A Phenomenological Study of Senior-Level Leaders Serving in Public Education Institutions and Workplace Harassment

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UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

A Phenomenological Study of Senior-Level Leaders Serving in Public Education Institutions and Workplace Harassment

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

Sarah J. Noonan, EdD, Committee Chair

Thomas Fish, EdD, Committee Member

Derrick Crim, EdD, Committee Member

October 23, 2017
Final Approval Date
ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study examined how 13 participants serving in senior leadership roles in education or human service fields experienced and made meaning of workplace harassment. Workplace harassment involves “an interaction consisting of acts of harassment, discrimination, unwanted conduct with an adverse effect on dignity, social isolation or exclusion, public and professional humiliation, criticism, intimidation, and psychological and sometimes physical abuse,” which adversely affects employees (Nolfe, Petrella, Blasi, Zontini, & Nolfe, 2008, p. 68). Few think of leaders as potential victims of workplace harassment because of their power and authority. The specific causes of workplace harassment of leaders involved personnel conflicts, financial challenges, and system change efforts. When individuals affected by change feel threatened, they engage in a variety of behaviors to harass leaders, including spreading false rumors regarding a leader’s character, attacking the competence of leaders, soliciting others to spread false claims, and impeding the progress of essential work. The experience of workplace harassment feels like an attack with increasing intensity. Some organizations appeared predisposed to foster workplace harassment due to unhealthy organizational cultures. One factor involved the governing board’s micromanaging and interfering with the daily operations in areas such as personnel, expenditures, and programming. Leaders suffered due to the loss of employment, future career potential, personal health, belonging to a community, and peace of mind. Coming to Grips with Loss theory (Cummings, 2015) revealed how individuals experienced and managed recurring personal loss due to harassment. The study included recommendations for leadership development and improvements to organizational culture.

Keywords: workplace harassment, mobbing, bullying, abuse
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The road of a doctoral student rises and falls with the rough terrain traveled to achieve the destination of quality and the claim “scholarly.” I cannot claim my road had any more or any fewer steep hills or diving valleys. I can claim the journey proved challenging every day. I fortunately traveled with a marvelous cohort of people in Cohort II, all striving to do their level best. Without a doubt, the faculty of the University of St. Thomas created the best environment ever to learn, grow, and discover. The wonderful faculty who traveled to Sioux Falls provided top notch, challenging curriculum in a consumable delivery method for the working adult. The vision of dedicated educators from the University of St. Thomas and University of Sioux Falls allowed a satellite program for Sioux Falls. A great group of students experienced and succeeded because of these dedicated, visionary educators.

I feel blessed to have had the best dissertation chair ever. Dr. Sarah Noonan nurtured me every day with her tireless support and encouragement. She tenaciously challenged me to continue to improve and complete this study. Honestly, I would not be at this point today without her. Words cannot offer a complete expression of my gratitude! I also must thank with sincere gratitude Dr. Fish and Dr. Crim for supporting this research and reviewing my work to create scholarly achievement.

I traveled this road with many great people who supported and sacrificed so I might succeed. My family provided constant support and encouragement. My wife Robyn and girls Laurel, Elise, and Lily supported me while waiting patiently for me to complete this project. My undying love goes to them each day and my gratitude for their patience is immeasurable. My friends Jim Rokusek, Aaron Knodle, LaDonna Zellmer, Cami Veire, and Vicki Oswald kept me
on the straight and narrow, encouraging me to keep moving. They made it possible to complete and offer this study.

The most important component to completing this study came from the 13 brave souls who consented to participate. Without their stories and honest accounts of harassment, there would be no study. Recounting the experience proved to be painful for most but as we completed our time together, most thanked me for the opportunity. I am forever grateful for their honesty, integrity, and bravery. Bless you!
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My study involved my deep interest in workplace harassment. Workplace harassment is “an interaction consisting of acts of harassment, discrimination, unwanted conduct with an adverse effect on dignity, social isolation or exclusion, public and professional humiliation, criticism, intimidation, and psychological and sometimes physical abuse,” which adversely affects employees (Nolfe, Petrella, Blasi, Zontini, & Nolfe, 2008, p. 68). Workplace harassment may affect any employee from the least powerful to the most powerful person in an organization.

I became interested in this topic because of my personal experience. While serving as the president of an organization, I experienced a lengthy period of workplace harassment carried out by a group of disgruntled employees, and know firsthand the price paid by victims. Harassment takes many forms and damages victims. For example, those engaging in harassment make unfair and untrue claims regarding executive decisions and performance. Some write letters to board members accusing the chief executive officer (CEO) of wrongdoing or incompetence, start a lawsuit, or send a constant barrage of hostile communication.

Once harassment starts, board or community members may investigate, accuse a victim of wrongdoing, and then all the actions resulting from the harassment may become part of an official record. Soon personal actions became suspect. The board may require significant justification for everything proposed and delay many important actions during their investigation. Some of these attacks cause some to worry about the safety of their family and home.

During a period of harassment, I wondered how leaders cope with this difficult situation due to my own experience as a victim of harassment. Most assume leaders with power have control and authority, preventing them from becoming victims of workplace harassment.
However, leadership positions offer little protection from the abuse of disgruntled employees. Public figures possess limited protection from workplace harassment. I decided to learn about how senior level administrators experience and make meaning of their encounters with workplace harassment. The effects of harassment on my family and me caused me to wonder about the vulnerability of leaders to bullying, harassment, and other forms of victimization. I also know others in leadership roles feel reluctant to make their experiences known and instead endure “silent harassment.” My study exposed the occurrence of workplace harassment among people in senior level leadership positions. The results of my study may increase awareness of the phenomenon of workplace harassment of CEOs and contribute to scholarly literature on the experience of leaders as victims working in a hostile work environment.

**Problem Statement, Purpose, and Significance**

Workplace harassment occurs with alarming frequency in the workforce. Two to five percent of all workers suffer harassment in their lifetime (Gravois, 2006, p. 2). Workplace harassment might be directed at a victim through prolonged exposure to frequent hostile behaviors, such as excessive criticism of one’s work, withholding information which affects performance, spreading of rumors, and social isolation (Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2011). Harassment may affect any employee, including those holding positions as senior leaders in various institutions (Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2011).

Some environments appear more susceptible to workplace harassment than others (Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiandou, 2003). For example, education, particularly higher education and healthcare, seem to dominate the research (Anderson, 2011; Bairy, Sachidananda, Saraswathi, Shalini, & Thirumalaikolundusubramanian, 2007; Berry, Gates, Gillespie, & Schaefer, 2012; Celeb & Konakli, 2013; Hall, 2005; Hecker, 2007).
Exposure to workplace bullying has severe consequences for both individuals and organizations; it can be a more crippling and devastating problem for affected individuals than all other work-related stressors put together (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010). Leaders and administrators suffer the risks and damaging effects from workplace harassment, as do other employees. Few may think of leaders as vulnerable employees requiring protection from workplace harassment.

This study describes how senior leaders initially encountered and managed episodes of workplace harassment, and also how they made meaning of this experience while serving in a public role. This study informs leaders and the public regarding the serious nature of workplace harassment. Raising awareness regarding how leaders experience the phenomenon of workplace harassment may lead to changes needed in human resource policies, feature the actions required to provide protection to victims, and/or the types of recovery needed for those suffering from harassment. My study contributes to scholarly literature focusing on how leaders experience this phenomenon.

**Research Question**

How do chief executive officers and senior-level administrators experience and make meaning of workplace harassment while serving in leadership roles? I adopted the following four sub-questions in my phenomenological study of leader experiences of workplace harassment:

1. What incident or incidents occurring in your workplace triggered an episode Meeting the definition of workplace harassment of a leader?
2. What different types of workplace harassment of a leader took place?
3. What health consequences did you as a leader experience resulting from your harassment?

4. Did/could you remain in the administrative/leadership position or did you seek other employment?

**Overview of the Dissertation**

This chapter provides context to the research and my interest in the topic of workplace harassment of leaders. I infuse background information supporting the phenomenon of harassment with my personal experience of being harassed while serving in a leadership position. I first describe my personal experience. I continue with definitions of harassment and statistical information on workplace harassment. This chapter provides the problem statement, purpose, and significance of the study, as well as the research question and sub-questions.

Chapter two presents an overview of the scholarly literature related to workplace harassment. I organized my findings into four categories: (1) history and definitions of workplace harassment and mobbing; (2) participants, causes and symptoms of harassment and bullying; (3) effects on employment and adverse mental or physical health disorders; (4) prevention and management of workplace harassment, legal protections and actions in the workplace. The last section of this chapter is devoted to the theoretical frameworks, which informed and provided a lens for understanding the content literature as well as the data collected in this study.

Chapter three describes the methodology for conducting my study of workplace harassment of leaders. I first describe the reasons I adopted qualitative research methods and phenomenology to conduct my study. I explain how I recruited participants, collected and
analyzed data, and took steps (to the degree possible) to insure validity and reliability of the data in qualitative research.

Chapters four, five, and six summarize the data based on themes. Leaders described how they experienced harassment, including the causes leading to the harassment of leaders. I found some types of organizational culture tend to predispose organizations to a climate favoring the harassment of leaders. I describe the impact of harassment on the individuals and how they managed workplace harassment in their lives.

Chapter seven involves data analysis. I use different theories to explain and interpret the phenomenon of workplace harassment. I use a metaphor to show how the action takes place (Morgan, 2006), and theory on organizational culture from Bolman and Deal (2013). Finally, I include Coming to Grips with Loss theory (Cummings, 2015) to explain the short and long-term effects of harassment on leaders.

Chapter eight provides the summary, implications and recommendation of my study on workplace harassment of leaders. I explain the need for awareness of harassment of leaders as well as treatment for leaders who have experienced harassment. I further explain the need to provide awareness training for new leaders as well as leaders currently serving in this role. I recommend changes in policy and practices to eliminate the occurrences of harassment in the workplace.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms and definitions have been adopted for this study:

**Harassment:** an interaction consisting of acts of harassment, discrimination, unwanted conduct with an adverse effect on dignity, social isolation or exclusion, public and professional
humiliation, criticism, intimidation, and psychological and sometimes physical abuse (Nolfe, Petrella, Blasi, Zontini, & Nolfe, 2008).

