody to talk to and

knowing that every time the phone rings somebody is listening in and reporting incorrect things to people that I am meant to have said, it's terrible".

(Angela: 20,822-829)

Angela describes also that outside of work, others did not understand the effects being bullied had on her. She is told to 'rise above it' and 'pull herself together' however these phrases are somewhat dismissive and trivialising of the bullying and its affects. Angela appeals to her partner to understand the severity of her situation by trying to get him to imagine what it is like to experience the bullying, emphasising her need to feel understood.

Hayley describes the lack of support she experienced from colleagues who said that they would give evidence but in the end abandoned her due to being fearful of becoming a target themselves.

You rely on other people to so called stand up and be counted but in those critical moments, people disappear and you look around you and you are left there.

(Hayley: 2,65-67)

Hayley describes being left to fight on her own during the investigation into the bullying when her colleagues' witness statements could have corroborated the bullying and helped in putting a stop to it. Hayley provides a mental image of looking around her and finding that she had to fight on her own, suggesting the experience left her feeling isolated and alone.

In addition to the lack of support experienced, participants described a difficulty in seeking support in the first place.

In the situation where you then have to disclose this to your line manager to say "I think there's a problem here", you then sound like your twelve and you are standing in the corner of the room trying to tell the teacher that somebody stuck their tongue out at you so it leaves you feeling demoralised, or embarrassed to say that somebody is being mean to me.

(Kate: 21,867-873)

Kate's extract conveys the difficulty many participants experienced seeking help with the bullying. She provides a vivid image of feeling like a child 'telling tales' when reporting the bullying to her manager summoning feelings of childhood vulnerability. For Kate, this felt like telling the 'teacher' and the implication was that she felt embarrassed to report the bullying. This suggests that Kate felt she should be able to deal with this as an adult. Kate also discussed elsewhere that she did not realise bullying could occur between adults and perhaps as she had no conceptualisation of what this was like she was left feeling like a child, powerless and not understanding what was happening.

It appears then that participants' experienced a lack of support when it was needed and a difficulty in seeking support due to feelings of shame and embarrassment. Similarly, Natalie also reported feeling 'ridiculous' when reporting her experience of bullying.

Unless someone else steps in I think, or you leave, you are really sort of stuck you know and it's not the easiest thing to do to go to someone and say it's happening when you're an adult.

I actually felt really ridiculous to say the things she'd been doing.

(Natalie: 9,338-341; 2,47-48)

Hayley's quotes further describe the fear and shame underlying participants' difficulty in seeking help.

The problem is in admitting it as well, does it mean that you are weak?

It's not easy to talk about because it's like somebody who has an embarrassing illness, it's still a taboo subject that you don't really talk about.

(Hayley: 8,286-287; 9,354-357)

Hayley likens being bullied to having an 'embarrassing illness' and as a 'taboo subject' which people do not really talk about and find it difficult to seek help or treatment for. The extract explains that the humiliation and shame surrounding being bullied makes it difficult to seek help because this feels like broadcasting to others that you are weak. Hayley describes later finding online forums useful as sources of support due to their anonymous and confidential nature therefore lessening the shame and embarrassment felt when disclosing bullying.

Kate discusses that her experience of bullying left her perceiving there was something wrong with her further illustrating the fears underlying a difficulty in seeking help for those who are bullied.

If you go home from work and break down because someone's being horrible to you, you are seen as being a weak person or a victim or you must be a bit mad because people don't do that. It makes you feel like there is something wrong with you.

(Kate: 6,222-226)

Like Hayley, Kate appeared to be concerned as to how she would be perceived by others if she disclosed feeling psychologically distressed as a result of being bullied at work. It seems that for Kate, the experience of being bullied and the associated humiliation of this impacted upon her sense of self and as a result, how she anticipated others would perceive her. She described a concern that she would be regarded as a victim, weak or delusional which implies that telling others you are bullied feels like you are admitting some flaw in yourself. The injurious effects of this upon the participants' sense of pride and self-respect and subsequent feelings of humiliation and shame made it difficult for them to disclose their experiences. Indeed, the workplace's response to bullying meant targets were led to feel that they were imagining the bullying or unable to deal with it themselves making it further unlikely that they would seek outside support.

Experiences of Support: The Importance of Validation

The experience of validation here refers to the communication of an understanding and acceptance of the bullying and its psychological consequences. This can be contrasted to the invalidating and judgemental organisational responses received as a result of reporting the bullying. It was important for another person to believe that the bullying existed and to recognise the severity of this and the legitimacy of the impact upon psychological health. It seems that participants doubted themselves feeling that they were weak or somehow bought the situation on themselves. Acceptance and validation from others appeared to be very important due to the extensive damage to the targets' confidence and sense of self. The role of support in facilitating self-acceptance and rebuilding self-worth along with protecting against feelings of difference and isolation was particularly highlighted.

Below, Patrick talks about his experience of therapy and his experience of validation within this.

She would listen to you and she wouldn't judge you and it was the lack of judgement, because basically the counsellor is reflecting your own ideas anyway in a non-judgemental way. Whereas if I was having the same sort of conversation with a manager or project leader or even with you know just a friend or colleague, there would always be some judgement.

(Patrick: 26,1026-1031)

Patrick described that the most helpful aspect of therapy for him was not being judged by his therapist. Patrick was constantly criticised during his experience of bullying and it appears that not being judged by his therapist was healing for him. In the context of a non-judgemental therapeutic relationship, Patrick was then able to hear himself and his own ideas reflected, facilitating his own understanding of his situation.

Natalie describes that at the time her bullying was occurring she experienced a need for support and for somebody to validate her experience.

I think if there had been an outside help at the time that I could have talked to or you know sort of say I'm not going mad but this and this and this is happening it would have been useful.

To say I'm not going mad, that I'm taking it to, that I wasn't being oversensitive and you know it really was happening because they were small things adding up to one big thing.

(Natalie: 10,382-385; 15,582-585)

Natalie discussed earlier that the organisational response to her complaint surrounding the bullying made her feel that she was imagining the bullying and she subsequently began to doubt and question herself as to whether she was being

paranoid. She describes that having somebody to validate that the bullying was occurring would have been beneficial in helping her to cope with the bullying and in lessoning the psychological consequences by reducing her self-doubt. These extracts demonstrate the importance of receiving validation of the occurrence of bullying in order to protect against the participants' perception of there being something wrong with them.

Angela sought support from a family member during her experience of bullying and describes the importance of having somebody to talk to in order to validate her story and need for help.

She was just sort of going through some of the psychological things and sort of saying to me "you know, it isn't you" []. But you know, it was just talking through and she listened to what I was saying and she didn't rubbish it.

She just listened to what I was saying, just to say "you know well no that does have a reason why that was getting to you, for what they are doing those little things".

(Angela: 22,882-887; 22,900-903)

Angela describes that 'just' to be able to talk about her experience to somebody who listened and did not trivialise her experience or the associated psychological effects was helpful. For someone to convey that they could comprehend the nature and meaning of the bullying experience and that understandably this was having an impact upon her psychologically was significant for Angela. Angela's extract again demonstrates the tendency shown by participants to question themselves and to perceive there to be something wrong with them that provoked the bullying or that led them to experience psychological difficulties. Having somebody to say it is not 'you' lets the individual understand that it is justified to be affected by the bullying behaviour allowing them to maintain a sense of positive self-worth.

Nina's experience of validation echoes that of the other participants. It appears to be extremely important for participants to be shown that they are not 'mad' by having another person validate the harmful effects of bullying.

It really helped that she told me I wasn't mad. She didn't say that to me in as many words, but she just listened to what I presented about the workplace and said "this is not a good environment to be in".

Validating your experiences, oh my God, another person truly believes like me that this is not good. It's like ok so I'm not the one that's mad, ok this department is not good for me.

(Nina: 23,937-940; 23,945-948)

Nina's exclamation of 'oh my God' conveys the significance of this encounter and a sense of surprise and relief at the realisation that there was nothing wrong with her, thus restoring a sense of confidence in herself. In this extract, we can see how the therapist's use of empathy assists Nina to discover new insights into her experience, freeing her from the negative feelings of shame associated with the perception there was something wrong with herself.

Hayley talks about seeking help from an online forum that appeared to provide her with similar aspects that other participants found useful in therapy.

It is really confidential, it is online, 24/7 and very secure and people actually, yeah, so you know that you are not alone and you are not this strange person you know.

(Hayley: 9,351-354)

It appears that talking to others who had experienced similar situations was validating in itself and helpful in assisting Hayley to see that she was not the only person who experienced bullying. It seems that Hayley was feeling 'strange' or like the 'alien' she was made to feel by the bully and by hearing others stories she was able to see that this was not the case. Knowing 'you are not alone' also implies that Hayley no longer feels isolated as she did during her bullying experience as a result of this. For Hayley, it also appeared to be important that the service was confidential and anonymous and this perhaps relates to Hayley's expressed embarrassment at talking about her experience due to a fear of others perceiving her as weak.

Sophie's experience of validation was when a colleague new to the job recognised that she was being bullied.

I just thought that I am imagining it. And she said "no you're not imagining it, she is just being so horrible to you and so disrespectful, you shouldn't put up with it".

So I think that really made me realise that "gosh this really is bullying, this really is happening and maybe I do have to leave".

(Sophie: 5,197-200; 5,213-216)

The impact of this for Sophie appears to be one of astonishment as she had thought that she had been imagining and deserving of the ill treatment from the bully. Unlike other participants, Sophie had not been told that she was imagining the bullying but her experience illustrates that participants went through a process of being unsure if they were being bullied or whether they were being paranoid. For Sophie, it was difficult for her to see that she was being bullied due to her perception that she was to blame. Having somebody else confirm that she was being bullied helped Sophie to see that the way she was being treated was unfair and wrong. This perhaps recovered a sense of Sophie's own value and competence, lessening her self-blame and enabling her to take action to leave the situation.

<u>Concentrating on Other Aspects of Life</u>

A coping strategy that emerged which appeared to help participants deal with the bullying at the time it was occurring was to concentrate on other areas of their lives and to focus on the small parts of the situation which they could control. It appeared that in doing so participants were able to feel better about their inability to change the situation. This was not enough however for them to cope with the bulling on a long-term basis and, for most participants, this coping strategy allowed them to continue to deal with the bullying on a daily basis until they left the job. Although leaving the organisation may not initially look like the best path to take, this appeared to be the only way for participants to remedy the impact of bullying upon their psychological health.

Natalie describes how not dwelling on her experience of bullying allowed her to be able to reduce some of the psychological consequences, in Natalie's case, the impact upon her sleeping pattern.

I even stopped talking about it as well and that helped, so in fact I didn't talk about it with my husband anymore because I was sick of taking it home. So yeah over the last say three to four months of it, I literally stopped talking about it []. And even that in itself helped, just not talking about it anymore. It was actually better to just let it go and to see if for what it was, which was just stupid ridiculous behaviour that was unfortunately being directed at not only me but other people. So yeah that finally sort of seeing that helped definitely and not taking it home helped. So then I started to sleep better as well.

(Natalie: 16,608-622)

Natalie described previously that, like all other participants, she spent a long time ruminating and talking about her bullying situation causing her to feel frustrated,

anxious and depressed. 'Letting go' of the bullying by putting a stop to the cycle of rumination was beneficial for her psychological health and Natalie was able to then distance herself and to take a different perspective on the bullying as 'stupid ridiculous behaviour'. Labelling the behaviour as such appears to have been protective, perhaps because this altered the power balance between Natalie and the bully, causing the bully to look 'ridiculous' rather than Natalie feeling this way. By not taking the bullying home, Natalie appeared to have been able to contain the bullying to the workplace and to reduce the impact it therefore had on her. Natalie further describes that focusing on something else in her life by throwing herself into developing a new career for herself allowed her to stop dwelling on her work situation.

I worked really hard because I was working, college and getting small jobs in as well so it did take my mind off all what was happening which was good. Yeah so I probably threw myself into that quite heavily.

College helped, because the workload was so high it was brilliant because I really just gave it everything you know and the fact I came out with all distinctions helped tremendously.

(Natalie: 8,287-291; 15,551-554)

Natalie reported going back to college in an attempt to distract herself from her bullying experience which helped her to avoid excessively thinking about the situation. The extracts demonstrate that focusing on something separate to the bullying situation, in particular that can give a sense of self-efficacy, worth and achievement, can provide an escape from the bullying situation and be protective to psychological health.

Nina similarly describes putting all of her focus into finding a new job in order to escape the situation.

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I just focused every day on getting out and that was the only thing I could do to help me stay alive in many respects because everything else was so shit around me, it was so bad.

You just get things that you can focus on so that all of this shit just takes a little side-line. It's only for a period of time, it's only for a period of time and I had a mantra.

(Nina: 18,757-760; 19,807-810)

This allowed Natalie to see her situation as temporary giving her enough hope and emotional strength to deal with the daily adversity of the bullying. Focusing on getting a new job meant that the bullying became removed from the centre of her attention even if this was only temporarily. Nina emphasises that she focused on this 'every day' indicating how tightly she was holding on to this coping strategy in order to enable her to continue to go to work. She describes that this was the only way she was able to 'stay alive'. This dramatic use of language implies that without this, Nina felt she might have ended her life as she alluded to earlier.

Nina describes having a mantra that she repeated to help motivate her to continue and cope with her situation. The word mantra is said to come from a root meaning 'that which protects the mind' (Frawley, 1997). By repeating her mantra, it appears that Nina was protecting her mind from the influence of the bullying, thus lessening the psychological impact of the bullying enough to allow her to cope with daily life at work.

Kate describes that she coped with her experience of bullying and the psychological consequences of this by distracting herself by joining a team sport.

It's been fun and doing some physical exercise has been good as well, it's been a release, the tension, and you can feel it all just dropping away, all that sort of months and months, a whole year's worth of worry and unconscious stress I suppose

[]. I felt such a release of emotion and stress and not thinking, I completely switched off for the first time in ages and doing something completely different. Just playing netball was great, it was all you were focused on and it was fun as well []. That release was rejuvenating actually, yeah very much so.

(Kate: 18,729-748)

Kate describes that physical exercise provided her with a distraction from the daily bullying and also with a release for the stress and emotions she experienced caused by being bullied. Kate's suggestion is that she was experiencing stress, worry and anxiety during her bullying experience yet she was not consciously aware of this, perhaps as she had become used to feeling this way due to the prolonged nature of her experience. The notion of 'release' implies that, for Kate, undertaking physical exercise helped her to let go of her experience providing her with relief from the emotional pain caused by bullying. The word release also conjures up an image of a prisoner being freed and it appears that physical exercise also freed Kate from the confinement of feeling trapped within her situation. Kate was able to 'switch off' and stop thinking and worrying about her situation conveying an image of switching off the 'tape recorder' participants spoke about experiencing in their minds. The end result of this release was that Kate felt 'rejuvenated' suggesting she felt restored to the self she was before her experience of workplace bullying.

Having a Corrective Experience

The meaning of 'corrective experience' in psychotherapeutic terms traditionally means "to reexpose the patient, under more favorable circumstances, to emotional situations which he could not handle in the past. The patient, in order to be helped, must undergo a corrective emotional experience suitable to repair the traumatic influence of previous experiences." (Alexander & French, 1946, p.66) and refers to the reframing of an experience through corrective emotional experiences. In the present study, the term is defined as getting another job and experiencing the workplace as a more positive place than was previously experienced during the bullying. Participants described the restorative effects

of gaining another job which allowed them to feel more positively about themselves and restored their faith and confidence in the workplace. Such a corrective experience appeared to go some way to counteracting the psychological consequences caused by bullying, pointing to the therapeutic benefit of helping targets of bullying to return to the workplace.

Liz described that the catalyst for rebuilding her self-confidence appeared to have been getting another job.

A year later I feel more confident, I mean I never thought I would get another job, and I've got this job now, it's mindless it's physical, I like the people I work with, the people are lovely [] it just is like a revelation.

(Liz: 27,1078-1084)

Earlier, Liz described that she was left feeling that she would never get another job due to a loss of confidence and opportunity within her chosen career. It appears that Liz reconceptualised what she wanted to achieve from her life, but instead of instilling a sense of loss, this was important in restoring her confidence. Gaining a new job may have presented an opportunity to build a new identity which provided a sense of self-esteem and efficacy, therefore relieving the threat to identity that arose as a result of being bullied. Indeed, below Liz describes the job as a 'lifesaver' signifying that the job gave back her life and sense of self which had previously been lost following the bullying experience.

Its (new job) been a lifesaver it really has []. I think that's what's helped as well, to realise that there are places in the world where you can get up and go to work and not feeling as though you are being hated and you know persecuted and targeted all the time.

(Liz: 29,1165-1176)

Liz describes that for her, the experience was a 'revelation' signifying that it was surprising for her to discover that it is possible to go to work without constantly living in fear and dread of being subjected to bullying and psychological suffering. It appears that by having a corrective experience of the workplace, Liz was freed from the 'nightmare' and 'prison' in which she felt trapped during her bullying experience and regained her faith in the workplace.

For Patrick, getting involved in a role at work away from the stress of his bullying situation and in which his skills were valued meant he regained a sense of achievement and confidence in himself as a professional.

I got involved with the corporate training program to meet other people from all around the company and so on to use my skills as a trainer to get me out of the office.

The feedback from all the people that we met was absolutely brilliant. So that gave me the feeling of achievement.