**Bullying:** The use of force, threat, or coercion by an individual to abuse, intimidate or aggressively dominate others.

**Mobbing:** Psychological terror in work life involving hostile and unethical communication, delivered frequently with a smile, directed in a systematic way by a group of individuals or occasionally by one individual toward an individual who is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position on a frequent basis for a long period of time (Leymann, 1996).

The next chapter summarizes scholarly literature on workplace harassment and “mobbing.” The literature review presents the studies pertaining to the topic, and includes analytical theories to best explain and interpret my review findings and the data collected in this study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My study involved workplace harassment of senior leaders in public institutions. Literature on the definition and causes of workplace harassment, the participants and consequences of those suffering harassment, as well as what needs to happen to arrest the continued prevalence of harassment in the workforce constitutes the majority of my review.

I organized my findings into four categories: (1) history and definitions of workplace harassment and mobbing; (2) participants, causes and symptoms of harassment and bullying; (3) effects on employment and adverse mental or physical health disorders; (4) prevention and management of workplace harassment, legal protections and actions in the workplace. I begin with a definition of workplace harassment and a brief history of the syndrome.

**History and Definition**

Psychologists and behavioral researchers have studied workplace harassment or mobbing since the beginning of the 1980s. A Norwegian psychologist, Dan Olweus, a professor at the University of Bergen, pioneered early studies of workplace harassment (Schafer, 2005; Schuster, 1999). He was the first to attempt to define the phenomenon of repeated exposure to harassment over time in employment.

Lorenz, an Austrian ethnologist, coined the term *mobbing* to describe the behavior animals use to scare away a stronger, preying enemy; the term also helps to describe the workplace behaviors of harassment (as cited in Davenport, Schwartz, & Elliott, 2005). Lorenz found a number of weaker individuals crowd together to protect themselves and often display attacking behavior. For example, in the animal kingdom, geese use mobbing to scare away a fox (as cited Davenport, Distler Schwartz, & Pursell Elliott, 2005). Lorenz’s early research had no available translations in English for review. Metaphorically, the workplace produces similar
behavior. Lorenz described how a group of birds often does something seemingly bizarre such as fly toward the threat (as cited in Gravois, 2006). When they reach the enemy, they fly and swoop down, as if to attack the fox. They do this again and again, jeering and making a racket, drawing still more birds to the assault. Lorenz also noted the impulse to make the enemy’s life a burden (as cited in Gravois, 2006). Metaphorically, this behavior from nature describes the phenomenon in the workplace.

Workplace harassment became a topic of research due to the work of a group of psychologists interested in solving workplace and employee issues (Leymann, 1990). Leymann studied this phenomenon initially, using Dr. Lorenz’s term: mobbing. Leymann (1990), who conducted most of the research in Sweden and Germany, found a high incidence of suicide in Sweden from workplace harassment. The estimate of suicides due to mobbing or workplace harassment in Sweden during the late 1980s stood at between 10 and 15 percent of all suicides in Sweden (Birkeland Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010; Leymann, 1990). Looking at the problem of workplace harassment and mobbing in Sweden, Gustavsson, Einarsen, Becker, and Zapf calculated through survey information that one percent of the working population suffered from significant harassment; to put this in raw numbers, 50,000 people might be affected by this problem (as cited in Leymann, 1996 Translated original research was no longer available for review. Based on the same percentages and using the same calculation, this could mean 1,000,000 workers in the United States might suffer from workplace harassment. Leymann (1996) adopted the term mobbing to describe workplace abuse or harassment due to the social nature of the abuse and the involvement of coworkers and by-standers. He stated, “Mobbing is social misery” (Leymann, 1990, p.120). Leymann defined and described mobbing as a phenomenon, involving “ganging up on someone,” “bullying,” or “psychological terror” (p.
In this type of conflict the victim is subjected to a systematic, stigmatizing process and encroachment of his or her civil rights (Leymann, 1996). If it lasts for years, the individual in question may be unable to find employment due to the psychological damage incurred and, ultimately, leave the labor market. The National Board of Occupational Safety and Health in Stockholm, Sweden first published the initial defining research in 1984 (Leymann, 1996). The common English term *bullying* did not fully describe what Leymann (1990) saw. The aggressive, physical nature described in the definition of bullying and the source being primarily from one individual, limited the understanding of what he saw. He noted some harassing communication quite often appeared to be non-aggressive, yet it delivered the same stigmatized effects even though it lacked the physical aggression of bullying: “Mobbing frequently lacks physical violence but has rather a very sophisticated behavior of social isolation, more of a harassment or even ‘psychological terror’” (Leyman, 1996, p. 167).

Mobbing begins when individuals become the target of disrespectful and harmful behavior. Innuendos, rumors, and public discrediting create a hostile environment (Leyman, 1990). Individuals gather others to willingly or unwillingly participate in continuous malevolent actions designed to force a person out of the workplace: “Mobbing is also defined as emotional lynching, psychological terror, psychological violence, trauma, psychological abuse, emotional attacks, intimidation, and emotional abuse at work” (Ozturk, Sokmen, Yilmaz, & Cilingir, 2008, p. 435).

Researchers studied the phenomenon of harassment in the workplace in a systematic fashion and defined it as “an interaction consisting of acts of harassment, discrimination, unwanted conduct with an adverse effect on dignity, social isolation or exclusion, public and professional humiliation, criticism, intimidation, and psychological and sometimes physical
abuse” (Nolfe, Petrella, Blasi, Zontini, & Nolfe, 2008, p. 68). The harassment victim’s inability to cope may lead to leaving his or her job and perhaps never re-entering the workplace.

Hierarchical structures, such as hospitals and academic institutions, lend themselves to more workplace harassment opportunities because they allow dominance and strength to measure an individual’s “social value” (Schafer, 2005, p. 1). The structure of an organization allowing some positions to be subordinate to other positions creates a pathway for harassment and bullying. For example, the physician and the nurse supervisor control the destiny and actions of the floor nurse (Katrinli, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010). Also, the dean of the college of education holds the position and authority to control the workload and environment of any professor within the college of education. In another educational setting, elementary and secondary school principals without clear leadership training can damage teachers, teaching, and student learning by creating a hostile environment (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). In the nursing context, evidence exposed how bullying can render the workplace an abusive and harmful environment with links drawn between bullying and the current recruitment and retention crisis in the nursing workforce (Hutchinson, Jackson, Vickers, & Wilkes, 2008).

Workplace harassment depicted in psychological and sociological studies of workplace conflict includes harassment/mobbing as “a common and bloodless form of workplace mayhem, usually carried out politely and without violence” (Westhues, 2005, p. 37). Mobbing describes the violent “ganging up” long observed in nonhuman species (Westhues, 2005, p. 37).

There has been a widespread rise in interest in this phenomenon among researchers and ordinary workers, trade unions, and the authorities (Agervold, 2007). This high level of interest is based partly on what may be serious consequences for the individual victim of violence and partly on indications bullying is a widespread phenomenon impacting the workforce (Agervold,
one of the original researchers of this phenomenon, found a far worse threat to a worker’s health and safety develops from their own co-workers’ and managers’ behaviors. The constant threat of enduring, collective, frequent, hostile communication; of being isolated, silenced, ridiculed, gossiped about, threatened, and harassed; of being assigned meaningless tasks or no work at all contributes to a victim’s frustration and helplessness (Westhues, 2005). The unfortunate individual thereby suffers being pushed steadily into a defenseless position from which there is no escape except by giving up his/her employment (Westhues, 2005). Leymann (1990) preferred not to use the term bullying because it connotes aggression. Instead he preferred mobbing, since the communication toward targets had little or no aggression but rather presented itself in a very polite, bloodless manner. The literature also provides a specific example of harassment of professionals:

A humiliation begins with attacks upon professional competence and reputation creating a strategy to reduce those targeted to a state of powerlessness and worthlessness, having been identified as being of little importance or use to the organization. Thus those targeted can be destroyed with impunity. (Hutchinson, Jackson, Vickers, & Wilkes, 2008, p. 27)

Investigators now take more account of the role of the social context and organizational structure of the workplace to see whether these influence the harassment experience of the victim (Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiandou, 2003). An evolving process of humiliation and punitive behaviors over time, accepted by colleagues and management, creates an organizational culture of harassment (Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiandou, 2003). A person experiencing harassment often receives little support, becomes isolated, and constructs the meaning of the experience as a shameful, personal failure (Baillien, Neyens, DeWitte, & DeCuypere, 2009; Duffy & Sperry, 2007).
Participants in Workplace Harassment

Three participants appeared in most studies: (1) the bully or perpetrator, (2) the target or victim, and (3) the by-stander or guardian (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). The bully plays someone who always looks good and makes everyone else look bad (Hall, 2005). A target or victim receives the brunt of the bully or perpetrator’s disgust. Perpetrators suddenly criticize and question the target’s work (Hecker, 2007). The victim’s workload becomes burdensome with tasks clearly below the training level of the position. The targets remain invested emotionally in their jobs with limitations such as tenure, age or family reasons locking them into their position (Hecker, 2007). For whatever reason, bullies decide they do not like the target and the campaign begins to drive the individual out (Halbur, 2005). The by-stander may become an ally of the bully and perpetrate the harassment with the bully or become the guardian of the victim and mitigate the situation to alleviate bullying (Simon & Simon, 2006). The majority of literature referred to the bully/perpetrator or the victim/target with minor references to the by-stander/guardian. I will primarily focus on the former two participant types.

Profile and Actions of Participants Engaged in Bullying

Bullies generally do not respect others and frequently abuse their victims using various types of negative verbal discourse (Hall, 2005). Insulting, demeaning, patronizing, humiliating, offensive, and aggressive behaviors result in abuse often through negative verbal discourse (Glazo, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2009; Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2006). The bully exhibits high levels of intelligence while quietly, subtly perpetrating psychological aggression (Hall, 2005). Women provide the majority of bullies or perpetrators in the workplace (Hall, 2005; Pomeroy, 2012). Women prefer the subtle use of behaviors such as vicious rumors or gossip, harsh criticism, intimidating behavior, demeaning tactics rather than physical aggression
The bullying participants’ motivation lies in the opportunity to exploit control over their perceived competitors seen as targets or victims (Kaplan, 2010; Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). “According to Barbara Lee Crouch, bullies are insecure, and they cover it up by badmouthing others” (Hall, 2005, p. 46).

Insecure manager bullies often take credit for the work of their targets or victims, while demeaning them for their poor performance (Wiedmer, 2011). In most cases, bullies have good social skills and are highly manipulative allowing them to create supportive cliques (Randle & Stevenson, 2007). Encouraging the involvement of by-standers in the harassment of the less fortunate becomes the norm. Perpetrators refuse to recognize, face up to, or overcome their weaknesses, failings or shortcomings (Randle & Stevenson, 2007). Common bully behavior occurs when perpetrators target those who challenge their sense of superiority (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). Many perpetrators exhibit low self-esteem, which may explain the need to bully. Poor social competence, ineffective leadership skills, and micro-political behaviors describe some reasons for bullying (Johnson, 2011), all in the name of advancing one’s career.

The bullying behavior occurs to serve the self-interests of the bully (Katrinli, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010). When perpetrators find themselves accused of bullying or being the bully, they are mortified and suffer a major blow to their self-esteem (Dickson, 2005).

**Profile and Actions of Victims**

The victim or target of the workplace harassment comes from a different position and personality description. Typically, victims or targets offer more technical skills at a higher level of competence than the bully and find more appreciation from colleagues, customers, and management (Wiedmer, 2011). They also typify moral superiority in comparison to the bully. Most victims exhibit self-confidence while being conscientious extroverts (Hall, 2005). They
appear as non-confrontational. When aggression finds them, they do not respond in kind. Researchers found most victims were in their 30s and 40s with a graduate degree (Ozturk, Sokmen, Yilmaz, & Cilingir, 2008; Simon & Simon, 2006). Frequently victims come from helper professions, such as teaching, nursing, and counseling (Hall, 2005). Most targets exhibit productivity, honesty, fairness, and mercy in their work environments (Coyne, Craig, & Chong, 2004). Work teams place most victims or targets as insiders to the workplace and reject bullies as outsiders. Workers prefer to work with victims rather than bullies. Victims often feel a sense of defenselessness due to the perpetrators’ disrespect of fundamental professional principles (Katrinli, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010). What a career professional in the field holds as sacred, the bully neither acknowledges nor respects (Katrinli, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010). Incident reports of harassment rarely get filed because victims sense any complaint could blight their professional progress (Dickson, 2005). A state of powerlessness and worthlessness overcomes a victim as they feel nothing will change (Hutchinson, Wilkes, Vickers, & Jackson, 2008). Many times they feel responsible for the attack (Agervold, 2007). One of the disabling aspects of workplace abuse comes when the victim assumes responsibility for the problem and accepts the abuse (Koonin & Green, 2004).

Profile and Actions of By-Standers

Depending upon the situation, by-standers generally take the side of the perpetrators, fearing they could be next in line (Schafer, 2005). The by-stander pretends events did not happen and remains silent for self-protection. Few find the courage to stand up for their fellow workers (Gravois, 2006; Ozturk, Sokmen, Yilmaz, & Cilingir, 2007; Smith, Singer, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003; Yildirim & Yildirim, 2007). An extremely tyrannical bully may actually cause by-standers to join together as a type of security for each other; however, this collaborative
action is rare (Coyne, Craig & Chong, 2004). Very little of the research in this literature review incorporated the perspective of the by-stander.

**Psychodynamic Perspective of Participants**

Examining participants from a psychodynamic perspective, researchers discovered deeper dynamics among the actors of workplace harassment. White (2004) used a psychoanalytic process to explain the cause of workplace harassment. Bullies typically test the boundaries of their target victims to find a container for their anxieties. Bullies exhibit insecurities and self-doubt leading to a need for control (White, 2004).

Targets have higher emotional intelligence than bullies, and bullies perceive targets as threats (Wiedmer, 2011). However, peers often like and appreciate identified targets because of the warmth and care they bring to the workplace. Frequently exhibiting behavior morally superior to the bully, targets desire to help, heal, teach, develop, and nurture others (Wiedmer, 2011). Thus, the bully often uses social isolation as a way to control and demoralize the victim. Due to the desire to help fellow workers, targets feel particularly vulnerable when separated from other employees (Wiedmer, 2011). Fellow employees avoid the targeted victim to avoid distress themselves, creating a greater isolation for the victim. In addition, skilled individuals identified as targets, suffer sabotage from insecure bullies who take credit for the target’s work (Wiedmer, 2011). To control the target, bullies commonly call into question and criticize the target while withholding validation of the target’s work (Hecker, 2007).

Bullies who provide confusing directions relish public humiliation of individuals. They frequently eliminate validation of high performance while creating a brutal environment for the targeted employee (White, 2004). The bully’s behavior leads to distress for targeted employees, at times causing them, including high performing key employees, to leave their workplace. A
clear description of this process developed by White shown in Table 1 explains the personality dynamics involved in harassment.

Table 1. Stages of Harassment in Psychodynamic Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: The Embryonic Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is an embryonic bully and an embryonic victim. It is characterized by multiple causalities; organizational causes, social groups, and the individuals themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 2: The Trigger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A trigger occurs. It may be the arrival of a newcomer or the reorganization of a department. Due to the change the bully seeks out someone to become a target. Once the victim is selected the attack begins.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 3: The Loyalty Stage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The victim remains loyal to the bully. The victim constantly seeks the bully’s love and recognition. The victim idealizes the bully.</td>
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<th>Stage 4: A Dance of Death</th>
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<tr>
<td>The bully and victim psychically intertwine as if in a frenetic and parasitic dance. The victim is worn down, the relationship fails, and the bully is felt to be a persecutor. There is a confusion of identities. The bully believes he or she is innocent and that the victim is the guilty one. The victim begins to blame him or herself for the bullying. The victim has no more value to the bully and accepts the description given by the bully. (White, 2004, p. 275-277)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Other factors contribute to harassment in the workplace beyond the psychodynamic interplay of participants in these studies. In the next section, I discuss some of these additional potential causes of harassment and bullying in the workplace.

**Job Insecurity, Role Demands, Job Control, Leadership Behavior, and Job Resources**

Job insecurity creates vulnerabilities to harassment because it reduces workers’ power with respect to their position (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). Job insecurity generates a power differential between employees and supervisors (Johnson, 2009). Close, personal supervision can lead to bullying particularly when job insecurity exists (Roscigno, Lopez, &
Hodson, 2009). Recent trends in business focus on excellence and quality, increasing the pressure on workers and creating a business setting ripe for harassment (Koonin & Green, 2004). Workers with relatively high wages actually experience greater harassment (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). Harassment results when compliance trumps individual identity in the name of quality and excellence. The perpetrator tends to hold a position of power that allows him or her to behave unacceptably and threaten the victim’s job security (Dickson, 2005). In 72% of harassment cases the bully has direct control over the target’s salary and livelihood as well as influence over transfer from his or her current position (Wiedmer, 2011, p. 36).

When harassment involves job insecurity, most victims quit or lose their jobs (Baillien, Rodriguez-Munoz, Van den Broeck, & De Witte, 2011). Senior administrators and leaders frequently experience job insecurity due to the structures of their positions and the environment of job ambiguity present in today’s workplace (DeCuyper, Baillen, & DeWitte, 2009). The phenomenon of job insecurity further validates my research study. Lack of job control, role ambiguity and role conflict create unclear or unrealistic expectations for an individual (Skogstad, Torsheim, Einarsen, & Hauge, 2011). Conflict resulting from role ambiguity may lead to harassment. Without clear expectations, conflict arises and harassment begins (Becher & Visovosky, 2012).

Job control relates directly to excessively close personal supervision over the victim leading to oppressive task requirements (Roscigno, Lopez & Hodson, 2009). Perpetrators of harassment direct the activities of a target closely to both control the outcomes and to take credit for the product. Lack of personal control by the victim over daily aspects of a victim’s job can lead to conflict that may culminate in harassment (Yildirim, 2009).
A strong link exists between increased job demand, low levels of job control, and harassment (Demir, Hons & Rodwell, 2012). In the current economy downsizing and restructuring become constants creating the perfect environment for harassment (Johnson, 2009). Dynamic market situations cause companies and organizations to go through constant changes (Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell & Salem, 2006), and individual workers react differently to the conflicts and problems caused by these changes. Frequently, restructuring can create a competitive organizational culture (Katrinli, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010), nurturing deficiencies in work design and encouraging harassment. While pressure continues on the workforce to comply with change, odds increase that deficiencies will create conflict (Katrinli, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010). The presence of low job autonomy and high workload commonly creates a perpetrator who responds negatively to the changes in the organization (Baillien, DeCuypere, & DeWit, 2011). The increase in work demand and low levels of control also lead to violations of existing social, organizational work-related norms enhancing the possibility of harassment (Demir, Hons, & Rodwell, 2012).

Harassment emanates from leadership behavior (Skogstad, Torsheim, Einarsen, & Hauge, 2011). Leadership that develops systematic aggressive and negative behaviors directed toward individual employees creates workplace harassment (Skogstad, Torsheim, Einarsen, & Hauge, 2011). Workplace power structures around leadership/worker relationships affect how intense and developed harassment becomes (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). A free reign of abuse exists without effective workplace constraints on so inclined supervisors.