(Patrick: 16,654-657; 16,668-669)

Patrick describes that meeting others working for the same company as himself who gave him positive feedback helped him to have pride in his work which he described earlier as being protective against losing his confidence. Again the feeling of achievement and of doing something well seems important here in restoring value and confidence in oneself and demonstrates the importance of having a corrective environment in which to experience this.

Nina describes experiencing an increase in her well-being as a result of having a corrective experience in the workplace.

Maybe the extra money that I have to pay to get into work and the extra half an hour that I have to get up and out is really worth it, because peace of mind is actually lovely []. My own sense of well-being has shot up like 150 fold.

(Nina: 10,387-390)

Nina weighs up the costs of her new job in terms of effort and money against having peace of mind and it seems that it is more than worth the cost to be free from the stress and anxiety she felt in her previous workplace due to her experience of bullying. Peace is a state characterised by being free from the fear of violence and it seems that Nina no longer lives in fear of bullying which results in a dramatic increase in her well-being. That her well-being increased '150 fold' shows the importance of this corrective experience for her psychological health.

Kate described earlier her fear and apprehension of going to work in a new job and it appears that having a corrective experience of the workplace empowered her and provided her with increased confidence to get another job.

I went there and I was so scared thinking that it would be a similar environment and it couldn't be more different and it just made me think that yeah when I get another job, I could walk in there and be me. And within the first two days I thought, "yeah I can do this", and just put that other experience behind me.

(Kate: 17,691-696)

Kate also earlier described having become a different person as a result of being bullied and that she questioned herself as to whether there was something wrong with her. Kate describes here how the experience of a corrective workplace led her to feel that she could be herself at work again without fear of being bullied and so

Kate not only reclaimed her confidence but also a sense of self and hope for her future which had been given up on during her experience of bullying. It appears that Kate's experience of a positive workplace also helped her to move on from her experience of bullying and lessened the psychological distress associated with it.

Sophie describes a similar experience whereby when starting a new job she felt accepted as 'herself' which left her feeling good about herself and the workplace.

I remember what did help me a bit was doing volunteering for an organisation and they were very accepting.

I came away with a good feeling that there are organisations where I can actually be myself and it can be fun.

(Sophie: 15,628-630; 16,653-655)

Sophie described worrying that she would be disliked and bullied in further jobs after her experience of bullying. She reports here that it was helpful for her to go on to work in an environment whereby she was accepted in terms of lessening her fear and distress surrounding the workplace. Echoing Kate's experience, Sophie describes coming to the realisation that there are workplaces in which she could be herself, allowing her to reclaim a sense of her own confidence and identity at work.

It appears that having a corrective experience in the workplace is important in overcoming the psychological effects of workplace bullying and can have a positive impact on an individual's sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence. The corrective experience led to the salience of bullying and its associated distress diminishing and participants were able to reclaim what had been lost due to their bullying experience.

Summary

In summary, this chapter sought to explore the four major themes resulting from the analysis: Bullying as a Powerful Experience, Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying, Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity and Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied.

The first superordinate theme, 'Bullying as a Powerful Experience' demonstrated the experience of being bullied against which backdrop the participants explained their experiences of psychological distress. The experience of being singled out and targeted for bullying created a sense of isolation, rejection and alienation from others associated with feelings of loneliness, depression and a loss of self-worth. A sense of inescapability permeated the participants' accounts leaving them feeling powerless and forced to remain in a situation in which they existed in a state of fear and dread about going to work. When at work, their day was permeated with fear, worry and anxiety culminating in feelings of desperation and hopelessness, leaving participants feeling on the verge of mental breakdown. Not being able to understand the bullying stimulated attempts to search for an explanation to make sense of the experience, however in the absence of any possible explanation, participants often came to blame themselves and to perceive that the fact they were being bullied meant that there was something 'wrong' with them, impacting further upon their sense of self-confidence and worth.

The second superordinate theme 'Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying' detailed the participants' descriptions and explanations of the psychological consequences they experienced as a result of bullying. Being bullied was associated with shock, disbelief, excessive and ruminative thinking, depression, anxiety and stress. Not being able to make sense of or resolve the situation led to a tendency to think excessively and ruminate in perceived attempts to understand and work out how to resolve the bullying. Participants reported experiencing, low mood, loss of motivation and withdrawal from activities and social contact along with feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and marked suicidal ideation. The experience of bullying left them overwhelmed and experiencing severe stress, exhaustion and burn out. Participants felt humiliated and fearful of being bullied again which caused them to feel wary of getting another job and some participants felt unable to

work again. Taken together, the psychological consequences reported indicated that participants may have been experiencing symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress as a result of being bullied in the workplace.

As well as negative consequences upon their psychological health, being bullied was associated with positive effects. Participants' accounts illustrated transformations of themselves as becoming stronger and experiencing increases in their confidence and perceived ability to cope with bullying in the future. It appeared that by framing their experience in a more positive light, participants were able to maintain definitions of the self which were positive and worthwhile and thus were able to lessen the associated psychological consequences.

The third superordinate theme 'Impact of Workplace Bullying upon Identity' relates to a further psychological consequence of being bullied that emerged from the analysis. Participants described a devastating impact upon their sense of self and identity which ranged from a loss of confidence to a complete loss of who they were and of the person they had once thought themselves to be. What clearly emerged from the data was the way in which participants felt their sense of identity was undermined by being bullied which assists the understanding of psychological difficulty following being bullied as participants' experienced intense distress following the loss to their sense of self and identity. Leaving the bullying situation appeared to lead to a process of rebuilding identity and reclaiming lives which participants managed by rediscovering other aspects of themselves, changing careers and engaging in new activities. While some participants were able to rebuild a sense of identity others had not yet recovered from their loss and there was little sense of identity reclamation. Accepting the loss of self and building new goals appears to be an adaptive approach to coping with the experience of being bullied and can re-introduce a sense of self-worth.

The fourth superordinate theme 'Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied' relates to the ways in which participants described coping with both their experiences of workplace bullying and the resulting psychological consequences. Most participants described feeling frustrated in their attempts to report bullying and described that the lack of support they experienced had further negative impacts upon their psychological health leading them to feel increasingly isolated, trapped

and hopeless. The most important aspect of support that emerged was the validation of participants' experiences, whereby their experience was believed and acknowledged to be damaging to their psychological health. In addition, participants also described possible underlying reasons that might lead targets to be reluctant to seek support due to feelings of shame and humiliation associated with being bullied. The role of support in facilitating acceptance of themselves and rebuilding their self-worth along with protecting against feelings of difference and isolation was particularly highlighted.

Participants appeared to find distraction techniques helpful as a means of enabling them to continue to deal with bullying on a daily basis. In addition, participants described the restorative effects of gaining another job. This may have presented an opportunity to incorporate a new sense of identity which served to provide participants with a sense of self-esteem and efficacy, therefore relieving the threat to identity that arose as a result of being bullied. This corrective experience led to the salience of bullying and its associated distress diminishing and participants were able to reclaim some of what had been lost due to their bullying experience.

Chapter 4: Discussion

In this final chapter, the current findings are discussed in relation to previous research and theoretical explanations of workplace bullying in order to answer the research question: 'How do targets of workplace bullying explain effects upon their psychological health?'. The methodology of the study is evaluated and avenues for future research are highlighted. Subsequently the implications of the findings for the practice of professionals working with those affected by workplace bullying are considered.

Bullying as a Powerful Experience

The following section aims to demonstrate how aspects of the bullying experience were used by participants to make sense of the effects it had upon their psychological health. The results are discussed in relation to previous research and theory and are argued to illuminate the ways in which workplace bullying has damaging psychological effects.

Feeling Isolated

The experience of being targeted for bullying created a sense of isolation, rejection and alienation from others which left participants feeling lonely and devalued as human beings. Such treatment led participants to believe that there was something wrong with them and reduced them of their self-worth. Participants were left feeling humiliated and ashamed to be in the rejected and excluded position of 'outcast' signalling the loss of a perhaps universal need for a sense of belonging, acceptance and respect, and at its most extreme, leaving participants feeling that they had no right to be alive.

Social isolation is often used as a bullying behaviour (Rayner et al. 2002) and feelings of isolation are consistently found throughout the literature (Glaso et al., 2007; MacIntosh, 2005; O'Donnell et al., 2010; Vaughan, 2012) and have been shown to have an impact upon the self-confidence of targets (Vartia, 2001). In van Heugten's (2013) study participants noted that they had become increasingly

professionally and personally isolated which they found to be one of the most distressing effects of being bullied. For participants in the present study, feelings of being excluded and isolated and a subsequent sense of feeling alienated, degraded and devalued as a person were provided as explanations of the psychological difficulties experienced.

Feeling Powerless

Feelings of powerlessness due to having little control and power to change the bullying situation and little choice but to remain in the situation left participants feeling imprisoned, despairing and hopeless. This finding is in accordance with previous research which has found that targets are consistently unable to control and prevent the bullying situation (Rayner et al., 2002; Zapf & Gross, 2001) and is also reminiscent of the power disparity involved in the definition of workplace bullying. Other researchers have also noted that bullied workers report feeling as though they were imprisoned in their jobs (Hauge et al., 2010). A prominent theme within Hallberg and Strandmark's (2006) study was 'Having Limited Space for Action' which refers to the lack of options available to targets to leave the situation before obtaining a suitable position elsewhere, consistent with the theme of powerlessness in the present study. The current study goes beyond this previous research to highlight how feeling powerless to escape bullying impacted upon targets psychologically.

All of the participants related a complete lack of support to feelings of powerlessness and as contributing to the psychological difficulties experienced. The participants demonstrated that it was not only the bullying itself, but the invalidating organisational responses they received which were damaging to psychological health, resulting in feelings of shame, humiliation and loss of self-confidence. Participants evoked feeling weak and childlike as a result of being bullied and the child metaphor has been found in previous research (e.g. Tracy et al., 2006). Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) suggests that being bullied may connote weakness or child-status because of its association with school bullying which appears to result in feelings of shame in targets about being bullied and being unable to stop it.

An interesting element of the interview analysis was the parallel made by Nina between domestic violence and workplace bullying, emphasising the power and control element inherent in workplace bullying and the subsequent feelings of powerlessness invoked in the targets. Domestic violence is defined by the NHS website as 'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse' and is seen as a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour through which the abuser seeks power over their victim (NHS, 2013). This definition can easily be applied to the experiences of bullying described by participants and is consistent with researchers who have noted similarities between bullying in different contexts (Monks & Coyne, 2011). Indeed it has been observed that bullying shares similarities with other forms of relational abuse such as domestic violence and that behaviours within these relationships may also meet the definition of bullying in that there is a power disparity and individuals are exposed to prolonged, repeated, negative threatening behaviours from which it is difficult to escape (Monks et al., 2009; Tehrani, 2012).

Living in Fear and Dread

All participants reported that their daily experiences of bullying and their inability to escape or change the situation meant that they existed in a state of fear and dread about going to work, and when at work, their day was permeated with fear, worry and anxiety likened to being trapped in a nightmarish and torturous situation. This resonates strongly with the study by Tracy et al. (2006) who describe that participant narratives were saturated with metaphors of nightmares, beating, physical abuse and death. Vaughan (2012) provides a summary of her daily experience of being bullied which could be said to be consistent with the experiences of the participants in the present study. She described feeling vulnerable, trapped, isolated, exhausted, anxious, depressed and in considerable distress most of the time. In the present study, participants felt unable to complete their work and cope with daily tasks as a result of the extreme distress engendered by the bullying experience. Other research has also demonstrated that targets perceive bullying to have negatively impacted upon their work performance resulting in increased work errors, concentration difficulties, decreased motivation and lack of initiative (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Namie, 2013; O'Moore et al., 1998).

Participants discussed that feelings of fear and dread could not be contained to the workplace and impacted upon their ability to enjoy themselves outside of work. This indicates that workplace bullying can have far more wide reaching consequences upon an individual's life than solely in the workplace. Participants described developing a feeling of apprehension and fearful expectation of being bullied which was experienced as equally distressing as the bullying incidents themselves. This is similar to Namie's (2013) research which revealed that 'anticipation of the next negative event' was experienced by the vast majority of participants. Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts (2007) describe that targets of workplace bullying appear to anticipate the workday with dread and a sense of impending doom, and when at work, exist in a state of high alert in anticipation of the next attack. This captures the experiences of the participants in the present study.

Ultimately participants were left feeling unable to go to work in these conditions and they either left their jobs or took sickness absence which has been noted as a common result of being bullied in the workplace (Kivimaki et al, 2000; O'Donnell et al., 2010). The participants described the continual feelings of dread and anxiety at having to endure the bullying with no support or intervention from the organisation as contributing to the negative psychological consequences experienced. This is consistent with the conceptualisation of bullying as a severe stressor and with transactional stress theories (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Trying to Make Sense

Prominent within each participant's account was a search for an explanation for the bullying. Some participants tried to explain bullying behaviour by making reference to the culture of the organisation in which they worked or by understanding the bully's own psychological issues. It appeared that these strategies were protective to the participants' sense of self. It may be that finding an explanation for bullying that draws upon the bully's own issues is protective to the self as one can locate something lacking in the bully rather than in oneself. Similarly, Lewis and Orford (2005) found that targets of bullying searched for meaning and attempted to make sense of what had happened to them. They describe that naming experiences as

bullying was important for targets in identifying the problem as external to themselves, enabling them to maintain or recover self-worth and competence.

The need to know why they were being targeted along with the absence of an explanation for their experience led participants to question and blame themselves in order to try and make sense of the situation. Self-blame as a result of being bullied has consistently been found in the literature. For example, Tracy et al. (2006) describe that their participants were left wondering what they had done to bring bullying on themselves and feeling as if they were somehow to blame and should have prevented the bullying. In the present study, participants described that not being able to understand, explain or make sense of what was happening to them contributed to the severe psychological consequences experienced. Participants experienced confusion, uncertainty and self-blame leading to a loss of self-worth, shame and symptoms of depression as participants perceived there to be something wrong with them to have provoked such behaviour.

The explanations presented by participants for the psychological consequences experienced are consistent with Williams' (1997) theory of social ostracism (see Introduction). Applying the theory to bullying, it is suggested that being bullied deprived targets of a sense of belonging and the need to maintain self-esteem through isolating, alienating and devaluing them. This appeared to signal a loss of acceptance and respect causing them to feel depressed, helpless and worthless. Bullying also threatened the need to feel in control of interactions with others as targets experienced a lack of control and power to resolve or escape the bullying situation. Lastly, bullying threatened targets' need for maintaining a belief in a meaningful existence as they were unable to understand or make sense of the situation. In accordance with the theory of ostracism, it appears that the long-term frustration of these needs led to severe psychological difficulties (Hogh et al., 2012; Williams & Zardo, 2005).

Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) also assert that bullying fundamentally threatens essential life domains (professional/personal identity, ability to provide for oneself, security of physical safety) and as such, can have devastating effects on well-being. Williams and Zardo (2005) acknowledge the individual's ability to cope with or change the social situation and the theory can therefore be integrated with

transactional stress theories (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As demonstrated by the current findings, psychological difficulties as a result of exposure to workplace bullying can therefore be seen as resulting from the appraisal of bullying as a threat to the targets' well-being and exceeding his or her coping resources.

The Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying

The following section aims to demonstrate the psychological difficulties experienced by participants and how these relate to, and further illuminate, the existing literature by highlighting how participants have made sense of their experiences.

Shock and Disbelief

There was a shared experience of extreme feelings of shock consistent with experiencing a traumatic reaction to the bullying. Participants felt shocked at having become a target of bullying and at the deep emotional impact bullying had upon them which affected their sense of self as strong and confident individuals. Not expecting to be bullied as an adult and having expectations for others' behaviour in the workplace also gave the experience a deeper sense of shock and disbelief that such behaviour could occur in the workplace. It appears that the experience of bullying shattered assumptions about other people, the workplace and the self, demonstrating how fundamental assumptions are shattered by traumatic events such as workplace bullying.

These findings support previous quantitative research that has found bullying to result in symptoms of PTSD, possibly arising from the shattering of basic assumptions surrounding the world, others and the self consistent with the cognitive model of trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1989; 1992; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a; Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2010). Similarly, other qualitative research has demonstrated that bullying experiences challenge targets' assumptions about the world, particularly the world of work (Lewis, 2000), and contravene assumptions regarding adult behaviours at work resulting in shock, confusion and disbelief (Lewis, 2006).

Excessive and Ruminative Thinking

Participants spoke about a tendency to ruminate about the bullying in perceived attempts to make sense of and work out how to resolve the situation. Rumination can be defined as a maladaptive cognitive process involving repetitive thoughts and feelings about events that are intrusive and aversive (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Participants emphasised the recurrent, intrusive and uncontrollable nature of their thinking which impacted upon other areas of life including relationships with friends, family and partners due to a constant need to talk about the bullying. Constant rumination also impacted upon the participants' psychological health affecting their sleeping pattern and leading to feelings of stress, worry and depression.

This is consistent with research which has illustrated that targets perceive a great need to repeatedly talk about the bullying in order to convince themselves that the bullying is unjust and not their fault (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). Yildirim, Yildirim, and Timucin (2007) reported that 69% of the 211 bullied participants in their study mentally replayed their experiences of being bullied over and over again. Similarly, Moreno-Jimenez et al. (2009) found ruminating on the bullying situation to have negative effects on psychological health. Previous research has also shown that the impact of bullying is not restricted to the workplace but also affects relationships with family and friends as targets report becoming preoccupied with bullying, tired and irritable (van Heugten, 2010).