As companies change to enhance their competitiveness, job resources often fail to meet the employees’ needs (Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell & Salem, 2006). The lack of job resources—including everything from a lack of training to ineffective management (Moayed, Daraiseh,
Shell, & Salem, 2006)—can induce feelings of oppression in employees and create a perfect environment for bullying (Lewis, Sheehan, & Davies, 2009). Low job resources paired with higher job demands wear out employees’ energy and strength, frustrating them and zapping their motivation (Baillien, Rodriguez-Munoz, Van den Broeck, & De Witte, 2011). Not only the lack of tangible resources but also lack of social resources can create the conditions for bullying (Lewis, 2006). Important job resources include autonomy, promotion prospects, and co-worker support (Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2011). The reduction of time and place available for the social support system of co-workers condemns the workplace to a culture of harassment (Lewis, 2006). Shockingly high levels of frustration occur among organizations as the result of low resources or not enough staff to meet the organization’s competitive needs (Duffin, 2013).

Targets of bullying have low job satisfaction (Rodriguez-Munoz, Baillien, De Witte, Moreno-Jimenez, & Pastor, 2009). High levels of burnout and decreased job satisfaction create a circular aspect to victimization (Rodriguez-Munoz, Baillien, De Witte, Moreno-Jimenez, & Pastor, 2009). Witnesses of bullying also show less job satisfaction and higher levels of burnout (Johnson, 2011). Job satisfaction lessens when high job demand and low job resources become complicated such as in nursing where the target serves two supervisors, the physician and the nursing supervisor (Katrinli, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010). Performance-based appraisal systems also increase the likelihood of bullying by stimulating competition among workers. Job dissatisfaction damages effectiveness of the workers and creates problematic organizational climates (Korkmaz & Cemaloglu, 2010).

**Effects of Workplace Harassment on Employees’ Mental and Physical Health**

Workplace harassment constitutes one of today’s greatest challenges to workplace health and productivity (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Sahin, Cetin, Cimen, & Yildiran, 2012).
Harassment has shown negative effects on the welfare and development of workers and organizations by increased rates of absenteeism, lower morale, anger, burnout, underperformance and deterioration of corporate image, worker relationships and loss of senior workers (Sahin, Cetin, Cimen, & Yildiran, 2012). Victims of harassment suffer not only health issues, some of which may lead to permanent health damage, but also suffer financial loss greater than the amount of earnings for one year (Ozurk, Sokmen, Yilmaz, & Cilingir, 2008; Yildirim & Yildirim, 2007). Harassment costs the individual and the organization (Koonin & Green, 2004). According to Nielsen, Matthiesen, and Einarsen (2010), the effects of workplace harassment exceed the effects of sexual harassment in total impact to the individual and the workplace. Workplace harassment has affected more employees than all other work-related stressors combined (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2009; Rodriguez-Munoz, Moreno-Jimenez, Vergel, & Hernandez, 2010).

In the next section, I describe research findings showing how workplace harassment impacts both the victim and the organization.

**Impact on the Victim**

Job loss produces the largest concern for any victim of workplace harassment (Hall, 2005). Gainful employment remains necessary for most people and threats to livelihood can have devastating effects on their wellbeing (Lovell & Lee, 2010). Most victims continue to accept routine abuse because they fear job loss (Hall, 2005). Victims become stressed, depressed, and demoralized while considering leaving their jobs (Allen, 2007; Bairy, Thirumalaikolundusubramanina, Sivagnanam, Saraswathi, Sachidananda, & Shalini, 2007; Dickson, 2005). The income loss created when leaving one institution for another creates profound emotional distress (Hall, 2005). Either choice—staying with the current job and being
harassed or leaving for another situation—may produce a health risk (Nolfe, Petrella, Blasi, Zontini, & Nolfe, 2008).

According to the scholarly literature, each victim has the potential to develop a variety of health issues. To help understand the effect of health risks, researchers categorized the impact on the individual. Davenport, et al. (2005) compared the health risks for targets of workplace harassment to risks of first, second, or third degree burn victims:

Mobbing of the first degree – The individual manages to resist, escapes at an early stage, or is fully rehabilitated in the same workplace or somewhere else.
Mobbing of the second degree – The individual cannot resist, nor escape immediately, and suffers temporary or prolonged mental and/or physical disability, and has difficulty re-entering the workforce.
Mobbing of the third degree – The affected person is unable to re-enter the workforce. The physical and mental injuries are such that rehabilitation seems unlikely, unless a very specialized treatment protocol is being applied. (p. 39)

Most harassment victims suffer some combination of depression, insomnia, or other stress and anxiety disorders (Hall, 2005). Marnavita and Heponiemi (2011) determined the observed problems of severe psychological abuse from harassment exceeded the effects of physical assault, possibly causing persistent problems years after the original event. Mental health issues can develop into psychological pain such as lower self-esteem, lower work performance, sleep disorders, negative self-image, loss of friends, chronic fatigue, anxiety and depression (Pomeroy, 2012; Vie, Glaso, & Einarsen, 2012).

First-degree mobbing victims frequently suffer sleep disorders, difficulty concentrating, and headaches (Johnson, 2009; Yildirim & Yildirim, 2007). Some second-degree victims showed signs of alcohol abuse (Rodriguez-Munoz, Baillien, DeWitte, Moreno-Jimenez, & Pastor, 2009). In the most severe cases, extreme sadness prevails in victims leading up to and including contemplating suicide (Berry, Gillespie, Gates, & Schafer, 2012; Yildirim & Yildirim, 2007). Because of the extreme mental health consequences of workplace harassment, some

Frequently, when victims seek help from their employer, the employer directs the victims to counselors within the organization. Such action may cause greater harm than good because of the continued connection to the bully or perpetrator (Ferris, 2004). Health disorders may lead to more long-term physical issues such as back problems, weight fluctuations, migraines and digestive disorders (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2007). Physical symptoms of headache, chronic fatigue, dizziness, skin rashes, tachycardia, heart pain, high blood pressure and gastrointestinal symptoms comprise the common symptoms leading toward the need for long-term treatment (Aguggia, Cavallini, & Varetto, 2006; Taylor, 2013). Extreme workplace harassment may cause cardiovascular health issues leading to life-long, progressive heart disease (Tuckey, Dollard, Saebel, & Berry, 2010).

Individual victim’s families also suffer from the harassment (Celep & Konakli, 2013). The behavior of the victim impacts the family through episodes of anger, aggression, and introversion (Yildiz, 2007). Also, victims lose the informal support system at work as co-workers avoid them, fearing they may become the next victim (Allan, 2007). The social isolation of the victim from normal communication loops at work enhances the loneliness and exclusion from organizational life (Sperry & Duffy, 2009). The family and friends must supply the victim with total support without the benefit of reciprocal intimacy and companionship, creating a double bind (Sperry & Duffy, 2009).
Impact on the Organization

Absenteeism, turnover, and loss of productivity offer the greatest impact on the organization resulting from workplace harassment (Coyne, Craig, & Chong, 2004; Halbur, 2005). Absenteeism develops into higher sick leave usage (Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006; Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004). Absenteeism leads to lower productivity and poor quality work that in turn comes from lower self-confidence (Korkmaz & Cemaloglu, 2010; Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006). Long-term harassment sufferers frequently leave the workplace increasing personnel costs for training due to turnovers (Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2006).

Disharmony appears and productivity decreases as a loss of mutual trust, respect and motivation reigns (Ozturk, Sokmen, Ylmaz, & Cilingir, 2008). The impact of harassment in the workplace creates a higher rate of errors, in turn resulting in poor patient or client care and service (Anderson, 2011). Firms recognize harassment poisons the work environment with low morale, job dissatisfaction, fear, anger and depression (Hall, 2005; Sanders, Pattison, & Bible, 2012). Coworkers who play the role of by-standers experience higher levels of anxiety as a result of witnessing hostile behavior (Kaplan, 2010). All of the impacts on the organization create an unhealthy environment that must be addressed.

Prevention, Management, Legal Protections and Actions Against Workplace Harassment

One in six United States workers directly experienced destructive bullying in the past year (Hall, 2005, p. 36). Workplace bullying happens twice as often as sexual harassment and creates a repeated, health endangering mistreatment of a person by a cruel individual who feels a need to exercise control over others. The need for prevention remains clear (Hall, 2005). The literature on workplace harassment included three distinct areas in regard to prevention and
management of harassment: an understanding of the culture of the workplace, prevention practices and policies that protect the victim, and, ultimately, legislation to make failure to respond and mitigate harassment a crime.

**Workplace Culture**

Creating a work culture conducive to eliminating harassment requires attention to details of how the organization’s culture develops (Smith, Singer, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003). Organizations characterized by chaos should recognize the increased incidence of harassment (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). Businesses and organizations need to create organizational structures, job descriptions, and comprehensive, permanent policies about expected behavior and ethics in the workplace to avoid chaos (Ozturk, Sokmen, Yilmaz, & Cilingir, 2008).

Organizations with widely divergent status and power gaps between employers and employees should recognize the probability of harassment (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). Teamwork, creativity, decision-making, and clear confidence with authority to achieve organizational goals foster essential behavior of a successful work culture (Olender-Russo, 2009; Ozturk, Sokmen, Yilmaz, & Cilingir, 2008). Organizations aiming to prevent harassment may limit high strain jobs and may invest in job designs yielding high job autonomy (Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011). Poor job characteristics become a precursor of bullying (Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011).

Developing a level of awareness of workplace harassment offers the first step to successfully preventing it (Dickson, 2005). Training of workers on harassment and its consequences as well as management supporting legal action, allow prevention of workplace harassment (Celep & Konakli, 2013). Society should be informed and educated about
harassment to deal with it and acknowledge it in a more open and inclusive way (Yildiz, 2007). According to Celep and Konakli (2013), a method for managing incidents of workplace harassment might include informing workers of the process of reporting harassment, allowing independent supervision, and implementing sanctions fostered to meet the needs of the organization. Establishing a legal framework to deal with harassment in workplaces threatening the physical and psychological health and productivity of workers grants an opportunity for relief (Yildiz, 2007).

Organizational responses to bullying need to move beyond handling each individual incident separately (Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009). Teaching appropriate skills to those consultants or employees tackling this issue, and developing role models could create a culture of prevention (Bairy, Thirumalaikolundusubramanian, Sivagnanam, Saraswathi, Sachidananda, & Shalini, 2007).

**Prevention Practices and Policies**

One major problem in prevention of harassment occurs when targets of harassment do not recognize themselves as harassed (Lewis, 2005). Targets fear retribution and worry others may consider them chronic complainers. They see the organization repeatedly failing to respond (Hall, 2005). To address effective prevention, intervention strategies must be established (Katrinili, Atabay, Gunay, & Cangarli, 2010). One method of prevention involves assertiveness in conversational style (Randle & Stevenson, 2007). Accurate communication through honesty with others may help. It has three components: non-judgmental statements, the emotional consequence, and the concluding effect. Practiced in the workplace, it may prevent harassment (Randle & Stevenson, 2007). In Table 2, Pomeroy offered seven strategies for the target to use in prevention of harassment.
Table 2. Seven Strategies to Harassment Prevention

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Develop professional working knowledge of workplace bullying through reading and continuing education</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Obtain a past history of the client’s work experiences, including work relationships and satisfaction and psychological well-being in previous positions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Have the client keep a journal of work related issues and document all bullying incidents as they occur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Empower the client to develop a social support system outside of the workplace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Advocate for the client with those in authority, when possible, to assist in resolving the bullying issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Support the client in obtaining information about workplace bullying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Assist the client in making decisions about the future by envisioning a range of job-related choices from most preferred to least preferred. (Pomeroy, 2013, p. 7)</td>
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When political and social leaders establish a priority to eliminate harassment and bullying in workplaces, social recognition increases (Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007).

Policymakers, courts, and managers need guidelines and standards to recognize and identify bullying and harassment and effectively deal with it (Lovell & Lee, 2010). Leaders recognizing the importance of respecting the workplace, re-evaluate their organization’s non-harassment policies to include bullying (Ferris, 2004).

**Legislation**

Legislative action concerning bullying has been implemented in various parts of the world. Australia enacted “Brodie’s Law” in reaction to the suicidal death of a young lady who suffered bullying at work (Anderson, 2011). Research found workplace harassment occurred when a bully perpetrated behaviors due to a lack of cultural and systemic protections (Kelly, 2007). Cyberbullying and workplace harassment including threats, abusive language and performing offensive acts created the basis of the law (Anderson, 2011). Cyberbullying utilizes today’s technology to afford the same harassment perpetuated in person. Modern bullying
occurs through such means as e-mail, texting, and other social media (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). France, Sweden, Poland and Belgium enacted workplace bullying and harassment laws (Kaplan, 2010); however, no specific workplace harassment and bullying law exists in the United States (Ng, 2011). Various employment laws throughout the United States may provide a legal response to workplace bullying, but they offer inadequate support (Martin, Lopez, & LaVan, 2009). Victims of harassment have filed cause of actions for harassment, discrimination, or violations of civil rights in response to the lack of recourse under the law (Martin, Lopez, & LaVan, 2009).

The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) established in 1998 allows an opportunity to address workplace harassment and bullying in American employment law (Kaplan, 2010). However, currently, 85% of workplace bullying cases favored the employer over the victim (Sanders, Pattison, & Bible, 2012, p. 5), even though the WBI objective was meant to support victims and establish a model to guide legislatures in drafting anti-bullying laws (Kaplan, 2010).

Summary

The review of literature described the history of “mobbing” and workplace harassment and the key researchers in the field. The review examined those participating in harassment. The bully or perpetrator, the victim or target, and by-standers created the list of participants found in the literature. Research describing outcomes of harassment produced a significant number of studies revolving around job security, role demands, job control, leadership behavior, and job resources. Effects of harassment on victims and organizations also produced significant literature. Finally, articles on prevention of harassment and legal remedies and actions provided a organizational and legal prospective on workplace harassment. The studies provided an overview of the phenomena but lacked sufficient studies regarding the personal perspective and
experience of senior leaders involved as victims of workplace harassment. Workplace harassment and mobbing appeared frequently in my review of the literature, however, more remains to be studied.

**Gap and Tensions in the Literature**

The bulk of the literature relied on survey data from employees affected by harassment and mobbing in specific fields. This methodology lacks an in-depth understanding of workplace harassment as a phenomenon. Few studies investigated the personal experience of individuals living with or recovering from harassment. The anonymity of the survey data lacked data concerning the lived experience of harassment by people holding senior leadership roles. Some literature attempted to explain the origins of harassment occurring in a system or the psychological perspective of harassment. Scholarly literature and practitioner articles primarily served as a guide to organizations regarding harassment, often providing advice on how manage individuals who suffer harassment. The literature lacked the voice of victims and their experiences. This gap inspired me to adopt phenomenology. A phenomenological qualitative study of individuals who experienced harassment may expand the body of research on harassment. Leaders appeared as an underrepresented group in the literature. The absence of studies focused on leaders as victims led me to pursue this study.

In the next section I describe the analytical theories I adopted to make sense of the literature and interpret my findings. I carefully reviewed a number of theories before I selected several theories to explain my review findings and support my analysis of data collected in my study. Each theory adds to specific aspects of the study and helps make the experience understandable to the reader. The theories concern the social and personal experience of harassment.
Analytical Theory

I selected the following theories to analyze my review findings: “dramaturgical social interaction theory” (Goffman, 1959), “metaphor of organizations as an organism from organization theory (Morgan, 2006), “organizational culture from organization theory” (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and “coming to grips with loss theory” (Cummings, 2015). I selected these theories because of the themes found in my literature review and because of my study of workplace harassment. Due to the very human nature of harassment, social interaction theory helps to explain how human behavior can develop into a destructive situation (Kivisto, 2004). Social interaction concerns “the study of human beings interacting symbolically with one another and with themselves, and in the process of that symbolic interaction making decisions and directing their streams of action” (Charon, 2004, p. 141).

I narrowed my selection of social interaction theory to Goffman’s dramaturgical social interactionism: the dramatic interaction of individuals with one another (Charon, 2004). Goffman (1959) described the circumstances surrounding the presentation of self in everyday life with the terms front stage and back stage. Application of this theory provides a context for harassment and the process used to develop harassment. The actors relate to two scenarios in each instance: the contradiction of what happens publicly to what really happens behind the scene (Charon, 2004). The subtle use of coded harassing words understood by both the perpetrator and victim in public contrasts with the destructive harassment played out of public sight but within earshot of other employees (Goffman, 1959). Applying dramaturgical social interactionism to my study of harassment provided a framework to explain the process occurring with the individuals involved in harassment.
Because workplace harassment of leaders involves people and in many cases a variety and number of people, I adopted organizational theory using the metaphor of an organization as an organism (Morgan, 2006) as a lens to explain the harassment process occurring within organizations and communities. Understanding the dynamics of an organism in nature applies perfectly to the behaviors of organizations and the members within the organization.

A key emphasis in organizational theory involves organizational culture (Bolman & Deal, 2013), including the everyday informal interactions of people within organizations. Morgan (2006) provides a concise definition of organizational culture: “The pattern of development reflected in a society’s system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day rituals” (p. 116). Organizations which have harassed a leader find the process and action as part of their values and rituals. The organization adopts the behavior as part of how they conduct business. I applied the practice of culture to the harassment of leaders to provide an explanation of how an organization becomes harassing.

“Coming to grips with loss theory” offers insight into the impact of harassment on the victim and organization (Cummings, 2015). Victims of harassment go through a predictable cycle of loss as described in Cummings’ loss theory. Applying loss theory to their situations, victims of harassment may find hope for recovery and resolution of the difficult experiences. This may also apply to those engaging in workplace harassment.

**Dramaturgical Social Interaction Theory**

Goffman (1959) provided a theory leading to a better understanding of the phenomenon of harassment. Known for his keen and discerning examination of the workings of everyday life, Goffman viewed the interactions between people as dramas of individual enactments and reenactments (Kivisto, 2004). Goffman used the metaphor of theatrical performance to describe
the front stage where people perform. He explored the features of their enactments such as expressive control, misrepresentation, mystification, and contrivance (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman (1959) viewed everyday life as a performance. Each character on the front stage presents themselves according to an established set of conditions allowing the audience to expect a certain behavior (Goffman, 1959). A person’s appearance, word choice, delivery of speech, and intended purpose create the front stage performance. Not having the proper setting, stuttering or stumbling through the performance, or not allowing the performance to come to the proper conclusion gives rise to a loss of expressive control (Goffman, 1959). The performer must at all times direct the action as in a well-scripted play.

The concept of social distance comes into the performance as well, providing an example of mystification (Goffman, 1959). Leaders frequently keep distances from their subordinates to express authority while covering intrinsic weaknesses, allowing the mystification (Goffman, 1959). If one does not get too close, one will not see what is not there. Establishing an appearance of authority as an absolute allows the other actors the cue to perform accordingly, creating the mystification.

Goffman explained one further aspect of the performance, the contrivance (Goffman, 1959). In this situation, the performance develops at the hands of the performers to create an unreal show. The script, written very carefully, gives the audience a false picture in order to gain advantage for the performers. Goffman (1959) gave the example of a Russian spy pretending to be a French cook (Goffman, 1959). The performer for purposes of the show is a cook, but while he is a cook, he is secondarily informing as a Russian spy.

The backstage performance stands in complete contradiction to the front stage performance (Goffman, 1959). Backstage, performers adjust costumes to find malfunctions,
performers sequester themselves to hold private conversations, and performers step out of character (Goffman, 1959). A metaphor of backstage and frontstage as explained by Goffman, comes from a restaurant staff. The dining room of a restaurant depicts the waiters and waitresses attentively serving the needs of the customers politely and efficiently. Meanwhile, in the kitchen, we find the waitresses fervently complaining about the customers, encouraging the cook to spit on the food, and watching as the food falls on the floor and is scooped back on to the plate to be served. The waitress takes the plate of food and ever so politely delivers it to the patron who eagerly awaits (Charon, 2004).