However other research has found that taking a problem solving approach to thinking about the bullying situation can have positive consequences leading targets to take action against bullying or to leave the organisation (van Heugten, 2013). D'Cruz and Noronha (2010) described that their participants appeared to engage in a sense-making process which, as they thought over the experience in their minds, led them to take a different perspective, for example that "there was more to life than this" and "there were other options". The participants indicated that they then began to look at the options available to them and realised that moving to another organisation was the best alternative. Such differences in the result of 'rumination' experienced by targets of bullying may be explained by emphasising the importance

of subjective individual interpretations of bullying in determining the psychological effects experienced.

Experiencing Depression

All participants reported experiencing at least some difficulties symptomatic of the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) criteria for a diagnosis of depression including low mood, feelings of worthlessness, loss of motivation and withdrawal from activities and social contact, along with intense feelings of hopelessness and suicidal ideation. Feelings of depression were related to a loss of self-belief and loss of hope at seeing no way forward with no possibility of a solution to the problem. Thoughts of suicide were related to losses in self-belief and energy for life along with feeling unable to cope with bullying due to the lack of support available.

Depression has consistently been found to be a psychological consequence of workplace bullying (Brousse et al., 2008; Niedhammer et al., 2006; Quine, 1999) and alarmingly high rates of suicide and suicidal ideation have also been found in this population (Leymann, 1990; Pompili et al., 2008; Soares, 2012). Soares (2012) similarly found suicidal ideation to be associated with hopelessness provoked by workplace bullying. For Hallberg and Strandmark's (2006) participants, thoughts of suicide were considered due to a lack of other solutions to resolve the bullying situation. The participants were left feeling worthless and that life was meaningless which resonates strongly with the results of the present study.

Experiencing Stress

The experience of bullying led to severe stress, exhaustion and burn out. Participants gave the impression of being drained both physically and mentally of their resources and therefore feeling unable to cope with the bullying. The participants explained that it was the number of stressors experienced and feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope with these that led to the psychological consequence of severe stress and for some impacted so deeply to the point that they became unable to continue at work and took sickness absence.

Studies have indeed shown targets of bullying to portray a high level of stress symptoms and burnout (Brousse et al., 2008; Einarsen, Matthiesen & Skogstad, 1998; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006; Lewis & Orford, 2005; Macintosh, 2005; O'Donnell et al., 2010; van Heugten, 2010). According to Vaughan (2012), as a result of continual bullying she became emotionally and physically exhausted to the point that that she had reached the end of her capacity to cope with the bullying and was therefore forced to go on long-term sick leave, resonant with the narratives in the present study.

This is in line with Leymann's (1990) assertion that being persistently exposed to bullying drains targets coping resources, leaving them less able to cope with job tasks and requirements. It appears the participants in the current study were suffering from work related stress which is said to develop because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them and can be a significant cause of illness linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and reduced work performance (Hoel & Giga, 2006). This is consistent with transactional stress models (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) which explain that psychological difficulties as a result of exposure to workplace bullying can be seen as the appraisal of the bullying as a threat to the targets' well-being and exceeding the targets' coping resources.

Becoming Fearful of Returning to Work

Participants' experiences of bullying left them fearful of returning to the workplace and of being bullied again. They described experiencing a loss of confidence in themselves as to whether they could undertake the job along with a loss of faith and trust in the workplace. This is consistent with previous research in which targets of workplace bullying report a deep fear of returning to or approaching their workplace (Brousse et al., 2008; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006). Mikkelsen and Iversen (2002, as cited in Hogh et al., 2012) reported that targets perceived that they had lost their ability to work due to stress and fear associated with the workplace along with an intense fear of job interviews. The current study illuminates the previous research by demonstrating how target's may become less trustful of others in the workplace and experience a loss of confidence in themselves.

Taken together, the psychological consequences reported by participants are indicative that they may have been experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress (DSM-IV-TR, APA, 2000) supporting the conceptualisation of bullying as a traumatic experience which can lead to PTSD (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Bond et al., 2010; Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006; Leymann, 1990; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a; Nolfe et al., 2008; Tehrani, 2004; Van Heugten, 2010). However, it is necessary to emphasise that as diagnostic interviews were not undertaken, the findings are only indicators of PTSD.

According to the cognitive theory of trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1989), events are traumatic to the extent that they shatter basic cognitive schemas and researchers have proposed that this may account for the observed relationship between exposure to bullying and symptoms of PTSD (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a). As mentioned earlier under the theme 'Shock and Disbelief', the findings of the current study suggest that workplace bullying may have shattered participants' assumptions about themselves, other people and the world, therefore supporting the view that post-traumatic stress following workplace bullying may be due to the shattering of basic assumptions.

In support of these tentative insights, several participants indicated that the experience of bullying and lack of support shattered the assumption of benevolence of the world and others due to experiencing betrayal and a loss of trust in others and the workplace. Furthermore, the participants reported that the experience altered their view of the workplace to one of threat, danger and uncertainty consistent with results found by Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004). The experience of bullying appeared to also lead participants to question the meaningfulness of the world as they came to feel powerless to exert control over their bullying situation and found it difficult to make sense of why they became targets of such undeserving behaviour. Finally, bullying appeared to have shattered assumptions of self-worth. Many participants stated that prior to the bullying they considered themselves confident and strong people. However, after being bullied they saw themselves as weak and helpless, resulting in low self-worth consistent with the quantitative results found by Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002a).

Positive Psychological Effects

As well as negative consequences upon their psychological health, participants often reported experiencing positive effects resulting from being bullied in the workplace. Their accounts illustrated personal transformations which included becoming stronger and more confident along with increases in their perceived ability to cope with bullying and adversity. For some participants, bullying served as a motivating experience giving the impetus to take other paths in life.

This is consistent with qualitative researchers such as Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) who found that targets attributed positive consequences to their experience, believing that they had become more humble and attentive towards other people. Indeed, most participants in van Heugten's (2010) study considered themselves more resilient, realistic or wiser than before their bullying experience. In a recent qualitative study of workplace bullying, van Heugten (2013) found that most targets of bullying considered they had developed greater resilience as a result of being bullied and were able to view the experience as an opportunity for personal and professional development. However in contrast to other studies, including the present study, the participants in van Heugten's (2013) study received support from colleagues, supervisors, unions, lawyers and family members and were able to find alternative employment which appeared to provide a buffer to psychological difficulties.

In the present study, it appeared that by framing their experience in a positive light, participants were able to maintain definitions of the self which were positive and worthwhile and thus were able to lessen the psychological consequences associated with being bullied. Participants suggested being wounded and damaged by their experience of bullying but also gave a sense of being a survivor after a traumatic experience. It has been noted by Tracy et al. (2006) that it may be beneficial for targets of workplace bullying to frame themselves in different ways for example as revolutionaries and survivors in order to reframe the bullying experience. Again such effects are consistent with the cognitive model of trauma suggesting that targets must rebuild a new set of basic assumptions (Janoff-Bulman & Schwartzberg, 1990). Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002a) have suggested that the positive consequences

reported by targets of workplace bullying indicate that targets have succeeded in establishing new and mature cognitive schemas.

Conversely, participants who did not see their experience as having any positive consequences appeared to experience more long-term psychological difficulties. Indeed it has been noted that although some targets are able to report benefits from their experiences of bullying, others may instead focus on the damage to their psychological health and losses sustained from the bullying. These individuals may develop permanent negative assumptions of self, others, and the world (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a) leading to enduring psychological difficulties. This suggests that in working therapeutically with targets of bullying it may be helpful to assist clients in conceptualising the positive consequences of their experience.

Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity

The study did not specifically set out to examine identity and the interview schedule did not contain specific questions exploring identity issues, however impacts upon the participants' self-concepts permeated all of the accounts. The analysis of the data highlighted the centrality of threats to participants' identities to their experiences of psychological difficulty. Consideration of this phenomenon led me to go back to the literature and investigate identity theory further. The following section aims to demonstrate the devastating impact being bullied had upon the identity of targets which helps to further the understanding of the experience of psychological distress as a result of bullying. The findings are discussed in relation to the emerging research investigating workplace bullying and identity and are linked to identity theory.

Impact on Self-Concept: A Destroyed Self

Participants described a devastating impact upon their sense of self as a result of being bullied ranging from a loss of confidence to a complete loss of who they were and of the person they had once thought themselves to be. Constant personal and professional attacks from the bully and not feeling able to effectively deal with and

resolve the bullying situation resulted in feelings of shame and severe damage to self-confidence and worth.

Both quantitative and qualitative studies have found workplace bullying to impact upon confidence and self-esteem. Lewis and Orford (2005) reported that bullying left participants questioning themselves and their experiences which led to feelings of self-doubt. In Hallberg and Strandmark's (2006) study, being bullied was also associated with shame and diminishing self-esteem. The authors proposed that bullies projected onto targets a feeling of being less valued as a person which was then taken on by targets leaving them feeling insecure and doubtful about who they were as human beings.

While the majority of participants experienced bullying as a threat to their sense of self, this finding was not unanimous. Natalie reported that while her self-confidence was lowered, she did not experience such a negative impact upon her sense of identity. As Natalie was not the only person to be bullied by the bully she was therefore aware that the bullying was not a personal attack to herself and so the experience did not impact upon her self-concept negatively. Natalie described that she could also understand that it was the bully's own issues which led her to bully and not due to some perceived fault in herself which appeared to be protective to maintaining a sense of self-worth. This finding is similar to that of van Heugten's (2013) study into resilience factors in workplace bullying whereby it was found that discovering that other people had been targeted by the same bully was reassuring, helped make sense of what happened, and reduced self-doubt.

Similarly, Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2011) assert that if the cause of bullying can be applied to the bully, the problem can be seen as external to those targeted. This is consistent with Bowling and Beehr's (2006) attribution based model that attempts to explain the link between bullying and its consequences. The model asserts that if there are many targets and perpetrators the organisation can be seen as responsible for bullying and if there are many targets but only one perpetrator, then this can be attributed to the perpetrator because the bullying is unique to that person. However, if the person is the only target and there are one or more perpetrators, then the target could come to blame him or herself as appeared to be the case in the present study.

Experiencing the Loss of a Valued and Expected Self

The participants described experiences of psychological distress resulting from the loss of the person they valued themselves to be along with interruptions to their anticipated futures due to being bullied and what this meant in term of their roles and identities. Aspects of their pre-bullying selves which provided a sense of self and worth were lost due to their experience of bullying. Participants conveyed difficulty in coming to terms with this loss and experienced intense feelings of distress, grief and bereavement. The results emphasise the importance of work to identity and show that bullying can affect psychological health by affecting targets' careers, social status and way of living.

In his qualitative study of workplace bullying, Kelly (1999) also discussed that being bullied undermined and destroyed the targets' identities and points to the cognitive model of trauma and the shattering of assumptions in order to explain such affects. In Kelly's study, targets suffered enduring damage to their personal and professional self-image in that they no longer perceived themselves to be as good at their job, or as outgoing and confident as they had been previously. The participants also compared their current selves to how they saw themselves before the bullying, as was the case in the present research. For the participants in Kelly's study, this resulted in a bleak view of the future with some participants even stating that they did not care whether they lived or died.

From a target's perspective, Vaughan (2012) argues that work is essential in the building and shaping of identity and to the search for daily meaning and recognition. Vaughan details how bullying crushed her self-belief in both her professional context and private life and caused her to withdraw from social contact whereas she had previously been extraverted and outgoing. Vaughan asserts that everything she stood for and the very foundations of her 'self' had been destroyed by being bullied.

The current results also support van Heugten (2010) who found that almost all of the participants in her study resigned from their positions and noted a sense of loss and grief associated with leaving their jobs prematurely and being forced to work in positions that they did not necessarily wish to. In contrast to this, van Heugten

(2013) found that although participants initially grieved the loss of a job in which they would have preferred to remain, most were able to look at the experience positively. This was facilitated by being able to find suitable alternative employment, pointing to the importance of getting another job in lessening the impact of workplace bullying upon psychological health discussed later.

Rebuilding a Sense of Self

Following the destruction of their identities some participants described a shift toward rebuilding their self-worth and identity as opposed to grieving the loss of their old and anticipated selves by engaging in a process of self-development, getting new jobs, changing careers and engaging in new activities. This appeared to offer a sense of regaining some of what the experience of bullying had removed and participants who were able to do this no longer experienced such debilitating psychological effects. However others had not yet recovered from the losses sustained as a result of being bullied and there was little sense of identity reclamation. This theme illustrates that accepting the loss of self and rebuilding new goals can be an adaptive approach to coping with the experience of being bullied and re-introduced a sense of self-esteem and self-worth for the participants.

These results echo Vaughan's (2012) description that her personal recovery from the effects of bullying entailed embarking on a process of rebuilding her identity. She concluded that ultimately she had undergone a journey of personal growth, changing her self-concept and life priorities. These results are again consistent with the cognitive theory of trauma which suggests that individuals must rebuild basic assumptions and beliefs following traumatic experiences (Janoff-Bulman & Schwartzberg, 1990).

Although some previous studies have noted effects upon targets' identity in workplace bullying research, (e.g. Kelly, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Lewis & Orford, 2005) there has been little research specifically examining the impact of workplace bullying upon identity. Identity can be defined as the meanings that individuals ascribe to themselves (Gecas, 1982) and it appears that being bullied may have such

deleterious effects upon identity given that work is a salient source of how people define themselves and has a role in shaping a large proportion of individuals' lives (Du Gay, 1996).

Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) has conducted one of the only research studies into the impact of bullying upon the identity of targets and the identity work the experience triggers. Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) developed the Intensive Remedial Identity Work Model (IRIWM) following grounded theory analysis of the narratives of 20 targets of bullying. In accordance with the results of the present study, being bullied was said to challenge past self-narratives that were based on being valued, successful, powerful and in control and the targets experienced an incongruity between their previously valued identity and the current devalued identity. According to Lutgen-Sandvik (2008), the process of identity work in response to being bullied takes place across pre-bullying, bullying and post bullying phases and involves stabilising, sensemaking, reconciling, repairing, grieving and restructuring processes. Each phase is associated with specific identity threats, identity work and remedial goals that assist targets to restore a sense of positive identity. For example, the remedial goals of grieving and restructuring include dealing with the perceived loss of professional reputation, organisational identity and self-confidence, along with shattered assumptions about the workplace by processing and accepting loss and incorporating the damaged identity and revised beliefs into one's self-narrative.

The identity work undertaken by participants in the present study is consistent with the IRIWM model proposed by Lutgen-Sandvik (2008). Post-bullying, identity threats were managed through processes of grieving and restructuring. Participants initially appeared to grieve the loss of their sense of selves, confidence and worth. However, ultimately, they appeared to come to terms with their losses and were able to describe positive personal transformations. This process allowed the experience of bullying to ultimately have positive implications through the revision of identity into self-narratives. A valued identity was thus re-created which reaffirmed a sense of personal and professional worth that had been lost as a result of the bullying experience. As Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) found, this often included drawing on non-work domains and reframing the experience as an opportunity for learning and personal transformation. However for some, bullying had shattered their lives so completely that they were unable to restructure their experiences and to rebuild their

identity. Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) suggests that the impact upon an individual's life narrative may partly explain why bullying has such devastating effects upon psychological health.

D'Cruz and Noronha (2010; 2012) have used the IRIWM model to describe the identity disruptions and identity work in targets of workplace bullying. Similar to the results of the current study, the results demonstrated that the experience of being bullied resulted in participants questioning values and beliefs including the goodness and fairness of the world and the benevolence, humaneness and rationality of people. Participants attempted to work through the experience by searching for explanations, looking for positive dimensions and incorporating the experience within their life-plans.

A model which may be of use in understanding the effects on identity presented here is Identity Process Theory (IPT; Breakwell, 1992; 2010a). This theory proposes that identity is regulated by interacting processes of accommodation/assimilation and evaluation which allow new components to be incorporated into the identity structure and determine the changing content and meaning of identity. The identity processes are guided by fundamental identity states including self-continuity, distinctiveness from relevant others, self-efficacy over life and future, and self-esteem. Challenges to these principles induce identity threat which can have adverse effects upon psychological well-being. Individuals seek to remove or modify threats to identity through intrapsychic coping strategies, which function at the level of individual cognitions and emotions, e.g. denial of threat; interpersonal strategies, which involve interaction with other individuals, e.g. by isolating self from threat; and intergroup strategies, which refer to group-level behaviour involving seeking help and support from others to reduce isolation and increase possibilities for removing the threat.

When the theory is applied to workplace bullying, it can be seen that the concept of identity threat may assist the understanding of the impact of bullying upon psychological well-being. It has been shown throughout this research that workplace bullying can pose a threat to identity through its impact upon targets' self-esteem; affect a sense of distinctiveness by causing them to be isolated and withdraw from social activities; affect their self-efficacy by reducing their sense of control over their

lives and future; and affect continuity as individuals must incorporate a sense of a changed self into their previous sense of identity. The theory also points to possible coping strategies. These include, for example, joining self-help groups to alleviate the threats to distinctiveness and belonging posed by bullying; and increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy through engaging in activities which provide opportunities for achievement and future possibility.

Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied

Most previous studies investigating coping strategies used by targets of bullying have focussed on how targets cope with the bullying situation rather than with the resultant psychological effects. This section aims to demonstrate how participants coped both with the experience of being bullied and with the resulting psychological effects. It is hoped that this may provide valuable information for health professionals assisting targets of workplace bullying.