Goffman described commonly divided social settings as evidence of the staged character of everyday social life. In his words, most social settings consist of a front region—or front stage—where a performance takes place and a back region—or backstage—“where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted” (Goffman, 1959, p.112). Normal people begin a process they do not want others to know or see in order to cause the elimination of the other (Charon, 2004). In this dramaturgical situation, individuals come to a consensus about one another and the situation guiding their interaction. Like stage actors, social actors enact roles, assume characters, and play through scenes when engaged in interaction with one another (Charon, 2004).

Performers may exploit the dramatic effect of expressions for their own purposes. That is, they may actually control expressions that appear spontaneous and uncontrolled (Charon, 2004). Individuals use their performances to their advantage in real situations, and, as the play begins to change because of the performances of others, individual performers change (Charon, 2004). It is not uncommon for bullies to use nonverbal actions to elicit group behavior. Such things as rolling of the eyes, snorts, smirks, inattentiveness to a speaker, or overt challenging a
speaker all add up to a call to action to further harassment. It may seem spontaneous, but in reality offers a very controlled expression with a purpose (Charon, 2004). The group reacts and molds itself to fit the norm of group expectation while harassment proceeds. Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of social life makes the human actor into an active being who has some control over what takes place in the interaction (Charon, 2004).

Each person involved in harassment makes a conscious choice to be involved, although he or she may be motivated to engage fearing not being involved could result in being the object of harassment (Charon, 2004). The social situation reveals a larger and more fundamental action than a focused conversation. “‘Even when nothing eventful is occurring,’ Goffman concluded, ‘persons in one another’s presence are still nonetheless tracking one another and acting so as to make themselves trackable’” (Collins, 1994, p. 282). Humans do the same things as other animals; they check for possible threats and allies. Harassment follows a pattern of animalistic tendencies true to Goffman’s observations (Collins, 1994). Individuals seek out threats and measure contacts with each other just like animals. The dramaturgical social interaction theory of Goffman provides the perfect explanation of how groups of people who appear normal can become vicious and cunning eliminators of others under the circumstances (Collins, 1994). Goffman’s (1959) theory is a lens through which to view harassment and see normal people behaving in unexpected ways, just as an actor in a production. Although appearing unrelated to harassment, Goffman’s theory may have significant impact and purpose in my study.

Metaphor of Organization as an Organism

Gareth Morgan explained how Max Weber first related parallels between an organization and a mechanism to develop organizational theory (Morgan, 2006). Morgan further explained Weber did not wish to study organizations but rather understand the process of an organization.
Morgan described organizations as a mechanism following Weber’s lead, showing the processes and practices of an organization as if it were a machine within a closed system. Staying true to the machine metaphor seemed less than enough to describe the many variable process and experiences of organizations. Recognizing the limitation of this metaphor, Morgan developed a description of an organism to explain an organization.

The organism metaphor had origins in the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Bertalanffy developed General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1969). He used the example of an organism: “Living organisms are essentially open systems, i.e., systems exchanging matter with their environment” (Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 32). The adaptation of an open system to the environment distinguished Bertalanffy from Weber in defining organizational theory.

Morgan (2006) saw how organisms worked as a unit to deliver the maximum for the whole organism through the work of each of its parts. Burns and Stalker (1961) wrote of a unit which develops to accomplish the tasks necessary to address the concerns of the whole organization: “An industrial concern exists in order to carry out a specific task. To exist at all, a concern employs a number of people. These are assigned to specific bits of the total task” (p. 97). Taking the concerns expressed in Burns and Stalker’s research, Morgan applied the information to the experience of corporate organizations: “It is most evident in the “project” or “matrix” form of organization, which makes use of project teams to deal with the continuous flow of problems and projects associated with changes in corporate policy and the external environment” (Morgan, 2006, p. 45). Recognizing how an organization works within an environment and reacts to the environment, as well as having people involved in accomplishing the objective, the metaphor of an organism fully describes organizations which experience harassment of leaders.
The metaphor of an organism provides the understanding necessary to establish organizational theory as a tool for an explanation of workplace harassment of leaders in organizations. To further refine the theory, I dug deeper into the literature to extract organizational culture and apply this also to the findings within this study.

Organizational Culture

Gareth Morgan (2006) defined culture in *Images of Organization*: “the pattern of development reflected in a society’s system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day rituals” (p. 116). Culture within the organization develops harassment as part of its values and day-to-day rituals. The culture of an organization continually changes with time. Government, religion, the media, and other institutions and individuals shaping opinion play important roles in the process (Morgan, 2006). Culture produces an ongoing process of reality construction. The embodiment of an organization’s culture becomes embedded in routine aspects of everyday. A culture of harassment may fall under “quality improvement” or “customer service” for example. Organizations may find themselves attacking a leader based on values imbedded in the practices of the routine. The organization acts on the basis of those routine elements of day-to-day to judge a leader and determine the quality of their leadership (Morgan, 2006).

Harassment shows the darker side of organizational culture. “Organizations can frustrate and exploit people. Often products are flawed, families are dysfunctional, students fail to learn, patients get worse, and policies backfire” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 6). Organizations are flawed. Organizations may see harassment as an appropriate outcome for the failures and flaws of the organization.

We are at sea whenever our sense-making efforts fail us. If our image of the situation is wrong, our actions will be wide of the mark as well. If we don’t know we’re seeing the
wrong picture, we won’t understand why we’re not getting the results we want. (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 7)

Organizations follow a preconceived notion of what the organization should be. When the notion fails or is flawed, meets unexpected challenges or must change, it allows for harassment of the leader to take place.

Structural design of an organization may lead harassment. Conflict arises from structural design of organizations. “The FBI is housed in the Department of Justice and reports to the attorney general. The CIA reported through the director of central intelligence to the president until 2004, when a re-organization put it under a new director of national intelligence” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 17). Having two separate reporting agencies to different aspects of the greater organization in order to make one combined decision creates the perfect situation for harassment. The structural barriers of the organization establish a physical, let alone intellectual, barrier to effective administration (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

“Believing is seeing” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 36). The brain constructs images of reality to let us understand how the world works. Our mental images affect our behavior subconsciously allowing what we believe to alter reality through behavior. “Beliefs come first, explanations for beliefs follow” (p. 37). An organization can easily accept harassment of leaders as a reality of expected processes. The mental image developed over time to meet the understanding of how the world works. In other words, this is how we treat leaders in this organization.

“Agreement and harmony are easier to achieve when everyone shares similar values, beliefs, and cultural ways” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 190). Scarce resources lead the organization into disharmony and conflict creating a situation where members of the organization see an offense to the culture and values of the organization and look for someone to
blame and eliminate. Change can also create disharmony and conflict underscoring the affront to beliefs and values of the culture with the same result (Bolman & Deal, 2013). A need to find a source to blame develops from the disharmony. Harassment arises through competing groups within the organization articulating preferences and mobilizing power to get what they want to support their view of the culture of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Individual employees strike back at leadership to demonstrate power as well as show displeasure at the circumstances of the situation. Leaders become the targets of social control (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

“The fundamental task facing leaders rests in creating appropriate systems of sharing meaning that can mobilize the efforts of people in pursuit of desired aims and objectives” (Morgan, 2006, p. 142). People can refuse to share or agree to systems and dispute the meaning. The image of reality for them abrogates the system implemented by the leader. The individuals find the need to react, challenge and eliminate the source of discord (Morgan, 2006).

Schein defined culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (1992, p.12). The definition of culture by Bolman and Deal shows “how we do things here.” Given the definition, culture becomes the avenue where harassment appears acceptable, including harassment of leadership.

Organizations exhibit various behaviors that lend themselves as clues to harassment of leadership. Refusal to change, attacking the objective as not in the best interests of the organization, or refusing to change to required budgetary limits on expenditure of resources, all lead to conflict with management and leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013). If the individuals in
the organization see leadership as violating their beliefs, values, and ideology, they feel obligated to remove the leader. Harassment accomplishes the deed without bloodshed, due process, or legal expense.

**Coming to Grips with Loss Theory**

Cummings (2015) introduced “coming to grips with loss theory,” developed from Kubler-Ross’s earlier theory regarding death and dying. Kubler-Ross (1969) researched the experience of individuals who faced terminal illness, developing a process theory for handling loss. Kubler-Ross (1969) provided five stages of grief to make sense of the behavior of terminal patients. Denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance identify the five stages. When faced with a patient-physician discussion regarding a terminal illness, the patient’s first reaction remains one of shock and denial (Kubler-Ross, 1969). The individual processing the loss shares anger at “why me,” moving through a phase of, “if I change and behave can this be stopped.” Individuals become depressed when confronted by the knowledge they will most likely not live. Finally, the individual accepts his/her fate and finds peace (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Each of these stages may apply to other forms of loss as well but primarily describes loss from terminal illness or end of life (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

I chose to apply a new theory regarding loss with an emphasis on recovery and the ability to normalize grief. Coming to grips with loss theory by Kate Cummings (2015) informs my study and also offers a pathway for victims of harassment to find recovery. Coming to grips with loss theory differs from other researchers’ work because it explains how people traverse the process of resolving any significant loss, not only death (Cummings, 2015). Five simple stages create the basis of this theory: discovering, assessing, mourning, coping, and resolving (Cummings, 2015).
Many sufferers of loss may not know they have a loss or are in denial of the loss, thus the first stage of the process is to discern or discover the actual loss (Cummings, 2015). Loss comes in many types (Cummings, 2015). When losses are expected, individuals can prepare for the loss. Unexpected losses such as sudden job loss, death, or accidental injury traumatize the victim with a total loss of control (Cummings, 2015). Loss can be external or internal (Cummings, 2015). Externally, individuals might lose a job or position in a community, while internal loss might be the loss of peace of mind, social status, or self-sufficiency. Discerning a loss could be immediate or gradual, permanent or temporary, direct or vicarious, mutual, or a sense of impending doom (Cummings, 2015). Each condition discovered with the loss affects how individuals proceed to the next stage. Individuals may find themselves struggling to make a choice, stuck in the “what if” scenario: what if they had done something differently (Cummings, 2015).