Experiences of Support: Lack of Support

It was generally felt by the participants that the organisations for which they worked did not acknowledge or provide adequate support or investigation into bullying in contrast to participants' needs for support. They described that the lack of support they experienced had further negative impacts upon their psychological health leading them to feel increasingly isolated, trapped and hopeless. The participants described that their concerns were generally belittled which left them doubting themselves and forced to deal with the bullying on their own. This led to a loss of confidence due to feeling unable to cope with the situation. The lack of support experienced by targets therefore may contribute to explanations of how psychological difficulties result from workplace bullying.

The lack of support available in the workplace for targets of workplace bullying and the detrimental effects of this has been extensively documented in the literature. Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) also found that targets lacked support from colleagues, managers, unions and occupational health services. The target's view of

what happened was often questioned or judged as a misconception of the situation, causing them to believe that the situation was their own fault. Similarly, Vaughan (2012) describes that she suffered a lack of understanding from professionals and was branded as oversensitive or reactive which led to feelings of despair as she failed to get the recognition needed to help her deal with the bullying situation. The results are also consistent with Lewis and Orford (2005) who noted that participants related feelings of anxiety and a threatened sense of self to the denial of support they experienced which had been experienced as distressing and traumatising. The author's argue that this may have shattered assumptions of others as caring and supportive leading to feelings of diminished worth and shame. Participants further reported in the present study that feelings of shame and humiliation associated with being bullied made it difficult for them to disclose their experiences, perhaps partly explaining why targets of bullying often feel reluctant to report bullying (Rains, 2001).

Experiences of Support: The Importance of Validation

Outside of the workplace, participants commonly sought support from friends and family and some attended therapy. It was important for participants for another person to believe that the bullying existed and to recognise the legitimacy of the subsequent impact upon their psychological health. Acceptance and validation from others appeared to be significant in removing self-doubt and perceptions of weakness or madness particularly given the invalidating responses from the workplace and resultant damage to the targets' confidence and sense of self. The role of support in facilitating acceptance of themselves and rebuilding their self-worth along with protecting against feelings of difference and isolation was particularly highlighted.

O'Donnell et al. (2010) also found being invalidated to be a consistent theme reported among targets of workplace bullying, leaving them feeling isolated and blamed for their difficulties. Demonstrations of interest and concern by health care professionals served to validate health issues and experiences and had positive effects upon psychological health. Similarly, van Heugten (2010) found that supportive family, friends, colleagues and medical practitioners helped targets to name and externalise bullying events and their causes so that their sense of failure

diminished. In Lewis and Orford's (2005) study social support also enabled participants to externalise problems, attributing them to the bully rather than to their self. An important aspect of support was identified as 'believing in you' which the authors argued offered participants some validation and protection of their sense of self.

Similarly, Vaughan (2012) explains that targets need to feel heard and recognised and that therapy helped her to realise that her reactions and symptoms were consistent with those found in other targets of bullying and that she was not going 'mad'. These results are also in line with Lewis (2000) who suggested that health professionals can help clients by minimising the extent to which health problems are seen as indicative of the individual's failure to cope with bullying.

Concentrating on Other Aspects of Life

A strategy which appeared to help participants cope with bullying was to concentrate on other areas of their lives and to focus on the small parts of the situation which they could control. This appeared to enable participants to feel better about their inability to change the situation and to stop dwelling on the bullying thus reducing the cycle of rumination and psychological difficulties experienced. Helpful strategies included focusing on leaving the job, building a new career, joining a team sport, returning to studying and undertaking self-development courses. This was not enough however for them to cope with the bulling on a long-term basis and for most participants, this strategy gave them enough hope and emotional strength to continue to deal with the bullying until they left the job.

The results demonstrate that focusing on something separate to the bullying situation, in particular that can give a sense of self-efficacy, worth and achievement, can provide an escape from the bullying situation and be protective to psychological health. This has also been found in other studies which report that withdrawing from the bullying situation is beneficial to the targets' health and well-being (Brousse et al., 2008; Tracy et al., 2006). In O'Donnell et al's. (2010) study, sickness absence allowed targets to disconnect and physically distance from the experience of being bullied, providing a sense of relief by reducing stress and tension. Strategies used by

participants as they attempted to regain their health included engaging in activities such as relaxation, prayer, exercise, and seeking help from professionals.

The results are consistent with Moreno-Jiménez et al. (2009) who found that psychological detachment, which can be defined as 'a sense of being away from the working environment' (Etzion, Eden & Lapidot, 1998), moderated the relationship between bullying and psychological effects. They suggest that an individual might use psychological detachment as a coping strategy by distracting attention away from the bullying situation. Distraction techniques have also been shown in general to assist the reduction of psychological difficulties including depressed mood (Morrow & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990). Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) similarly demonstrated that activities undertaken outside of work such as voluntary work or studying provided targets with strength and motivation and gave new meaning to life. In Lovell and Lee's (2011) case study, the target was able to overcome the negative effects of the bullying by engaging in activities which helped them to take more control of their lives.

Having a Corrective Experience

Participants highlighted the restorative effects of gaining another job which allowed them to feel more positively about themselves and restored their faith and confidence in the workplace. It appears that having a corrective experience in the workplace is important in overcoming the psychological effects of workplace bullying and can have a positive impact on an individual's sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence, pointing to the therapeutic benefit of helping targets of bullying to return to the workplace. Gaining a new job may have provided a new source of self-esteem and efficacy, therefore relieving the threat to identity that arose as a result of being bullied. These results correspond with other research such as Lewis (2006) who found competence and success at work was an important resource for maintaining identity and self-esteem. Similarly, O'Donnell et al. (2010) found that seeking employment helped to increase confidence as targets confirmed their abilities and successfully attained new positions.

Evaluation of the Research

The present findings have provided a number of unique insights into the experiences of psychological difficulty following being bullied in the workplace. The study has served to support the existing quantitative and qualitative literature and has illuminated this further by providing rich descriptions underlying the lived experience of being bullied. The study has also drawn attention to the devastating impact of being bullied upon the identity of targets, adding to the emerging literature surrounding the impact of workplace bullying on identity. Furthermore, the study has provided insights into how targets of workplace bullying cope with the experience and has highlighted the need for the development of guidelines for treatment with targets of workplace bullying. These insights have important ramifications for treatment, discussed later in the chapter, and demonstrate the utility of the qualitative approach in adding to and complementing the existing research by providing insight into the particular that can further illuminate the universal (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

To the author's knowledge, this is the first study using IPA to explore experiences of workplace bullying. The design and methodology therefore enabled participants to reveal rich details of their experience, gaining access to how individuals make sense of and give meaning to experiences of workplace bullying and psychological difficulty. The use of IPA also allowed the incorporation of an interpretative element, giving a more detailed and psychologically nuanced analysis of the participants' experiences. This has allowed the study to make a valuable contribution to the understanding of what it is like to experience psychological difficulty following being bullied in the workplace. Therefore, it is argued that the research aims have been met through the use of IPA methodology. A quantitative approach could not have captured the complexity of the psychological effects of workplace bullying as this would not be able to consider the lived experience of bullying which was fundamental to the impact of bullying upon the participants psychological health and sense of identity.

In the Methodology chapter, I have aimed to demonstrate the quality of the current study in relation to the criteria relevant to evaluating qualitative research and IPA (Yardley, 2000). However, the current study like all research has some limitations

which will have impacted upon the evaluation of the findings, some of which are taken into account below.

Limitations

Firstly, the sample of participants was purposive and therefore included self-selected targets of workplace bullying. While this is consistent with IPA sampling methods where participants are selected because of their expertise in the phenomenon being explored (Reid et al., 2005), the self-selected nature of the sample means that there is reason to assume that the participants in this study may not be typical of all targets of bullying. Self-selection may have attracted participants who were particularly impacted by their experiences of bullying and had particularly negative effects upon their psychological health. Indeed the majority of participants were recruited via a support organisation for targets of workplace bullying and it has been suggested that such sampling methods will include more severe bullying cases (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2008). However those individuals with higher levels of psychological distress are also more likely to access psychological services and their accounts may therefore be of particular significance for professionals who may treat such individuals and for whom an understanding of the psychological consequences of workplace bullying is paramount.

It is acknowledged that other individuals with similar experiences may have responded differently and presented with different psychological difficulties, ways of coping etc. It would be interesting to conduct research with a similar group who did not experience psychological effects as a result of being bullied and look at the factors underlying this, for example to explore protective factors that may lessen the psychological impact of workplace bullying. Another limitation of the sample is that the majority of the participants were female. This is inconsistent with UK prevalence figures of workplace bullying which have found small or no gender differences in target rates (e.g. Hoel & Cooper, 2001). There also appear to be few gender differences in terms of the health consequences of bullying (e.g. Vartia & Hyyti, 2002). It could be speculated that the small number of male participants who responded to the study may reflect a more general reluctance by men to seek help, talk about their difficulties and participate in research (Galdas, Cheater & Marshall,

2005; Galea & Tracy, 2007; Mackenzie, Gekoski & Knox, 2006; Olaffson & Johannsdottir, 2004).

These factors suggest that the sample is therefore unlikely to be a good representation of the population of targets of workplace bullying in general and this research can therefore be regarded as offering insights into the experience of workplace bullying from a specific perspective. The interpretations and findings are not claimed to be generalisable but it is hoped they may be transferable to other groups that are similar, in accordance with the principles of IPA. With regards to the sensitivity to context criteria for qualitative research (Yardley, 2000), the analysis paid little attention to cultural and social factors although they are bound to also play a role in individuals' perspectives of the experience of workplace bullying and psychological effects. Therefore future research could explore the same issues with different groups of targets, for example, from different social and cultural backgrounds and of different age ranges/genders. This could investigate differences and commonalities in their experiences to construct an increasingly complex and complete picture of the experience of workplace bullying.

It is also impossible to say with all certainty that the psychological difficulties reported by targets are a product of their bullying experience as the study explores self-reported mental health experiences. It is likely that bullying may interact with other negative life events and workplace factors and therefore must be understood within the wider life context of the individual. Including questions regarding the participants' wider life history in the interview may have illuminated the impact of the participants' life context on the psychological difficulties experienced and could be addressed in future research. As asserted in the Methodology chapter, it is acknowledged that the study does not provide an objective 'true' reading of the data and instead offers phenomenological insights into the participants' sense-making of their experience shaped by the researcher's interpretations.

Furthermore, the participants' accounts and findings of the study may have been constructed to some extent by the methodology and interview questions. It is acknowledged that different researchers construct interviews differently, influence participants to respond differently and interpret the findings differently (Finlay, 2002b). It is also important to consider bias on account of the researcher's

interpretations as a result of preconceptions surrounding the topic which may also have influenced the results. As highlighted in the Methodology chapter, these results are a co-construction between participant and researcher and therefore present just one interpretation of the data. It is understood in IPA that multiple equally valid readings and interpretations of the data are possible and therefore the results of the present study remain tentative, emergent and open (Finlay, 2008).

Further research

The analysis of the data highlighted the centrality of the impact of bullying on the participants' identity to their experiences of psychological difficulty. Therefore it would be useful to conduct further qualitative studies explicitly exploring the impact of workplace bullying upon identity and factors that facilitate coping with identity threats in order to enable greater insights and further knowledge of the psychological effects of workplace bullying. If I were to re-design the interview schedule for future use, I would ask specific questions surrounding the impact of bullying upon identity and the sense of loss suffered that I had not considered prior to the analysis.

Additionally, it has been argued by many researchers that in order to advance our knowledge of the psychological consequences of workplace bullying, future research should be more theory driven in order to provide a stronger base from which to develop interventions (Coyne & Monks, 2011; Hogh et al., 2011). Few studies have, as yet, explored individual consequences of workplace bullying using theoretical models to guide the analysis. Therefore, future studies could, for example, use existing theoretical models of identity (e.g. Breakwell, 1992, 2010; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008) to guide a qualitative analysis of the impact of bullying upon identity.

As the present study demonstrates, the findings are consistent with a number of models which have been used to explain the psychological effects caused by workplace bullying such as the cognitive model of trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) and Williams' (1997) theory of social ostracism. While these models highlight and explain aspects of the experience of workplace bullying, further research is needed into a model which can integrate elements of the different theories to more fully explain the psychological effects of workplace bullying. In addition, Coyne and

Monks (2011) have suggested that researchers can take an interdisciplinary research and treatment approach to tackling bullying and its consequences. Adapting theory and practice interventions from a variety of settings in areas such as psychology, education, sociology and social work to develop common theoretical frameworks and interventions could inform and enrich our understanding of bullying as a whole (Coyne & Monks, 2011).

The present research has also highlighted that the development and evaluation of treatment approaches for the psychological consequences of bullying merit further research. Research could aim to gain further insights into areas of possible focus in therapeutic work by investigating how targets of bullying cope with its effects and recover. Further research might also be undertaken with health professionals exploring their knowledge of treating individuals affected by workplace bullying in order to gain insights as to how this might be developed and improved.

Implications for Clinical Practice

Research suggests that a high prevalence of those who have been bullied will seek help from mental health professionals (Namie, 2013). The benefits of therapeutic support were highlighted in the current study and important implications for treatment can thus be drawn from the research. A summary of suggestions for the work professionals working with targets of workplace bullying could engage in is provided below.

Firstly, the analysis and discussion of the findings highlight the powerful role of health professionals in validating the experiences of targets of workplace bullying. A humanistic approach providing the core conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957) would seem an essential foundation for such therapeutic work. Targets need to feel heard and recognised and clinicians can communicate an understanding of the client's experience and help them to realise that their reactions and symptoms are consistent with those found in other targets of bullying. Clinicians may also provide targets with information about the manifestations, causes and consequences of workplace bullying, which can serve to normalise their experiences.

It is likely that psychological treatment for targets of workplace bullying may involve helping client's to face and cope with practical issues in the workplace, along with managing the psychological effects of bullying. As the current study was undertaken with individuals who had left the workplace, it cannot comment on how to assist clients with addressing the bullying situation within the organisation. However, the findings of the present study suggest that distraction techniques and helping clients find other ways of affirming and rebuilding their sense of self may be helpful in enabling them to take action to address or leave the situation. Given the invalidating responses from the workplace received by the participants in this study, it is important to be mindful of directing the client to the organisation for support. Ferris (2004) argues that therapy should include exploring whether to approach the organisation for help and preparation for negative organisational responses by developing a strategy to approach the organisation and for dealing with an invalidating response. It could be helpful to highlight that this is a common response to reporting bullying and this may be crucial to protect the client's sense of self.

Given the multitude of psychological effects experienced by targets of workplace bullying, practitioners need to be aware that clients may present with such difficulties and assess these accordingly in order to provide sufficient support or therapy. The association found between workplace bullying and suicidal ideation highlights the need for practitioners to assess and evaluate such risk. The findings of the study suggest that targets of bullying experience an array of psychological difficulties including stress, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress. It would seem then that an integrative approach as advocated by Tehrani (2012) may be particularly beneficial when working therapeutically with this population. In accordance with existing models of treatment for bullying (Tehrani, 2003, 2012; Schwickerath & Zapf, 2012) and with the results of the present study, such a therapeutic model might include interventions providing psycho-education on bullying and psychobiological responses to stress and trauma; guidance on how to reduce the impact of symptoms, for example training in anxiety management skills; desensitisation to re-experiencing symptoms and the bullying memory; and reappraising negative cognitions activated by the experience of bullying.

Practitioners and researchers such as Tehrani (2004; 2012) suggest that the diagnosis of PTSD best captures the psychological symptoms of being bullied. Therefore

interventions traditionally employed to treat PTSD may be used effectively to help targets of bullying (Tehrani, 2004). The present findings are in accordance with Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002a) who point to interventions to assist targets of workplace bullying in rebuilding basic assumptions enabling targets to reconstruct their values and regain a sense of self-worth. Such assumptions, for example 'I am a failure', may be reappraised using interventions such as cognitive restructuring techniques. Given the results of the present study which suggest that targets of bullying become fearful about returning to the workplace, a focus of therapy is also likely to include helping the client to build self-esteem and confidence and to prepare them to return to work. As discussed earlier, it appears that having a corrective experience in the workplace is important in overcoming the psychological effects of workplace bullying. This can have a positive impact on an individual's sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence, pointing to the therapeutic benefit of helping targets of bullying to return to the workplace.

The results presented here suggest that working therapeutically with targets of workplace bullying may include exploring the impact upon the individual's identity. The work of Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) suggests remedial goals that therapists and clients might work towards such as restoring and reconstructing self-narratives to recreate a valued self-identity. Farmer (2011) suggests that a counselling approach that incorporates the IRIWM model proposed by Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) with a cognitive restructuring approach could be beneficial for targets. According to Farmer (2011) an important aspect of such therapy might be to explore clients' thoughts and feelings in relation to their new identities in order to help them to work through their loss and grief and to form narratives which can restore a more positive identity. Participants in the current study engaged in processes of self-development, gaining new jobs, changing careers and engaging in new activities in order to rebuild their sense of identity. This points to potential therapeutic tasks of assisting clients to build a sense of self and life outside of workplace bullying/the workplace.