Sufferers of loss frequently have cascading losses, each flowing over the other, making it appear as if it might be insurmountable and all-consuming (Cummings, 2015). One loss leads to another loss and another loss, causing some victims to believe coping with the losses will require more energy and resources than they can afford. Knowing these feelings are a normal part of the process will hopefully encourage the individual to move forward on the path to recovery (Cummings, 2015). Once individuals determine the loss, they can assess the severity of the loss and prioritize it within their life (Cummings, 2015).

Assessing loss requires individuals to give value to the loss (Cummings, 2015). The second stage of “coming to grips with loss theory” offers a perspective of each victim’s personal life story. The combination of events, attitudes, and perspectives add up and interact to affect how individuals view values, abilities, and overall life (Cummings, 2015). Factors such as
biological state, emotional state, spirituality, personal history, available resources, cultural conditions, physical environment, and political conditions create the basis for assessment of loss (Cummings, 2015). How individuals experience loss is measured against these life experiences and allows them to assess loss.

Mourning loss occurs while the victim assesses the loss (Cummings, 2015) and the feelings related to loss. This mourning stage may contain a host of various feelings ranging from sadness to anger. Everyone experiences emotions at various degrees or intensities. Victims’ responses may include feelings of going through the motions, distorted sensations, diffusion of feelings, depression, anger, carrying of feelings, transience of feelings, acceptance, settling in, and a sense of hope (Cummings, 2015). The length and intensity of mourning depends on a variety of factors including the victims’ resources of support, their mental health, and family and friends (Cummings, 2015). Processing mourning may lead to developing coping strategies to address and deal with loss.

“Coping strategies are actions that people perform to deal with or attempt to overcome problems and difficulties” (Cummings, 2015, p. 45). Victims make a decision on how they will respond to loss by sorting, allocating energy, prioritizing situations and devising a reaction to the situation (Cummings, 2015). Two basic ways of coping entail delaying until the victim can withstand the emotional climate of the loss or taking action to resolve the feelings of loss. Delaying may include strategies of insulating, trapping, carrying the burden, armoring, degenerating, dropping out, or self-harm (Cummings, 2015). Insulating manifests itself in such behavior as circumventing, deflecting, substance use, façade maintenance, holing up and self-talk. Trapping maintains emotional constriction limiting the feelings of normal life. Carrying the burden fixes the responsibility on the individual living with loss (Cummings, 2015).
Armoring offers self-protection to avoid being further disappointed. Degenerating allows the individual to backslide or revert to mourning again. Dropping-out gives the individual the option of withdrawing from normal life (Cummings, 2015). Self-harm projects the ultimate negative response to loss, inflicting pain to overcome loss (Cummings, 2015).

The resolving stage creates coping strategies that progress to normal functionality and the ability to come to grips (Cummings, 2015). The resolving stage has four processes: stabilizing, making sense, internalizing, and salvaging (Cummings, 2015). People will probably not use all of these processes, but options allow people to respond to feelings in a constructive manner (Cummings, 2015).

To stabilize, individuals must establish safety. This may require outside support to meet the needs of the individual (Cummings, 2015). The victims may need to routinize their day or find a new normal while compartmentalizing unrelated issues. Making sense of the loss requires understanding of how an individual explains the loss. Victims can ruminate on the reasons and come to an understanding of the loss or they may get stuck in this process. It may require sharing the journey with others to find the explanation (Cummings, 2015). Individuals may also research authoritative documents to find answers or seek spiritual guidance to find peace in their new situation.

Internalizing provides an adjustment to the changes in one’s life due to loss (Cummings, 2015). This adjustment may include reprioritizing one’s actions or questing for a new understanding of one’s life. Due to the interconnectedness of loss with other people, individuals might shift relationships or positions within relationships (Cummings, 2015). They may need to pace themselves, to take baby steps in order to come to grips with the loss. Individuals may rise above loss through connections to proven sources. Victims may have practiced coping skills in
the past to deal with loss. Many sufferers seek validation from others to prove recovery (Cummings, 2015).

The salvaging stage means extracting something good from a bad situation (Cummings, 2015). Many individuals look back on their lives in retrospect as a source of healing. Victims will recreate themselves, not knowing what they want but knowing what they do not want. They may develop a new perspective to becoming a more complete and normalized individual (Cummings, 2015). Workplace harassment culminates in loss. Much of my study will support the connection of loss and harassment.

The next chapter provides the methodological framework of my study. The process of designing the research, recruiting participants, and analyzing the data from the extensive interviews exists in the following chapter. The design of the chapter also provides the process to insure validity and reliability within the research data. It also addresses the ethical concerns of researcher with the sensitive nature of workplace harassment.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I investigated the lived experience of harassment victims serving as chief executive officers. My study concerned how leaders made meaning of their harassment experience while serving in public leadership roles. In this chapter I explain how I conducted my study. First, I adopted qualitative research methods, and used phenomenology to investigate the experience of workplace harassment (Creswell, 2013). After selecting phenomenology, I next considered the sensitive nature of workplace harassment. Only one-on-one personal interviews extract meaningful data from leaders who have lived the experience of harassment. To discern the high-quality information available from an individual’s experience, the researcher must witness the answers to the questions as they take shape.

The researcher has a significant role in the progress of the research. Before I took up the mantle of researcher, I recognized my own biases and place in the research. I experienced harassment and reflected on how this experience affected my view of each leader who participated in the study.

IRB approval remained essential for the safety, confidentiality, privacy, and ethical treatment of human participants. Before I conducted any research, the full IRB application process and approval allowed participants those safeguards. I recruited harassed leaders through a process of connecting each participant through the introduction of a mutual acquaintance. Each person needed to hold a leadership position, have experienced harassment as defined in this study, and consent to tell his/her story.

The interview process provided the essential elements of data which inform this study. It required time, patience, restraint, and attention to every detail in order to tell the story of harassment and why harassment of leaders follows its own path. The importance of
confidentiality and careful storage of all data remained essential to safeguarding the participants. The data from harassed leaders contained sensitive information that required protection.

I collected the data and processed the information into a clear analysis with the help of analytical theories. The theories provided a framework to make sense of the experiences of the leaders. Validity and reliability become critical parts of each participant’s story. The process of collection produces the validity and reliability in the study. The next section explains the selection of qualitative research and phenomenology.

**Qualitative Research**

Creswell (2013) explained two traditions of research: qualitative and quantitative methods. Researchers using quantitative methods utilize numeric relationships to explain their study. Statistics and variables provide understanding within a quantitative study. Quantitative studies created deductive processes and can be easily replicated. Such a study provides analysis which compares, explains cause and effect, and measures to test a hypothesis. Workplace harassment of leaders cannot be easily quantified. An in-depth study of the phenomenon of workplace harassment does not lend itself to quantitative methods because the experience of harassment affects individuals differently.

Qualitative research methods allowed me to investigate human experiences where there are unknown variables (Creswell, 2013). “Qualitative researchers’ goal is to better understand human behavior and experiences. They seek to grasp the process by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are” (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007, p. 43). Qualitative research methods permitted me to limit constraints or predetermined categories of analysis. A greater concern with process allowed me the opportunity to negotiate meaning from the data.
Qualitative research fostered my ability to observe phenomena and find patterns from themes, categories and concepts.

Bogdan and Biklin (2007) noted five characteristics of qualitative research. All qualitative studies do not necessarily match all characteristics to an equal degree. Some studies may lack individual characteristics with only one or two being fully developed but the study remains qualitative. The five characteristics described by Bogdan and Biklin included the following:

- Naturalistic – researchers develop context and historical circumstances
- Descriptive Data – data contain detailed quotations from transcripts and field notes, nothing is trivial
- Concern with Process – concern with process not only outcomes and products
- Inductive – abstracts are built as particulars are gathered and grouped using the data
- Meaning – how people make sense of their lives, participant perspectives. (p. 4-8)

Qualitative research is naturalistic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2013). For example, qualitative researchers do not rely on questions or instruments created by others. Instead, researchers develop questions asked in a private setting, and answered by participants selected for the study. Detailed interviews explaining the circumstances of the participants, collected by the researcher, allowed a more naturalistic approach to my study.

Qualitative research must be descriptive—the data takes the form of words, quotes, and observations rather than numbers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I provided detailed descriptions of participant responses. “Qualitative researchers’ approach demands the world be examined with the assumption . . . nothing is trivial . . . [,] everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5).

Process played an important role in this qualitative study (Maxwell, 2012). My study focused on the process of the phenomenon of workplace harassment of leaders. I sought to
answer questions such as, “How do leaders negotiate meaning of harassment?” or “How does the organization respond?” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 22). The process provides understanding rather than focusing only on outcomes and products.

My study did not involve proving a hypothesis; rather, the data from my study produced a description of workplace harassment from the bottom up, inductively. The many pieces of interconnected data allow me to develop a picture of the phenomenon. The picture took shape as I collected data, examined the parts, and identified patterns. The direction of the analysis developed after data collection. Patterns emerged, and I found meaning by sorting and combining disparate pieces of collected evidence.

I felt concerned with capturing the meaning put forth by participants under study. Studying the participants’ experience with harassment with qualitative research methods allow me to capture the human experience and find meaning in the data by paying attention to detail. Great concern for capturing participant perspectives accurately created lengthy dialogues between the participants and me. To fully develop the research, I used various strategies to gather data, achieve understanding, and ascribe meaning.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology served as the best theoretical research method for my study because phenomenology explores the lived human experience. As a qualitative research theory, phenomenology focuses on the life of the individual and analyzes individual experiences with regard to a universal phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I explored the phenomenon of workplace harassment by using the experience of others, and then creating clear descriptions of the harassment events. Phenomenology allowed the inclusion of composite descriptions of the events and contained the “what” and “how” of the experience (Creswell, 2013).
Moustakas (1994) referred to the phenomenological approach as providing “a logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience” (p. 47). An individual constructs a full description of his/her conscious experience through a reflective process (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon became clarified by considering and reconsidering the experience in reflective processes. The leaders used the process of perceiving and reflecting on acts to know their meaning in their experience and their relationship to themselves (Moustakas, 1994). “Intentional experience incorporates a real content and an ideal content, in and through which we dwell in thought, perception, memory, judgement and feeling, in order to comprehend its essences” (p. 55). Phenomenology focused on how individuals make meaning, including the nature of individuals’ experiences and/or perceptions of those experiences.