An enduring theme throughout the research was the sense of isolation and alienation felt by participants. This highlights the potential benefit of developing supportive group work interventions in order to reduce feelings of isolation and difference. This is similar to the group therapy advocated by Schwickerath and Zapf (2011) as part of their inpatient treatment of targets of workplace bullying. They argue that the

benefit of group therapy is that clients feel understood, supported and taken seriously by other members of the group who have had similar experiences. Similarly, participants in the current study described finding online forums useful as sources of support due to their anonymous and confidential nature therefore lessening the shame and embarrassment felt when disclosing bullying. Thus it may be beneficial to signpost clients to these.

It is hoped that this research may also have wider implications that extend beyond clinical practice to the workplace. The study strongly indicates that exposure to workplace bullying is associated with severe and devastating psychological consequences. It is hoped that the current findings will raise awareness within organisations that bullying does occur in the workplace and can have potentially damaging psychological effects indicating the need for targets of bullying to be believed and supported and for bullying behaviours to be addressed. This is particularly important given the invalidating responses from the workplace received by the participants in the present study and the contribution of this to the psychological difficulties experienced. By considering these findings and realising the impact of workplace bullying upon psychological health, organisations can play a big part in increasing the support available to targets of bullying, reducing the psychological distress experienced and in preventing workplace bullying from occurring in the first place. Counselling Psychologists and other health professionals are well placed to work with organisations to create a culture which is more respectful and able to deal with bullying through drafting bullying policies, managing investigations, team training, and mentoring, coaching or counselling employees (Tehrani, 2012).

Finally, further research studies are essential to contribute towards evidence based approaches to treat the psychological consequences of workplace bullying. The above discussion suggests factors which may be taken into consideration when planning services for targets of workplace bullying and potential future research studies which aim to inform therapeutic interventions. Whilst therapeutic approaches cannot stop bullying, they may be able to reduce the psychological difficulties experienced by targets exposed to workplace bullying (Coyne & Monks, 2011).

Summary

The present study aimed to gain an understanding of how and why workplace bullying is costly to psychological health and aimed to consider the therapeutic needs of targets of workplace bullying by asking targets about their experiences. It aimed to gain an understanding of how targets explain how this experience may have affected their psychological health in order to answer the research question: 'how do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their psychological health?'. In summary, the current study gained rich insights into the psychological difficulties experienced by targets of workplace bullying. The findings confirm the existing quantitative and qualitative literature and illuminate this further by providing the participants' explanations underlying their experiences of psychological distress. Further, the research demonstrated the impact of workplace bullying upon identity, adding to the emerging literature in relation to identity and workplace bullying. The study has also provided information regarding the coping strategies used by targets of workplace bullying with a view to highlighting practice implications for clinicians working therapeutically with targets of bullying.

It is therefore hoped that this study has made a unique and valuable contribution to the current understanding of the experience of psychological difficulty following being bullied in the workplace and may contribute to the process of developing treatment interventions for targets of workplace bullying.

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Appendix A – Advertisement for Research Participants

Hannah Shaw is studying for a Professional Doctorate and is researching workplace bullying and its effects. Her study aims to gain an understanding of how and why workplace bullying can be costly to an individual's psychological health. The study also aims to consider the counselling needs of such individuals through asking about their experiences of seeking help. The question that drives this research is 'how do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their psychological health?' The study is interested in the ways in which targets of workplace bullying themselves describe the effects this may have had on their psychological health in order to better understand the mechanisms that link bullying and psychological distress.

Semi-structured interviews will be undertaken to explore: how participants have experienced workplace bullying, how they have made sense of their experience, whether they perceive effects on their mental health, how they might explain such effects, and how they have coped with their experience.

Hannah is aiming to interview 8 participants

> The interviews will be carried out face to face and for ease, she would prefer participants from the Kent/London/South East area

> Participants will be included on the basis that they have experienced bullying in the workplace for a period of longer than six months, within the last five years.

> Individuals who are currently experiencing workplace bullying or who are involved in proceedings such as tribunals due to workplace bullying, will not be included in the study for ethical and professional reasons.

I have personally met Hannah and would like to support her aim to investigate this less understood area so that there may be more focused counselling for victims of bullying in the future. If you would like to take part or contact Hannah for further information, please email her on Hannah.Shaw.1@city.ac.uk

Appendix B – Information Sheet for Participants

Dear Participant

You are invited to take part in a research study to examine the psychological effects of workplace bullying. The research will involve taking part in an interview about your experiences of bullying in the workplace. This research is part of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University London and is supervised by Dr Courtney Raspin. Both mine and Dr Raspin's contact details are provided below, should you have any questions regarding the research.

Please take the time to read the following information and feel free ask questions if you wish. The purpose of the research study is to explore experiences of workplace bullying. I would like to ask questions about what the experience was like for you; how it has affected you, your relationships with others and your physical and psychological health, and I would also like to ask about your experiences of any help you have received. The interview will take approximately one hour and will also involve an informal discussion of how you found participating in the interview. If you choose to take part, I will organise a date, time and location for the interview that is convenient to you.

If you decide to take part you will be asked to complete and return via email the consent form attached to this email. You will be asked to provide your signature on the consent form at the interview. The consent form will be kept separate from your interview responses. Your participation is voluntary and you may decide not to continue with the interview at any time, without giving a reason, and without incurring any penalty. You will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire so that information regarding age, gender, ethnicity and occupation and marital status can be collected. This will be kept separately from your interview responses. Please could you also return this with the consent form.

You may find that reflecting on your experiences will be beneficial. However the experience may also be distressing for you. You are free to ask the interviewer to move on to another question, to take a break, or to stop the interview at any time. The interview will not be like a session of therapy, however if you feel like you would like some additional help after the interview, I will be able to advise you who to contact, for example your GP or other support organisation.

The interview will be recorded on audio tape and later transcribed onto a computer. The audio tapes and computer data will be stored securely at all times, in accordance with The Data Protection Act (1998). The audio tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. Your responses will only be seen by myself, Dr Courtney Raspin, and an independent reviewer who will check that I have reported your responses accurately.

The transcription will include quotations from your interview. Neither your own name, nor any other personal details that would identify you will ever be associated with these quotations. Your responses will be treated with full confidentiality. In extremely rare instances I may need to break confidentiality for ethical reasons, i.e. if

you disclose actual or intended harm to yourself or others. I will do my utmost to let you know in advance of breaking confidentiality, if such a situation occurs.

The information gained from this research may be used to inform our knowledge of workplace bullying and to inform therapeutic interventions with those who have experienced workplace bullying. The results of the study may lead to publication in academic journals or further studies of the experience of workplace bullying. I would like to reiterate that you will not be able to be identified from your responses in the report.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at hannah.shaw.1@city.ac.uk should you need any further information.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Shaw

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Appendix C – Demographic Questionnaire

Please highlight in bold the answer that best describes you.

1. Are you?

Male

Female

2.What is your age group?

Under 25

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

Over 75

3.What is your occupation? (Please state)

4.How would you describe your ethnic origin?

White

British

Irish

Other White background

Black or Black British

Caribbean

African

Other Black background

Asian or Asian British

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Other Asian background

Chinese

Chinese

Other ethnic background Chinese

Mixed

White and Black Caribbean

White and Black African

White and Asian

Other Mixed background

Other Ethnic background (please specify)

5.What is your marital status?

Single

Married

Divorced

Widowed

Widower

Unmarried Relationship

Thank you.

Appendix E – Consent Form

I confirm that I read and understand the information provided.	Yes	No
I have had the purpose of the interview explained to me and I understand what the meeting will involve.	Yes	No
I have had the chance to consider the information and to ask questions	Yes	No
I have received satisfactory answers to these questions	Yes	No
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty	Yes	No
I consent to participating in this study and for my responses to be included in the study	Yes	No
I have completed the demographic questionnaire	Yes	No

Please feel free to add any comments you wish you make:

Name (please print)…………………

Signed……………………………. (to be signed on the date of the interview)

Date…………………………………

Appendix F – Interview Schedule

The interview schedule consists of mainly open-ended questions or open-ended prompts. The questions focus on areas which might relate to the experience of being a target of workplace bullying.

1. *What was your experience of bullying in the workplace?*

   Can you tell me about a specific time you were bullied at work?

   (Possible prompts - What happened? What was that like? How did you feel about that?)

The above questions have been included in order to explore how the individual has experienced bullying at work and to begin to elicit how they have made sense of their experience.

2. *Can you tell me about any negative effects on your psychological health you feel may have resulted from your experience of bullying?*

   (Possible prompts – Do you feel your experience of bullying led you to feel psychologically/emotionally distressed? In what ways? Can you tell me more about that?)

3. *Can you tell me about any positive effects on your psychological health you feel may have resulted from your experience of bullying?*

   (Possible prompts – Do you feel your experience of bullying has had any positive consequences? In what ways? Can you tell me more about that?)

4. *How/why do you think your experience of bullying led to these feelings of distress/positive consequences?*

   (Possible prompts – What do you think it was about your experience of bullying which led to the psychological effects you experienced?)

Following the finding of a link between workplace bullying and psychological distress in the literature (see Introduction chapter), the above questions have been included in order to explore how those who have experienced workplace bullying experience and perceive such effects.

5. *Has your experience of bullying changed the way you see yourself?*

   (Possible prompts – Do you see yourself differently now than before your experience of bullying? In what ways?)

6. *Has your experience of bullying affected your relationships with others?*

(Possible prompts – partner, family, friends, work colleagues, bully. In what ways?)

It has been suggested that psychological distress resulting from bullying experiences may be caused by the bullying event shattering basic assumptions about the world, other people and the self (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a). The above questions have been included to explore how this may have been experienced by participants in the study.

7. *How did you cope with the experience?*

    (Possible prompts – Was there anything that helped you to manage/cope with the bullying/psychological distress? Did you inform your workplace of the bullying? If so, how did your workplace deal with the bullying?)

8. *What were your experiences of support throughout the time you were bullied?*

    (Possible prompts – Did you seek help? I.e. from partner, family, friends, workplace, work colleagues, bully, psychological help. What was your experience of this?)

These questions have been included in order to explore participants' experiences of support and their feelings towards this. The availability of support has been suggested in the literature as a possible protective factor in the relationship between bullying and psychological distress (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004). It has been suggested that the way in which the bullying was dealt with by the workplace can be relevant to the targets' psychological health (Rayner et al., 2002). It was also deemed useful to assess if participants sought psychological treatment in order to consider their experiences of therapy and therapeutic needs.

In summary, the interview was intended as an exploration of the lived experience of bullying and how this might affect an individual's psychological health, sense of self and relationships with others along with how the experience was coped with and experiences of support. It was hoped the schedule would provide rich enough data while maintaining manageability for analysis.

The interview schedule presented here is a revised version of the schedule that was presented in the research proposal. The draft schedule consisted of a pool of 12 questions. The above 8 questions were retained following piloting of the questions with colleagues and the gatekeeper for the research, who reviewed the questions for clarity and relevance. As the interviews for the main study went on, it also became apparent that some questions were unnecessary to ask as participants often answered these when talking freely about their experiences. It was felt that fewer questions would do justice to an in-depth interview and some questions were grouped and used as prompts for the main questions.

Appendix G – Debrief

Thank you for your time and contribution in participating in this study. I would like to remind you that the data you have provided will be kept in a confidential manner and your responses will not contain any identifying information.

If you have any further questions about the study please feel free to contact me at Hannah.shaw.1@city.ac.uk. You may also wish to contact the research supervisor, Dr Courtney Raspin. Her contact details are listed below.

If you feel that you have been adversely affected by any of the issues that you have discussed in this study, please contact me on the email address above, and I will be able to advise you who to contact. Alternatively, I would like to inform you of the details of Mind*info*line, who will also be able to direct you to appropriate support and information.

You can contact the Mind*info*line on:

0845 766 0163
info@mind.org.uk
Mindinfoline
PO Box 277
Manchester
M60 3XN

I hope that you do not object to including your responses in the study, however I would like to remind you that you may withdraw from the study, and the information that you have provided will not be used in the study and will be destroyed.

Thank you again for your participation

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Appendix H – Audit Trail

Example from Kate's transcript illustrating initial notations in right hand margin and emergent themes in left hand margin

Transcript Participant 7
How do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their
psychological health?

P establish the self of prev workplace? was she –

171   themselves. There were all sorts of characters in that place,
172   I mean you could make a sitcom out of it but it was very nice
173   and comforting and you knew what you were walking into   WB?
174   and it was professional. I don't doubt that things went on in
175   other departments but the area that I was in, the floor I was
176   on, it didn't happen to me thankfully and it didn't happen to
177   anybody I knew. Because people had dignity and morals
178   suppose and just were professional or nice people, (laughs) I
179   don't know which other category to put them in but. Yeah
180   then I got my next job, which was the second experience I
181   just talked about, so by that time I was feeling erm very
182   confident, I'd had three promotions in my last employers
183   premises and worked my way to a position where I was
184   networking across the (area) with all sorts of people at all
185   sorts of levels and I seemed to be respected and taken
186   seriously for my opinions and ideas. And then I went to the
187   next job and that's when that young man took an instant
188   dislike to me and decided to sort of knock the stool out from
189   under my feet almost, publicly. And I think it was a culture
190   there. In discussion with a colleague who also saw what was
191   happening, it was a culture that the director there kind of
192   almost condoned, I suppose if that is the right word,
193   because she was very much an alpha character and she'd
194   like nothing more than to build members of the team up
195   and then in the team meeting, to just knock them down,
196   especially when you were made to think that you were the
197   favourite of the moment and she would knock that stool out
198   from under your feet just to see if you would land on your
199   feet or if you fell to your knees basically and she would
200   humiliate you and she got a kick out of it. She did it to me
201   but she did it to most other people there, she was a very
202   rude person. But I think he saw the way she acted and
203   thought it was appropriate. And it was ignored by her. I
204   talked to my direct line manager frankly about what was
205   happening. I think I almost broke down and cried at one
206   point because I felt so humiliated, like belittled and erm
207   squashed I suppose. I couldn't understand what I was
208   doing, I was just being me, exactly the same person I was in
209   my last organisation. And I'm not somebody who tries to
210   spark controversy or get people to debate, I'm here for the
211   fun ride in life and for people to get on in life. I've no idea
212   why he didn't like me, it was very strange.

[Left hand margin handwritten annotations:]

Explanation for Bullying – Bully's own issues.

The professional self-concept

Being Disliked
loss of confidence
culture of org
Loss of Hopes/Plans for self?
Not the only one
Bully as powerful

Feeling humiliated
Bully as spiteful
culture of org
explanation for Bullying
Reporting concerns to Manager
Breaking down Crying/Becoming tearful.

Feeling humiliated
Feeling small
Not understanding
Questioning self

[Inline left annotations by line numbers:] 173 implies; 174 She work was; 175 unprof; 181 Feeling; 182 Confident; 183 before; 184 2nd WB; 185 exp explained is; younger than P?; 187 younger than P?; 188 antipathy polly him; 189 beneath her; her – ej; 190 coping strategy; story validate; 193 culture of org; she much liked/enjoyed; 194 culture of org; 196 Accept; 197 allow beh that; 198 is; 199 considered morally wrong; 200 or offer to cont?; 203 Not the only one; 205 Bully as; 206 spiteful; 207 offensive; 208 impolite; 209 sim to P; 210 to P; 212 Bully as

[Bottom handwritten notes:]
Bully thinks beh is acceptable due to management style – culture of org.

Bully Power as by something my boss

ended with fire so become flat suppressed

Strong word – undervalue to emphasis feels small, flat – broken by something my boss

put down degrade underValue

Became distressed Upset crying

feeling humiliated – belittled

feeling small – less than everyone else

lessed dignity + reputation

[Right hand margin handwritten annotations:]
relief it didn't happen to her

worthy of esteem, self respect, poise, SC – implies Bully's do not have this – something in bully's character that leads to bullying? – Explanation for WB, Bully's own issues

positive prof self-concept – (maintaining)

Being disliked.

"spoiled something she had built up – ej loss of confidence to make someone's plans fall through? – loss of hopes for self – this job was hoped to be 'big break!'

in front of everyone.

Bully as powerful – considered herself as most imp, highest ranking

Bullying to test how would handle it – as perceived managerial tactic – intentional – manipulative – sc got amusement from it.

humiliating

Ignoring Bullying

Reports concerns to manager search for an explanation – of self Almost broke down

make someone feel shamed + foolish by injuring their dignity + self respect – esp publicly like P.

Example table of superordinate and subordinate themes for Kate's transcript

Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes
The Bullying Experience	Difficult Experience, Multiple Bullying Experiences, Not the Only One, Being Ganged Up On, Difficult Experience, Duration – Prolonged Experience, Affecting All Parts of Life, Experience as Strange, Feeling Like the Only One, Bullying Experienced as Nightmare, Subtle Nature of Bullying, Not Realising Being Bullied at First, Feeling Powerless, Feeling Isolated/Excluded, Experiencing Uncertainty
Trying to Make Sense	Nature of Job/Culture of Organisation, Explanation for Bullying, Not Understanding, Questioning Self, Explanation for Bystanding, Search for an Explanation
Relationship with the Bully	Strong/Negative Feelings Towards Bully, Bully's Own Issues, Bully as Powerful, Bully as Getting Away with It, Bully Rewarded for Bullying, Bully as Lacking Insight into Behaviour, Understanding the Bully's Own Issues
Reacting to the Bullying Situation	Thinking About How to Deal with It, Distancing Self from Bully, Focusing on Work, Reporting Concerns to Manager, Leaving the Job, Not Knowing What to Do, Becoming Resigned to Situation, Wanting to Leave, Getting a New Job, Looking for Another Job, Not Feeling Able to Address Bullying/Stand Up to the Bully, Not Knowing How to Deal with It, Difficulty in Knowing You are Being Bullied
Psychological Consequences of Bullying	Shock, Feeling Small, Feeling Humiliated, Worrying It Will Happen Again, Breaking Down, Crying/Becoming Tearful, Feeling Like Something is Wrong with You, Becoming Withdrawn, Loss of Hope, Shame/Embarrassment, Experiencing Paranoia, Feeling Like a Child, Feeling Stupid, Experiencing Fear, Excessive/Ruminative Thinking, Feeling Unvalued, Loss of Enthusiasm, Feeling Hurt, Feeling Confused, Long-Term Effects, Becoming Frustrated with Self, Fear of Getting Another Job, Experiencing Worry/Stress, Feeling Empty, Loss of Motivation,Disbelief, Living in Fear/Dread
Positive Psychological Consequences	Becoming Stronger, Learning from the Experience, Learning to Respond Differently
Organisational Response	Nature of Job/Culture of Organisation, Not Being Believed, Belittling Concerns, Lack of Support, Organisation Not Dealing with It, Organisation as Not Knowing How to Deal with It
Experiencing Loss	Importance of Career/Loss of Career, Loss of Self/Personality/Feeling Destroyed, Loss of Confidence, Loss of Trust, Loss of Hopes/Planned Goals for Self, Loss of Hope, Loss of Interest in Career, Loss of Pride in Self, Loss of Pride in Work, Loss of Enthusiasm, Loss of Motivation
Experiences of Support	Lack of Support, Not Wanting to Admit Being Bullied, Family Support, Not Being Judged, Support from Colleagues, Support from Friends and Family, Talking About the Experience, Not Perceiving Experience to Warrant Help, Bullying Acknowledged by Others/Validating Story
Coping with Bullying	Distancing Self from Bully, Focusing on Work, Getting a New Job, Corrective Experience, Difficulty Talking about Bullying, Recovery as Gradual, Modifying Behaviour/Not Drawing Attention to Self, Looking for Another Job, Distraction Techniques, Bullying Seen as Time Limited, Moving On/Putting Bullying Behind You/Dealing with the Experience, Reclaiming Hopes/Goals for the Future, Taking Action, Self-Development, Meeting New People, Physical Exercise, Releasing Tension, Need for Help and Advice, Concentrating on Other Aspects of Life
Changes in Self-concept	Impact on Identity/Valued Self, Positive Professional Self-Concept, Sense of Self-Efficacy at Work, Loss of Pride in Work, Positive Personal Self-Concept, Loss of Pride in Self, Loss of Self/Personality/Feeling Destroyed, Loss of Confidence Feeling like Rubbish/Loss of Worth, Questioning Self, Comparing Old Self to New, Fear of Being Self, Reinventing/Rebuilding Self/Building Confidence, Reclaiming Self, Rediscovering Career, Feeling Like Self Again, Shattered Assumptions

Example file of compiled transcript extracts for Kate's interview for the emergent superordinate theme 'Coping with Being Bullied'

Coping with Being Bullied		
Emerging Themes	**Page/Line**	**Quotes**
Avoiding the Bully	13.541 14.571	And actually tactically I always knew he started at ten and we had some flexitime so I started at eight. Which meant that I changed my entire lifestyle, which meant I got on a seven o clock train in the morning to get to work to walk through the door at eight o clock so I could walk out at four so I could spend less time in the office when he was there. I would start at eight and (name) was there and most people didn't come to work until ten so I would take my lunch at twelve so that meant that I would have two hours in the room with (bully). And actually he was quite late for work quite often. And then he would get in and have to make tea and tell everyone his life story. Erm and at twelve I would go for lunch until about one and he would potentially go for his lunch at one until two which meant that I then had two hours in the office with him again. So I worked it out tactically in my mind, it was a coping mechanism. If I can spend the least amount of time in the same room as him, that's better for me. So it worked for a while, it kept me going. It did mean that in the deepest darkest winter that I was in the rain and the snow going to work at stupid o clock in the morning so that I could leave work at four o clock in the afternoon. But it meant that also if I finished work at four o clock I could meet friends that worked around the corner early and we could then have a time in the evening to do something that was actually nice and trying to find nice things.
Focusing on Work	1.23	I got quite aware of this so I distanced myself from him professionally just so I was focusing on my work.

Leaving the Job	4.152 8.314 14.595 18.757	so after the first experience of bullying, I was only at that job for six months and I just thought I have to cut my losses here, I'm not going to work here, this isn't a real job, to me it wasn't a career. And so for my own well-being I decided that the best thing to do was to leave that situation and because of the experience I'd had before, knowing that the minute you walk out of that door, your life will be better, gave me the courage to say no thank you I'd like to give you a month's notice now, which I did do and I haven't looked back at all. And so that's when I decided that I would find another job so I was already on the job hunting process when all the redundancies were announced. In the first instance all those years ago it knocked me, but I think because I saw that person was not a nice person generally and nobody at the organisation liked him and that somebody came to me and tipped me off, my mechanism was just to leave.
Corrective Experience	4.164 9.342 16.677 17.689 17.706	Then I went to another job and I was there for five years and it was fantastic. It was the complete opposite, total reverse, where you were empowered and you were encouraged and supported and it was a very warm open environment. But now I work freelance and I work with people who respect me and have no idea of his existence, thankfully (laughs). And I walked in and it was wonderful experience, everybody was, I mean these guys know their stuff, more than the last place I worked in where there was the (name) guy being so mean to me. I actually remember going home and talking to my mum again and saying I can't believe it, I can't believe I went there and I was so scared thinking that it would be a similar environment and it couldn't be more different and it just made me think that yeah when I get another job, I could walk in there and be me. And within the first two days I thought, yeah I can do this, and just put that other experience behind me. But so yeah the last experience was really good and it did show me that was an isolated incident and that most people get on with their jobs and their work
Bullying as a Taboo Subject	6.215	And I think that's something that can exist with bullying as well, as adults you ignore it because it doesn't exist for adults, only children do, supposedly, culture tells, the way we live. It says bullying only exists when you know kids pick on each other in the playground. But it's wrong because it does happen in the workplace and it's a different way of being and it's almost a kind of taboo subject.

Difficulty Talking about Bullying	6.222 9.357 21.884	Because if you go home from work and break down because someone's being horrible to you, you are seen as being a weak person or a victim or you must be a bit mad because people don't do that. It makes you feel like there is something wrong with you. And I know a couple of people now who are going through hard situations at work and they talk to me quite openly about what is happening, which is really quite hard, because I know how hard it is because you don't want to admit that someone is being horrible to you, because it's almost the minute it comes out of your mouth it makes it real. But also, coming out and saying that I was bullied is quite a difficult thing to do in society. One of my housemates now has started to describe to me how somebody is acting towards him at work and he won't call it bullying, he will not, but it is and this woman has been doing it to him for years and he's made to feel horrible.
Recovery as Gradual	8.320.	And it took me a good six to eight weeks to feel as though I was myself again
Rediscovering Career	8.320.	And it took me a good six to eight weeks to feel as though I was myself again and I am doing some freelance work now, and in the time I've been off I've studied loads and I've got all sorts of ideas and I'm writing new strategies and I feel like myself again for the first time in a year.
Modifying Behaviour/Not Drawing Attention to Self	10.417	But for my own self-preservation, the way I've learnt to deal with things from experiences at school was that I just shut my mouth and sat there and got on with what I was doing, which was what I did in the workplace I suppose so I didn't draw attention to myself. And I was also quite, I suppose I was quite scared in the end to be myself in front of him because I just didn't want him to be horrible to me quite honestly. So I just sat there, didn't say very much, hardly anything actually did my work, or didn't, well I was on facebook or looking for other jobs, applying for other jobs.
Looking for Another Job	10.424 14.595	So I just sat there, didn't say very much, hardly anything actually did my work, or didn't, well I was on facebook or looking for other jobs, applying for other jobs. And so that's when I decided that I would find another job so I was already on the job hunting process when all the redundancies were announced

Distraction Techniques	13.526 14.587 18.739	I loved my social life and that kept me going a lot at the time because I was then working in (city) and I was lucky enough that a couple of my very good friends worked around the corner and so for a while I lived for my social life. But it meant that also if I finished work at four o clock I could meet friends that worked around the corner early and we could then have a time in the evening to do something that was actually nice and trying to find nice things. I felt such a release of emotion and stress and not thinking, I completely switched off for the first time in ages and doing something completely different. Just playing netball was great, it was all you were focused on and it was fun as well. So that was something that was missing, an element of fun that didn't consist of going out for drinks after work and completely different to my social life. Completely opposite but that release was rejuvenating actually, yeah very much so.
Bullying Seen as Time Limited	14.596 22.901, 22.909	so I was already on the job hunting process when all the redundancies were announced and so when that happened I knew that he was leaving within a few weeks, so I just hung in there. I suppose in my mind I could see the end game was that he was going to leave in the January, I knew that date was coming and so in my mind I just looked forward to that and that was great. I think if he had stayed, if he was the permanent person... Then I might have changed tack. But yeah I just had that date in my head which I just couldn't wait for him to leave on. So my way of coping was knowing that things would get better and he wouldn't be there anymore.
Taking Action/Self-Development	17.718	I could feel myself sinking so I took proactive steps in going to the library and getting books, start reading and swotting up on subject matters that I hadn't looked at for a year. And I joined a netball team where I met new people, because meeting new people was I suppose part of the confidence boosting thing again
Joining a Team/Meeting New People	17.718	I could feel myself sinking so I took proactive steps in going to the library and getting books, start reading and swotting up on subject matters that I hadn't looked at for a year. And I joined a netball team where I met new people, because meeting new people was I suppose part of the confidence boosting thing again because I used to meet new people in my other walks of life, in other jobs I'd done all the time. And suddenly I wasn't meeting anybody and the people I was working with wasn't very nice.

Final summary table of themes for all participants

	Liz	Patrick	Natalie	Angela	Nina	Hayley	Kate	Sophie
Bullying as a Powerful Experience								
Feeling Isolated	6.219-222, 7.277-78, 19.741-742, 21.840-841, 21.852-854	7.271-275		3.105-110, 4.125-127, 5.200-202, 9.339-340, 20.834-836	14.595-597, 21.877-881	2.65-67, 8.316-320, 10.395-399, 12.444-446, 15.568-571, 16.725-728, 19.738-740	21.860-862, 23.959-962	6.222-224, 10.412-419, 18.716-729
Feeling Powerless	9.326-327, 28.1111-1118, 29.1179-1181, 32.1297-1302	1.8-14, 15.606-609, 19.739-741	9.338-341, 14.524-526	21.851-853, 21.869-872	5.191-193, 7.284-289, 14.578-581, 14.595-596, 15.636-639, 17.717-721, 19.799-802, 21.852-860, 22.926-933	3.110-114, 22.862-864	4.133-135, 15.616-621	5.200-204, 11.426-428, 13.545-555, 14.586-593
Living in Fear and Dread	7.273-275, 8.313-314, 9.32, 19.749-750,		12.454-456, 14.524-525	4.127-130, 9.342-344, 11.436-440, 12.489-492	6.248-252, 15.597-601, 18.733-742, 22.894-898	1.26-29, 11.475-486, 23.950-956	23.950-957	
Trying to Make Sense	1.34-37, 8.296-297, 15.573-579, 15.585-587, 15.594-	1.5-7, 4.156-159, 8.319-324, 19.734-736, 23.913-	4.145-147, 9.344-348, 12.443-453, 17.641-644	2.47-51, 11.456-459, 16.646-660, 17.706-713, 20.809-	1.7-9, 5.183-188, 9.339-344, 11.465-468, 15.629	1.9-15, 2.80-81, 4.130-132, 5.163-167, 24.938-943	2.46-50, 5.189-203, 5.207-212, 7.292-298,	9.377-388, 10.392-395, 12.497-502, 13.544-545

	596, 32.1272 -1276	919, 27.1064 -1067		812, 25.1027 -1042 26.1044 -1049	-630, 24.984 -986		15.605 -608, 20.847 -851, 23.962 -969	

Psychological Consequences of Workplace Bullying

Shock and Disbelief	7.268-269, 22.886-887, 23.903-904, 29.1152-1155		2.53-54, 7.244-247, 7.258-261, 8.300-303, 13.491-493	1.3-7, 11.454-456, 12.479-450, 24.986-990, 25.1006-1118	13.541-542	1.3-9, 16.614-617, 18.697-698, 19.754-763, 22.872-875, 23.885-889	4.146-149, 19.769-773, 20.834-846	10.392-397
Excessive and Ruminative Thinking	8.281-282	23.913-919	12.460-464, 14.535-545	17.709-713, 19.759-763	7.258-259, 12.476-478, 21.874-876	3.90-94, 6.240-242	10.402-405, 20.824-827, 24.981-983	1.33-44
Experiencing Depression	5.161-164, 29.1147-1150, 30.1198-1201	12.495-505, 28.1113-1116	12.460-464, 14.535-545	9.355, 11.448-452	7.259-266, 17.703-706, 22.898-910, 23.964-965	8.316-318, 15.568-571, 19.719-724, 20.767-768, 23.891-894	9.373-377, 20.816-824	
Experiencing Stress	8.314, 16.640-642	5.186-188, 8.327-333, 8.346-347, 9.361-363, 11.453-462	12.435-440	2.43-47, 5.176-178, 5.188-189, 8.313-314, 15.607-612, 21.858-859	3.129-131, 3.96-100, 17.714-715, 20.810-812	18.693-694, 20.783	18.729-733, 19.777-780	
Becoming Fearful of Returning to Work	30.1212-1218			26.1049-1056		21.804-808, 23.892-898	4.155-160, 16.656-666, 16.674-677, 19.782-787	6.237-238, 6.244-253, 9.373-377, 15.626-627, 16.655

							-656, 17.692 -694
Positive Psychological Effects	25.1004 -1009	18.709, 18.713-715, 22.853-855	6.199-200, 7.249-251, 7.264-266, 11.411-415, 15.554-579, 17.655-660, 18.676-678, 18.692-694		4.140-146, 4.171-174, 5.179-183, 14.567-576, 14.585-587, 15.610-615, 16.666-667	9.333-335	8.327-328, 9.353-357	17.698-705
Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity							
Impact on Self-Concept: A Destroyed Self	13.497-501, 30.1195-1197, 30.1202-1207, 31.1222-1224	16.650-654, 17.685-687	2.68-71	1.3-4, 2.62-63, 12.479-480, 14.565-566, 15.612-614, 19.759-769, 19.773-780, 25.1027-1033	5.178-179, 7.793-296, 19.797-799, 21.864-865, 21.876-877, 22.907-908	15.574-579, 18.680-682, 21.810-819	4.133-135, 5.205-207, 13.515-526, 19.769-776, 15.600-603, 15.621-624, 18.754-757, 19.780-782, 20.829-830, 23.943-947	6.234-237, 6.241, 17.684-689
Experiencing Loss of a Valued and Expected Self	16.636-639, 27.1084-1093, 29.1157-1161	11.453-462, 12.472-474, 12.487-489, 23.906-910		12.484-485, 14.565-569, 19.766-769, 25.1025-1029		18.689-691, 20.769-771, 27.1074-1077	3.96-100, 5.186-189, 13.530-541, 19.768-769, 19.773-776	18.716-721
Rebuilding a Sense of Identity	31.1224-1229	13.519-525, 13.533-535,	6.199-200, 7.249-251,		10.393-397, 14.559-565,		8.320-325, 16.666-671,	

		14.566-568, 18.702-707,	7.264-266, 11.411-415, 15.554-579, 17.655-660, 18.676-678, 18.692-694		14.581-582		17.718-729	
Coping with the Experience of Being Bullied								
Experiences of Support: Lack of Support	10.395-396, 11.426-429, 20.774-775, 20.779-787, 24.967-968	9.354-361, 31.1242-1244	2,45-48, 4.116-121, 4.133-135, 4.137-139, 5.176-178, 13.498-500, 14.524-528	1.16-18, 13.529-531, 15.617-619, 16.666-669, 19.780-785, 20.821-829, 20.833-834, 23.941-948, 24.991-1001	5.195-199, 17.717-721, 24.981-984,	1.31-33, 2.44-59, 4.133-138, 7.252-256, 8.286-288, 9.354-357, 10.392-395, 21.844-848, 23.899-906	2.72-75, 6.222-226, 10.405-409, 21.867-873	8.326-335
Experiences of Support: The importance of Validation	31.1257-1264	23.922-924, 26.1023-1031	10.382-385, 15.582-585, 17.650-654	17.673-676, 22.881-888, 22.900-903, 23.917-920	23.937-952, 24.987-989	9.351-354	15.608-612, 22.899-901, 22.919-921	5.191-200, 5.204-216
Concentrating on Other Aspects of Life		16.650-858	5.165, 7.262-264, 8.287-289, 15.548-554, 16.608-613		18.744-747, 18.757-759, 19.774-775, 19.807-810		10.424-426, 13.526-530, 14.587-591, 18.739-748	
Having a Corrective Experience	27.1078-1081, 29.1164-1176, 30.128-129	16.668-669	15.560-566		9.361-363, 10.387-390, 13.544-546		4.164-174, 16.677-698, 17.706-708	15.628-630, 16.653-655

Appendix I – Ethics Release Form

ETHICS RELEASE FORM FOR STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

All students planning to undertake any research activity in the School of Arts and Social Sciences are required to complete this Ethics Release Form and to submit it to their Research Supervisor, **together with their research proposal clearly stating aims and methodology**, prior to commencing their research work. If you are proposing multiple studies within your research project, you are required to submit a separate ethical release form for each study.

This form should be completed in the context of the following information:

- An understanding of ethical considerations is central to planning and conducting research.
- Approval to carry out research by the Department or the Schools does not exempt you from Ethics Committee approval from institutions within which you may be planning to conduct the research, e.g.: Hospitals, NHS Trusts, HM Prisons Service, etc.
- The published ethical guidelines of the Health Professions Council and the British Psychological Society (2010) should be referred to when planning your research.
- **Students are not permitted to begin their research work until approval has been received and this form has been signed by Research Supervisor and the Department's Ethics Representative.**

Section A: To be completed by the student

Please indicate the degree that the proposed research project pertains to:

BSc ☐   MPhil ☐   MSc ☐   DPsych X   n/a ☐

Please answer all of the following questions, circling yes or no where appropriate:

1. Title of project

How do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their psychological health?

-

2. Name of student researcher (please include contact address and telephone number)

Hannah Shaw

-

3. Name of research supervisor

Dr Courtney Raspin

-

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4. Is a research proposal appended to this ethics release form?   Yes

5. Does the research involve the use of human subjects/participants?   **Yes**

If yes,

a. Approximately how many are planned to be involved? 8

b. How will you recruit them?

Participants will be recruited via an email which will provide information regarding the research. This will be forwarded to participants by the gatekeeper for the research. This email will also form the information sheet for the research.
c. What are your recruitment criteria?
(*Please append your recruitment material/advertisement/flyer*)

Participants will be recruited from a support organisation for workplace bullying. Participants will be included on the basis that they have experienced workplace bullying for a period of longer than six months, within the last five years. Participants will be recruited from Kent and London for ease of access to the researcher. Individuals who are currently experiencing workplace bullying, or who are involved in proceedings such as tribunals due to workplace bullying, will not be included in the study. The recruitment email (information sheet) to participants is included in Appendix 1.

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d. Will the research involve the participation of minors (under 18 years of age) or vulnerable adults or those unable to give informed consent?

     No
d1. If   yes, will signed parental/carer consent be obtained?   N/A

d2. If yes, has a CRB check been obtained?   N/A
(*Please append a copy of your CRB check*)

6. What will be required of each subject/participant (e.g. time commitment, task/activity)? (*If psychometric instruments are to be employed, please state who will be supervising their use and their relevant qualification*).

Participants will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. It is estimated that the interview will last 1-2 hours.

7. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to the subjects/participants?

                                                                        Yes

If yes,
a. Please detail the possible harm?

Describing and reflecting on their experiences of workplace bullying and psychological health may prove distressing for some participants.

----

b. How can this be justified?

It is expected that talking about their experiences in the interview will not lead to any greater distress than they would encounter when talking about their experiences in everyday life, ie when contacting the support organisation for which they are members. Participation in the study may even confer a therapeutic benefit for interviewees as reflecting on their experiences may lead to a greater understanding of their experience.

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c. What precautions are you taking to address the risks posed?

It is hoped that by conducting interviews therapeutically, in an empathetic and respectful way, that this will minimise the possibility of harm that may be caused to participants. If at any time the researcher observes that the interview is causing undue distress, participation will be discontinued and referral will be made to appropriate sources of support. The participant will also be informed that they may stop, or take a break from, the interview at any time. After the interview, the participant's experience of the interview will be discussed in order to monitor any negative effects. Participants will then also be given a debrief sheet detailing where they can access support if they feel they have been negatively affected by the research. The debrief sheet is included in Appendix 5.

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8. Will all subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers receive an information sheet describing the aims, procedure and possible risks of the research, as well as providing researcher and supervisor contact details?

Yes

(*Please append the information sheet which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers*)

9. Will any person's treatment/care be in any way compromised if they choose not to participate in the research?

No

10. Will all subjects/participants be required to sign a consent form, stating that they fully understand the purpose, procedure and possible risks of the research?

Yes

If no, please justify

If yes, please append the informed consent form which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers

11. What records will you be keeping of your subjects/participants? (e.g. research notes, computer records, tape/video recordings)?

Consent form, demographic questionnaire, research notes, audio recordings, computerised transcribed interview notes and analysis.

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12. What provision will there be for the safe-keeping of these records?

The records will be stored, in accordance with the requirements of data protection legislation in order to keep data safe and secure. Records will be kept securely in locked premises and computer data will be kept in a security protected, encrypted format. Back up files of this data will be kept separately on a security protected external hard drive. The password will be known only to the researcher. The only people who will have access to these records will be the researcher, the research supervisor, and the independent auditor.

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13. What will happen to the records at the end of the project?

Audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project. Other records will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

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14. How will you protect the anonymity of the subjects/participants?

Participants personal details, eg those included in the consent form and demographic questionnaire will be stored separately to participants' interview audio recordings and transcripts. This information will only be seen by the researcher and research supervisor. Interview transcripts will be edited for anonymity by using pseudonyms and altering any identifying personal details.

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15. What provision for post research de-brief or psychological support will be available should subjects/participants require?

After the interview, the participant's experience of the interview will be discussed in order to monitor any negative effects. Participants will be provided with a debrief sheet, where they will be informed that should they experience any form of distress, both during and after the study, they can contact sources of support provided by the association of which they are members, or details will be provided of a national helpline. Participants will also be provided with an email address for the researcher, should any questions or concerns arise before, during or after the study. The debrief sheet is included in Appendix 5.

(Please append any de-brief information sheets or resource lists detailing possible support options)

35

If you have circled an item in **underlined bold** print, or wish to provide additional details of the research please provide further explanation here:

The research involves the use of human subjects/participants as the aim of the study is to explore individual experiences of workplace bullying. As with any psychological research using human participants, the researcher should be mindful of any situation that may pose a risk of physical or psychological harm. As mentioned earlier, all necessary procedures will be undertaken to minimise the risk of harm posed. The ongoing research will be monitored for any adverse effects on participants, and the research will be stopped if there is any concern regarding the well-being of participants. In the event that participants suffer adverse effects, such participants will be referred to appropriate support. All participants will be provided with a written debrief containing the contact details of the researcher and research supervisor and details of other appropriate support, regardless of whether adverse effects are observed to occur during the interview.

Signature of student researcher Hannah Shaw   Date 28/1/11

CHECKLIST: the following forms should be appended unless justified otherwise

Research Proposal   ☒
Recruitment Material   ☒
Information Sheet   ☒
Consent Form   ☒
De-brief Information   ☒

Section B: Risks to the Researcher

1. Is there risk of physical or psychological harm to yourself?   Yes
If yes,

a. Please detail possible harm

It could be anticipated that exploring individuals' experiences of victimisation and distress may prove stressful for the researcher.

b. How can this be justified?

It is expected that any stress experienced will not be over and above that experienced by the researcher within their clinical practice as a Trainee Counselling Psychologist.

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c. What precautions are to be taken to address the risks posed?

Such issues will be addressed by the researcher in supervision and personal therapy.

36

Section C: To be completed by the research supervisor
(Please pay particular attention to any suggested research activity involving minors or vulnerable adults. Approval requires a currently valid CRB check to be appended to this form. If in any doubt please refer to the Research and Ethics Committee.)

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted ☑

Refer to the Department's Research and Ethics Committee ☐

Refer to the School's Research and Ethics Committee ☐

Signature ~~*[signature]*~~ Date 25/2/11

Section D: To be completed by the 2nd Departmental staff member *(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where <u>**underlined bold**</u> items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

I agree with the decision of the research supervisor as indicated above ☐

Signature -- Date -----------------------

37

Section C: To be completed by the research supervisor
(Please pay particular attention to any suggested research activity involving minors or vulnerable adults. Approval requires a currently valid CRB check to be appended to this form. If in any doubt please refer to the Research and Ethics Committee.)

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted   ☐

Refer to the Department's Research and Ethics Committee   ☐

Refer to the School's Research and Ethics Committee   ☐

Signature -- Date------------------------

Section D: To be completed by the 2nd Departmental staff member *(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where **underlined bold** items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

I agree with the decision of the research supervisor as indicated above   ☑

Signature --- Date ----------22/12/11----

Section D: Paper for Publication

The impact of workplace bullying on identity: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

(Hoel & Cooper, 2000) have been reported. In addition to a high prevalence, workplace bullying has been shown to have a range of detrimental effects upon those who experience it.

The impact of workplace bullying

A large body of research has demonstrated that exposure to workplace bullying is associated with a range of negative effects upon the health and well-being of those who experience it. Targets of workplace bullying report a range of psychological and psychosomatic health problems including anxiety, depression, burnout, sleep problems, nervousness, and reduced self-esteem (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2010; Hoel, Faragher & Cooper, 2004; Niedhammer et al., 2006). Exposure to workplace bullying has also been associated with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with several studies reporting that the majority of targets report symptom levels that meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2002; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Tehrani, 2004).

Research has also shown that the negative effects of workplace bullying are not confined to the targets themselves but may extend to those around them including witnesses and co-workers (Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper & Einarsen, 2011), family members (Rayner et al., 2002), and the organisations within which the bullying occurs (Hoel et al., 2011). The costs of workplace bullying to organisations may be seen in increased staff turnover, absenteeism, and reduced productivity (Hoel et al., 2011).

Despite the wealth of research demonstrating the detrimental effects of workplace bullying, relatively little attention has been paid to the impact that being bullied may have upon the target's sense of identity. This is surprising given that

(Hoel & Giga, 2006) have been found along with an estimated global prevalence rate ranging from 11%-18% (Nielsen, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010).

Psychological consequences of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying has been associated with impaired psychological, physical and occupational health; deterioration of interpersonal relationships and family functioning; and financial crisis (Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiadou, 2003; Rayner et al., 2002; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik & Alberts, 2006). Becoming the target of bullying appears to be associated with severe psychological effects even when controlling for the effects of other job stressors (Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2010). It has therefore been claimed that workplace bullying is a more devastating problem for targets than all other types of work-related stressors combined and it has been conceptualised as a severe social stressor and traumatic event (Hogh, Mikkelsen & Hansen, 2011; Vartia, 2001; Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996).

The literature suggests that targets of bullying experience an alarming array of psychological difficulties including symptoms of anxiety and depression (Brousse et al., 2008; Niedhammer et al., 2006; Quine, 1999), suicidal ideation (Leymann, 1990; Pompili et al., 2008; Soares, 2012), sleep disturbance (Moreno-Jimenez et al., 2008; Niedhammer et al., 2009; Vartia, 2001), and symptoms of PTSD (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Leymann, 1990; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a; Nolfe et al., 2008; Tehrani, 2004). Targets of workplace bullying also generally report self-blame, anger, stress, humiliation, shame, exhaustion, and diminished self-confidence and worth (Hallberg & Strandmark, 2006; Lewis, 2004; Lewis & Orford, 2005; van Heugten, 2010; Tracy, et al., 2006).

Workplace bullying and identity

The concept of identity and its relation to organisational life is widely studied and has mainly focused on how individuals form, maintain and modify their sense of identity within the context of the workplace, and has highlighted the salience of work to how people define themselves (Du Gay, 1996; Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Similarly, a large body of research has explored the impact of traumatic experiences upon identity and has highlighted, for example, the traumatic impact of serious life changes such as diagnoses with severe

illness (e.g. Crossley, 2000; Dickson, Allan & O'Carroll, 2008; Flowers et al., 2006), however, this has rarely been studied within the workplace. Although some previous studies have noted effects upon targets' identity in workplace bullying research, (e.g. Kelly, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Lewis & Orford, 2005) there has been little research specifically examining the impact of workplace bullying upon identity.

Identity can be generally defined as the meanings ascribed to an individual by themselves and others (Gecas, 1982). Identity Process Theory (IPT; Breakwell, 1992; 2010a) proposes that identity is regulated by interacting processes of accommodation/assimilation and evaluation which allow new components to be incorporated into the identity structure and determine the changing content and meaning of identity. The identity processes are guided by fundamental identity states including self-continuity, distinctiveness from relevant others, self-efficacy over life and future, and self-esteem. Challenges to these principles induce identity threats which can have adverse effects upon psychological well-being.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) has conducted one of the only research studies into the identity threats posed by workplace bullying. Being bullied challenged past self-narratives that were based on being valued, successful, powerful and in control; and targets experienced an incongruity between their previously valued identity and the current devalued identity. Based upon these insights, Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) developed the Intensive Remedial Identity Work Model (IRIWM). According to the model, the process of identity work in response to being bullied takes place across pre-bullying, bullying and post-bullying phases. Each phase is associated with specific identity threats, identity work and remedial goals that assist targets to restore a sense of positive identity. For example, in the post-bullying phase, the remedial goals of grieving and restructuring include dealing with the perceived loss of professional reputation, organisational identity and self-confidence, along with shattered assumptions about the workplace by processing and accepting loss and incorporating the damaged identity and revised beliefs into one's self-narrative.

D'Cruz and Noronha (2012) used the IRIWM model to describe identity disruptions and identity work tasks in targets of workplace bullying across the bullying and post-bullying phases. The study demonstrated that the experience of being bullied resulted in participants first questioning beliefs and then redefining beliefs including the fairness of the world and the benevolence, humaneness and rationality of people. Identity disruptions included a heightened sense of naivete and

vulnerability, chronic uncertainty and discomfort, public scape-goating and sullying of image, and a sense of discontinuity in one's life story. Participants attempted to work through the experience by searching for explanations, looking for positive dimensions and incorporating the experience within their life trajectory.

Rationale for the current study

This paper is part of a wider doctoral thesis which adopted a phenomenological perspective to gain an understanding of how targets of workplace bullying make sense of and give meaning to the effects of bullying upon their psychological health. The study explored the following research question: 'How do targets of workplace bullying explain effects on their psychological health?' This paper presents the theme 'Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity' which emerged unexpectedly from the analysis and warranted further consideration. The existing literature suggests that a relationship exists between workplace bullying and subsequent impacts upon the targets' identity, however, there has been little research specifically examining identity in the workplace bullying literature and the nature of this relationship remains virtually unknown.

Methodology

The study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996). The aim of IPA is to understand the meaning individuals attach to their experiences and how they make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2008) by looking at the individual's own account of the processes they have been through (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). This lends itself to the purpose of the research to examine how targets of workplace bullying perceive and make sense of their experiences of psychological distress. IPA also recognises the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of the researched (Osborn & Smith, 1998; Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997) and that the production of an interpretative account of a participant's experience is co-constructed between researcher and participant (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Adopting an IPA approach allows the researcher to draw on a range of theoretical constructs, therefore enabling the analysis to explore, understand and make sense of an individual's experience, as well as contextualise this from a psychological perspective (Larkin et al., 2006).

Sampling and Participants

Data collection for IPA is usually based on purposive sampling whereby participants are selected because of their expertise in the phenomenon being explored (Reid et al., 2005), in this case having been bullied in the workplace. Consistent with previous research and definitions of workplace bullying, eight participants were recruited on the basis that they had experienced bullying in the workplace for a period of longer than six months within the last five years. For ethical and professional reasons, individuals who were currently experiencing workplace bullying, or who were involved in proceedings such as tribunals due to workplace bullying, were not included in the study. The sample consisted of one male and seven female participants aged 25-64. Reported occupations in which the bullying occurred included IT, support work, administration, procurement, nursing and public relations. Seven out of eight participants had left the job in which their experience of bullying took place.

Recruitment

Five participants were recruited from a national support association for targets of workplace bullying. Participants were contacted via referral from the founder of the support organisation who acted as gatekeeper by posting a description of the research in the organisation's online forum. Once prospective participants had made contact with the researcher, participants who met the eligibility criteria and wished to participate were then sent an information sheet, demographic questionnaire and consent form. Three participants were recruited via 'word of mouth', and emailed directly by the researcher, following the same procedure. Interviews were undertaken in hired premises, such as university meeting rooms. Full ethical approval was granted for this study and the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2011) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2012) were followed.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken using an interview schedule to flexibly guide the interview through the proposed topics, enabling a flow of dialogue between the researcher and participant and allowing the freedom to explore novel and unexpected areas without prescribing the responses participants could give

(Smith & Osborn, 2003). Interview questions explored how participants had experienced workplace bullying, how they made sense of their experience, whether they perceived effects on their psychological health, how they might explain such effects, and how they coped with their experience. Typical questions included 'Can you tell me about any negative consequences on your psychological health you feel may have resulted from your experience of bullying?' and 'How did you cope with the experience?'. Interviews lasted approximately one to two hours, and were recorded on a small digital recording device.

Participants were advised that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not wish to and could opt out of the research at any stage. At the end of the interview participants were debriefed about their experiences, and if needed, provided with signposting material for sources of support. Participants were also provided with an e-mail address for the researcher should any questions or concerns arise before, during or after the study. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Analytical Strategy

The analysis of the interview data followed IPA procedures as detailed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). Interview transcripts were read several times in order to become familiar with each account during which time notes were made in the right hand margin to record initial reflections including summary statements and descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments. Transcripts were then re-read and emergent themes capturing the essential quality of the text were documented in the left hand margin. The emergent themes were then listed and connections made between them in order to create theme clusters and superordinate themes. When all eight interviews had been analysed, the superordinate theme clusters for all interviews were examined and further clustered together to create a master list of themes for all participants. The final model of themes provided a framework by which to understand the participants' experience of workplace bullying and psychological distress and from which a narrative account was generated interweaving participant extracts with detailed commentary.

Results

The analysis of the interview transcripts generated data providing a rich and encompassing portrayal of the experience of being bullied in the workplace. The superordinate theme 'Impact of Workplace Bullying on Identity' and its subordinate themes 'Impact on Self-Concept: A Destroyed Self', 'Experiencing the Loss of a Valued and Expected Self' and 'Rebuilding a Sense of Identity' is examined here. This theme is explored in the current paper as it was considered to warrant closer attention as identity issues have not been studied widely in workplace bullying research. The findings are supported by participant quotations taken directly from the transcripts. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants have been given pseudonyms and all identifying information has been either removed or altered.

Subordinate theme 1: Impact on Self-Concept: A Destroyed Self

Participants recounted how their experience of workplace bullying had a devastating impact upon their sense of self and bullying appeared to be experienced as a threat to identity. For some, being bullied resulted in a loss of confidence whereas for others it resulted in a complete loss of their identity and consequently they no longer recognised the person they had become. This is well illustrated in the following quote by Nina:

It breaks you down to the point that you don't value yourself. (Nina)

Nina figuratively describes having become broken down, suggesting that she had been separated into pieces and giving a sense of being completely destroyed. Broken down can also mean to have become distressed or upset and describes going to pieces due to the pressure of internal stress. Her use of 'breaking' could be interpreted as symbolic of Nina's experience, representing notions of losing her self-esteem and sense of self as she was worn down by the experience until there was little left of her.

Liz's case in particular shows how devastating the effects of workplace bullying were for the participants' sense of identity and captures the participants' struggle to assimilate their experience of being bullied into their self-concept.

It's that feeling that I'm not there anymore. You know I've been destroyed really, knocked out. Because as I said my whole identity was based around the fact I had this job. You know, no husband, no children kind of thing, your identity is what you do. (Liz)

There is a sense for Liz that the person she defined herself to be now ceases to exist. By placing the definition of her whole identity solely on her job, when Liz lost her job as a result of the bullying she was unable to find a source of self-worth or identity elsewhere. The impact of this was that her whole sense of self was destroyed. This highlights the importance of work to how people define themselves and the shocking and traumatic nature of the experience of bullying for targets.

Kate emphasises the destruction and loss of her identity to the extent that she no longer recognised the person she was due to the great change in herself caused by being bullied.

I actually look back on that person that I was for a while and think "who was that?" (Kate)

While the majority of participants experienced bullying as a threat to their sense of self, this finding was not unanimous. In stark contrast to every other participant, Natalie reported that while her self-confidence was lowered, she did not experience such a negative impact upon her sense of identity.

I didn't take it personally because she was doing it to other people, I wasn't the only person so I felt ok in myself. (Natalie)

Natalie was aware that the bullying was not a personal attack and so the experience did not impact upon her self-concept negatively. Natalie was thus able to avoid the impact experienced by other participants of perceiving there to be something wrong with her that provoked her to be bullied which appeared to be protective to maintaining a sense of self-worth and respect.

Subordinate theme 2: Experiencing the Loss of a Valued and Expected Self

Participants described that the loss of themselves and their jobs as a result of being bullied led not only to the loss of past selves, but also to the loss of anticipated future selves. This theme emphasises the pervasive sense of loss and grief in the participants' accounts which indicated that they were preoccupied with what they had lost through their experience.

For Angela, the experience of bullying completely changed her personality and she experienced the loss of the part of her personality expressed by her 'sparkle' which conveys a sense of brightness and animation.

> My friend said "you've lost your spark, your little sparkle, you no longer come forward like you used to and laugh and joke about things, the whole time you're holding back now", and that's how I do feel, very careful, I don't like what it has done to me, not at all (tearful). (Angela)

The contrast between her old and new self highlights feelings of loss associated with the loss of a valued self. Angela became tearful about this during the interview suggesting that she continues to grieve her past self even years after the bullying has ended.

Liz's story highlights the life-changing impact of her experience of bullying due to the loss of her planned future goals for herself, a valued life that she was no longer able to lead, and a person that she would no longer be.

> This person I thought I was, you know this person with this interesting job that had money coming in every month, you know could go on holiday, and this that and the other, that person doesn't exist anymore. (Liz)

Liz suffered the losses of a valued life and identity that had given her a sense of worth. There is a sense of grief and disappointment for her lost self and opportunities and Liz talks about this person as if she had died and she is mourning the life, identity and associated sense of self-worth which appears to have been taken away.

For Kate, her job was a 'big break' and a 'dream' and represented what she had hoped to achieve for herself.

I thought this was my big break in life.

The fact that I thought it was my dream job and it became a nightmare quite honestly, yeah that was harder. (Kate)

Kate juxtaposes her 'dream' with the subsequent 'nightmare' the experience became further highlighting the loss of what she had hoped for and the difficult nature of this experience.

Subordinate theme 3: Rebuilding a Sense of Self

Some participants described a shift toward rebuilding or reclaiming their identities as opposed to grieving the loss of their past and anticipated selves. This was managed through crafting a new sense of self by beginning new careers or engaging in activities which appeared to lead to the reclamation of their confidence and worth. This appeared to offer a sense of regaining some of what the experience of bullying had removed. While some participants were able to rebuild a sense of identity others had not yet recovered from the loss and there was little sense of identity reclamation.

Kate suggested that she felt she became a different person throughout her experience of bullying and the process of reclaiming her identity was gradual.

It took me a good six to eight weeks to feel as though I was myself again and I am doing some freelance work now, and in the time I've been off I've studied loads and I've got all sorts of ideas and I'm writing new strategies and I feel like myself again for the first time in a year. (Kate)

By being able to return her focus to something that was previously important to her, it appears that Kate reclaimed her confidence and enthusiasm along with her goals for her future. Kate also reported that she took steps to make positive changes to her life in order to 'rebuild' her lost self-confidence and sense of self.

I could feel myself sinking so I took proactive steps in going to the library and getting books, start reading and swotting up on subject matters that I hadn't looked at for a year. And I joined a netball team where I met new people, because meeting new people was I suppose part of the confidence

> boosting thing. But it was part of rebuilding me and being part of a team that
> worked I suppose. (Kate)

To rebuild suggests a restoration to something's original condition after it has been damaged or destroyed. For Kate, being part of a team that was able to work together was important in rebuilding herself and restoring her confidence in herself and others following her opposite experience of this in the context of her bullying. Kate describes this process as 'rejuvenating' which is suggestive of reclaiming her old self and becoming more lively and full of life as she had described herself to be prior to experiencing bullying.

Patrick described a change in career following his experience of bullying in which he began working in a healing capacity.

> I found that actually this was incredibly rewarding to get into trying to help
> people and heal people.
> I found that in order to, it's a bit of a cliché really, but in order to find healing
> myself I learnt how to heal others. (Patrick)

Patrick's accounts conveyed a sense of rediscovery of self and what he wanted to do with his life. This suggests that he had healed the wounds caused by his experience of bullying. It appears that Patrick received the highly sought sense of recognition in this role which was never achieved in his previous job. This was central to maintaining his self-esteem and sense of value and thus in rebuilding his identity.

Similarly, Natalie describes how a change in role following her experience of bullying helped to rebuild her confidence.

> It's something I already did as a hobby so it has pushed me to be more
> confident. And the actual tasks we were given, just because I suppose I
> hadn't been in that situation like giving talks or giving you know feedback
> and things like that, that all broadened me beyond belief you know. (Natalie)

Natalie describes that being bullied prompted her to leave her job and motivated her to establish a career in a more fulfilling area. This 'broadened' Natalie suggesting that by experiencing and attempting new things she was able to redevelop her sense

of self and increase and rediscover her confidence in her abilities. For participants, having a corrective experience in a new job following the bullying was facilitative in restoring a sense of self and repairing the psychological consequences caused by workplace bullying.

Discussion

The study's findings provide insights which assist the understanding of the experience of psychological distress following being bullied as related to threats to identity. The findings are discussed in relation to the emerging research investigating workplace bullying and identity and are linked to identity theory.

The devastating impact bullying had upon the confidence and self-esteem of targets has been frequently noted throughout the literature. Lewis and Orford (2005) reported that bullying left participants questioning themselves and their experiences leading to feelings of self-doubt. Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) proposed that bullies project onto targets a sense of being less valued as people, which is then taken on by targets leaving them feeling insecure and doubtful about who they are as human beings. The findings also support previous literature which has suggested protective factors for maintaining self-worth in the face of bullying. For Natalie, being bullied was not perceived as a personal attack and did not have detrimental effects on her sense of self as she was not the only person to be bullied by the bully. This finding is similar to that of van Heugten's (2013) study into resilience factors in workplace bullying whereby it was found that discovering other people had been targeted by the same bully was reassuring, helped make sense of what happened, and reduced self-doubt. Similarly, Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2011) assert that if the cause of bullying can be attributed to the bully, the problem can be seen as external to those targeted. These findings are consistent with Bowling and Beehr's (2006) attribution based model that attempts to explain the link between bullying and its consequences. The model asserts that situations involving only one target and one or more perpetrators can result in targets attributing blame towards the self leading to shame and a loss of self-worth.

Further psychological distress resulted from the loss of valued selves along with interruptions to anticipated futures due to participants leaving their jobs and what this meant to them in terms of their roles and identities. Aspects of their pre-bullying selves which provided a sense of self and worth were lost and participants

conveyed difficulty in coming to terms with this loss. The capacity of workplace bullying to undermine and destroy the identity of the target has also been highlighted in previous research such as Kelly (1999) who found targets suffered enduring damage to their personal and professional self-image in that they no longer perceived themselves to be as good as their job, outgoing or confident. Participants often compared their current selves to how they saw themselves before the bullying as was the case in the present research. For the participants in Kelly's study, this resulted in a bleak view of the future with some participants even stating that they did not care whether they lived or died.

From a target's perspective, Vaughan (2012) argues that work is central to our lives and is essential in the building and shaping of identity and search for daily meaning and recognition. Vaughan details how bullying crushed her self-belief in both her professional and private lives and caused her to withdraw from social contact whereas she had previously been extraverted and outgoing. Similarly, loss and grief have emerged as themes in previous research in relation to bullying forcing targets to leave jobs prematurely (van Heugten, 2010). In contrast, van Heugten (2013) found that although participants initially grieved the loss of their job, most were able to look at the experience positively which was facilitated by being able to find suitable alternative employment, pointing to the importance of getting another job in lessening the impact of workplace bullying upon psychological health.

Following the destruction of their identities some participants described a shift toward rebuilding their self-worth and identity by engaging in a process of self-development, getting new jobs, changing careers and engaging in new activities. This appeared to offer a sense of regaining some of what the experience of bullying had removed and participants who were able to do this no longer experienced such debilitating psychological effects. However others continued to grieve their past selves and there was little sense of identity reclamation. These results are consistent with the cognitive theory of trauma which suggests that individuals must rebuild basic assumptions and beliefs about the self following traumatic experiences (Janoff-Bulman & Schwartzberg, 1990). It may be that while some participants were able to incorporate the bullying experience positively into their self-concept, some participants struggled to do so which may have led to the development of permanent negative assumptions of self, others, and the world (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Taken together, the findings illustrate that accepting the loss of self and rebuilding

new goals can be an adaptive approach to coping with the experience of being bullied.

The identity work undertaken by participants is consistent with the IRIWM model proposed by Lutgen-Sandvik (2008). Post-bullying, identity threats were managed through processes of grieving and restructuring. Participants initially appeared to grieve the loss of their sense of selves, confidence and worth. However, ultimately, they appeared to come to terms with their losses and were able to describe positive personal transformations. This process allowed the experience of bullying to ultimately have positive implications through the revision of identity into self-narratives. A valued identity was thus re-created which reaffirmed a sense of personal and professional worth that had been lost as a result of the bullying experience. As Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) found, this often included drawing on non-work domains and reframing the experience as an opportunity for learning and personal transformation. However for some, bullying had shattered their lives so completely that they were unable to restructure their experiences and to rebuild their identity. Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) suggests that the impact upon an individual's life narrative may partly explain why bullying has such devastating effects upon psychological health.

A model which may be of use in understanding the effects of bullying on identity is Identity Process Theory (IPT; Breakwell, 1992; 2010a). When the theory is applied to workplace bullying, it can be seen that the concept of identity threat may assist the understanding of the impact of bullying upon psychological well-being. This study has shown that workplace bullying can pose a threat to identity through its impact upon targets' self-esteem, affect a sense of distinctiveness by causing them to be isolated and withdraw from social activities, affect their self-efficacy by reducing their sense of control over their lives and future, and affect continuity as individuals must incorporate a sense of a changed self into their identity. The theory also points to possible coping strategies, for example, establishing acceptance of losses and constructing new values and conceptualisations of the self by highlighting positive implications of the experience; seeking group support to alleviate threats to distinctiveness and belonging; and increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy through engaging in activities which provide opportunities for achievement and future possibility.

Evaluation of the Research

The current study has drawn attention to the devastating impact workplace bullying can have upon the identity of targets, providing insights into the experience of identity threat and how this may be coped with adding to the emerging literature surrounding workplace bullying and identity. To the author's knowledge, this is the first study using IPA to explore experiences of workplace bullying. The use of IPA methodology enabled access to how participants gave meaning to their experience and incorporated an interpretative element providing a psychologically nuanced analysis of the participants' experiences. This allowed the study to make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the impact of workplace bullying on identity.

The quality of the present study is assessed in accordance with Yardley's (2000) principles for assessing qualitative research: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. A thorough and systematic IPA analysis was undertaken which moved beyond description of participants' accounts to a more interpretative analysis illuminating both individual and shared themes. Quotes and verbatim extracts from the transcripts were included to enable readers to evaluate the validity of the researcher's interpretations. The researcher engaged in a process of personal reflexivity to illustrate as far as possible their own values, interests and assumptions and how these may have influenced the research process. An audit was also undertaken to ensure a logical and systematic path through the chain of evidence (Smith et al., 2009). Consistent with the principles of IPA, such validity checks do not aim to produce a 'true' account of an individual's experience but instead are implemented to ensure the credibility of the final account.

The current study like all research has some limitations which will have impacted upon the evaluation of the findings. Self-selection may have attracted participants who experienced particularly negative effects upon their psychological health. Indeed the majority of participants were recruited via a support organisation for workplace bullying and it has been suggested that such sampling methods will include more severe bullying cases (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). However those individuals with higher levels of psychological distress are also more likely to access psychological services and their accounts may therefore be of particular significance for practitioners for whom an understanding of the psychological consequences of workplace bullying is paramount.

It would be interesting to conduct research with a similar group who did not experience negative impacts upon their identity to explore potential protective factors that may lessen the threat to identity posed by workplace bullying. Another limitation of the sample is that the majority of the participants were female, which is inconsistent with demographic characteristics reported in prevalence studies of workplace bullying. These factors suggest that the sample is therefore unlikely to be a good representation of targets of workplace bullying in general and this research can therefore be regarded as offering insights into the experience of workplace bullying from a specific perspective. The interpretations and findings are not claimed to be generalisable but it is hoped they may be transferable to other similar groups.

It is also impossible to say with all certainty that the identity difficulties reported by targets are a product of their bullying experience as the study explored self-reported experiences. It is likely that bullying may interact with other negative life events and individual and workplace factors and therefore must be understood within the wider life context of the individual. Furthermore, the participants' accounts may have been constructed to some extent by the methodology and interview questions as different researchers construct interviews differently, influence participants to respond differently and interpret the findings differently (Finlay, 2002b). It is acknowledged that the study does not provide a 'true' reading of the data but that the results are a co-construction between participant and researcher and therefore present just one interpretation of the data.

Further research

It has been argued that in order to advance our knowledge of the psychological consequences of workplace bullying, future research should be more theory driven in order to develop interventions which are guided by theory (Coyne & Monks, 2011; Hogh et al., 2011). Further studies could use theoretical models of identity to guide a qualitative analysis explicitly exploring the impact of workplace bullying upon identity and factors that facilitate coping with identity threats.

Implications for Practice

The results presented here suggest that working therapeutically with targets of workplace bullying may include exploring the impact upon the individual's identity and undertaking identity work. The work of Lutgen-Sandvik (2008) suggests

remedial goals that therapists and clients might work towards such as restoring and reconstructing a new self-narrative to recreate a valued self-identity. Farmer (2011) suggests that an approach incorporating the IRIWM model and interventions utilising cognitive restructuring could be beneficial when counselling targets of workplace bullying. According to Farmer (2011) an important aspect of such therapy might be to explore clients' thoughts and feelings in relation to their new identities in order to help them to work through their loss and grief and to form narratives within which they can place themselves to restore a more positive identity. The findings of the current study point to potential therapeutic tasks of assisting clients to build a sense of self and life outside of the workplace. A focus of therapy is also likely to include helping clients build self-esteem and confidence and to prepare them to return to work. It appears that having a corrective experience in the workplace can have a positive impact on an individual's sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence, pointing to the therapeutic benefit of helping targets of bullying to return to the workplace.

It is hoped that this study may help to promote greater awareness among practitioners of the psychological effects of workplace bullying and point to potential interventions that may be utilised when working therapeutically with targets of workplace bullying.

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