Personal interviews served as the essential data collection source for conducting this study. Each individual’s experience informed the research under phenomenological methods. Phenomenological research recorded and examined the individual’s explanation of reality. Not every account of an individual’s story required full recounting, but rather I focused on the experience of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Data collection and analysis provided awareness, and new knowledge of the participants’ perceptions of reality. Understanding workplace harassment required substantial discernment of the events described to understand and make meaning of each individual’s experience. I collected and analyzed the data with the goal of producing new awareness and knowledge of the phenomena.

Bogdan and Biklin (2007) recognized the value of the researcher’s insight as part of the analysis. The participant and I viewed the phenomena at the same time as participants in the dialogue and experience; researchers and participants share a role in conducting the study.
(Maxwell, 2012). I understood the potential of bias and limited its effect by engaging in reflection (Creswell, 2013). The emphasis of phenomenology required me to suspend my assumptions and judgments of the lived experience studied (Moustakas, 1994).

**Role of the Researcher**

Until I became a victim of workplace harassment, I had no concept of it. My career followed a succession of positions of increased responsibility. As the levels of responsibility grew, my exposure to hostile environments grew as well. Bullying and harassment appeared frequently among lower-level jobs, but I found the harassment experience to be as prevalent in upper management (if not more prevalent than at entry level). How the harassment revealed itself changed from a more overt and possibly physical expression at an entry level to more subtle use of hostile language and unethical behavior at the leadership level. My experience caused me to study the nature of workplace harassment of leaders.

The call for efficiency and high-level outcomes at top levels of management results in the demand for leaders to produce unrealistic feats of performance. I recognized the difficulty leaders faced from hostile work environments and bullying employers, this helped me interpret collect and analyze data. I recognized the delicate nature of gaining the trust of harassment victims. I asked them to tell their story and describe a difficult experience. Victims appeared either unwilling or not ready to speak on the subject. My experience suffering from harassment allowed me an opportunity to share my understanding their experience and offer a safe way to disclose a very personal, difficult experience.

I also recognized the inherent bias resulting because of my harassment experience. I carefully listened and questioned the participants without injecting my bias. I attempted to objectively study the subjective state of the participants (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). I did not pass
judgement on the participants but rather listened to them carefully and collected data about their experience.

I attempted to control for bias in my study very carefully. As a leader who was a victim of harassment, my involvement in the narrative held a particular challenge. To avoid shaping the data through the interview questions and interaction, I needed to remain vigilant about my reactions and involvement in participant descriptions. I created field notes about my behavior, reactions, and feelings to avoid influencing my participants. As I recognized bias in my behavior, I checked and also noted any effect it caused. Mental preparation before each interview reduced bias in the presentation of questions or topic areas. I committed to conducting a clear and methodical interview to provide the best possible data for this study.

**IRB Approval**

I prepared and submitted the appropriate forms and the study application to the University of Saint Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approved my study. Appendix A of this study provides a copy of the approval letter from the IRB. Appendix B shows a copy of the consent form for the study, which meets the ethical requirements related to the protection of participants. To keep all participants secure and comfortable in sharing their experience, I provided safeguards to assure their information was secure and private. Participants completed a thorough, informed consent form to assure their willingness to freely participate in the study. Due to the sensitive, personal nature of harassment, I informed the participants of any possible conflict of interest in the collection of the data. I thoroughly reviewed the possibility of conflict and offered the option for participants to remove themselves from the study. No participant asked to be removed.
I used pseudonyms for all participants and used these names throughout the process; no connection to the actual name can be found in this study. All interview materials and transcripts remain secure and private. All electronic files remain in a password protected computer as well as paper remains in a locked cabinet. I will destroy all materials, transcripts, and recordings one year from this study. All electronic files and recordings will be permanently deleted following the same one year period.

The informed consent form assured participants regarding my effort to ensure their experience remained confidential. This avoids any threat to their current employment or any other aspect of their career. Each participant responded to a set of questions to determine their level of understanding of consent form as shown in Appendix C. I informed all participants of the need to gain their consent to participate, and the volunteer nature of this study. The willing participants voluntarily signed the consent form to proceed with the face-to-face interview. I shared the interview questions in advance with the participants before meeting participants and conducting the interviews. This allowed them time to determine their comfort level with the research project. Questions for the interview are found in Appendix D. The questions allowed for some general information (a warm-up), and then proceeded to more specific topic-related questions.

**Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

Administrators, chief executive officers, or individuals holding significant authority over organizations provided the base of participants in my study. Following IRB approval, I began recruiting participants. Finding participants who experienced harassment proved challenging. Individuals frequently believed they experienced harassment when they had not. For example, an administrator who experienced discipline and removal from his/her position for cause does
not meet the definition for harassment. In the case of employee discipline, if they had due process and committed a terminating offense, it would not fit this study. I found it extremely important to recruit harassed individuals based on my adopted definition of harassment. Participants needed to hold a leadership position which interacted with a governing board, and clear harassment needed to have occurred.

I used purposeful selection to select and recruit participants for my study. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore selected a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). Adopting purposeful selection allowed for deliberate selection of participants to provide information not readily available from other sources (Maxwell, 2013). Four goals arise from purposeful selection: First, the participant held representativeness for the individuals in the study. Second, the participant captured the heterogeneity of the population being studied. Third, the researcher examined participants representing the critical theories studied in the research. Fourth, the researcher established particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between participants (Maxwell, 2013)

The recruitment and selection process proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated, causing me to adopt a “snow ball” recruiting approach (Creswell, 2013). “Snowballing identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (Creswell, 2013, p. 127). As I interviewed a referred participant, a harassed leader, I would ask if they knew of anyone else who might fit the study. Each participant responded affirmatively. When I asked if they would contact the person or share a name to solicit them for the study, they refused.
The universe of harassed leaders remained closed. Somewhat like a fraternity, those having experienced harassment declined to expose their brother or sister. I used a variety of methods to find participants by any means possible within reason. I used networks of associates, church friends, and work colleagues to locate participants. I also used other less structured means of recruitment, such as reading news articles. I typically found someone associated with a potential participant, and they discussed my study of harassed leaders with them. This strategy became the standard method of recruitment and approach. Thirteen participants agreed to participate. The stories and insights of the participants produced rich, full data to fully develop this study.

Table 3 below provides a listing of all the participants, the pseudonym which represents them, and some professional data regarding them. Nearly all the participants hold higher level degrees of education, and they have years of experience in the field. Unfortunately, regardless if a leader has a few employees or hundreds of employees, he/she experienced harassment.

Table 3. Participants in Workplace Harassment of Leaders Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Career Field</th>
<th>Leadership Position</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Number of Employees Supervised</th>
<th>Career Outcome Following Harassment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roxie</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Asst. Superintendent</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>Left Education Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Ed.S.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Ed.S.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Ed.S.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Unemployed - Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Retired - Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Govt. Dept. Admin.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Remained in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>Higher Ed.</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Still Serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Higher Ed.</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Still Serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Ed.S.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Still Serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Left Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>no degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Still Serving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E provided a script used with participants identified and recommended. In most cases, the participants required more than one visit with me to fully consent to the interview. Leaders frequently did not believe they experienced harassment. They thought the experience reflects the responsibilities of the job. Many participants felt the harassment was part of normal behavior. Using the script and explaining parts of the existing literature on harassment made it possible to encourage leaders to participate in the study. I described the potential for bias due to my previous knowledge and relationship to some participants. It is a small state, and I was acquainted with some participants; however, I would not call any of them close associates, merely acquaintances.

I interviewed 13 workplace harassment victims suffering from the effects of bullying or mobbing. The rich nature of the experiences of these individuals provided significant data to analyze and develop my study. Creswell (2013) recommended interviewing between 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomena to inform a phenomenological study. Due to the nature of workplace harassment, I found identifying participants required significant effort but produced more than sufficient data to inform my study.

**Research Design**

Interviewing served as the primary method of data collection in this qualitative study. Interviewing allowed me the opportunity to hear and interact with participants while learning about their harassment experience. Phenomenology necessitated the use of relatively long, in-depth interviews to gather the lived experience of the participant. I used standard interview questions to guide the interviews, adopting a semi-structured approach to using planned questions (Moustakas, 1994). Questions for the interview appear in Appendix D. The phenomenological approach allowed me to deviate from the interview questions to gather
additional, related data. I utilized the simple open questions from Appendix D and found the participants more than capable of providing many details.

**Data Collection**

I chose face-to-face interviews as the data collection method. The information I sought was complex as well as very personal in nature. I needed to interact with participants to understand the context of the experience and to negotiate a research relationship (Maxwell, 2013). I adopted the following open-ended questions to use as a basic structure for the interviews:

1. Please tell me about your experience of workplace harassment? Describe this experience in story form, beginning with your circumstances, and the event or experience first identified as a form of harassment. Please include details about this experience, such as who participated in this event and their role (board member, employee, member of the public, etc.).

2. Describe the types of harassment experienced from the beginning until the end of this experience. Finally, describe the effects of this experience on your personal and professional life.

3. Please describe what you learned about workplace harassment and how you might help others to prevent or respond to workplace harassment.

I shared the general questions prior to the interview (Appendix D) and provided a paper copy of the questions available at the interview session. I provided a general intake form in advance. Appendix F is an example of the intake form used to gather information about each participant. I asked more questions during some interview to gather the richest data. All participants signed a consent form prior to being interviewed. No participants declined to finish
the interview or felt any undue emotional stress. The interviews sometimes become emotional, but the participant and I managed the experience well. Each participant thanked me for being allowed to participate in the study. As difficult as the recalling of incidents of harassment were to participants, they thought sharing their story and including it in the research made the experience worthwhile.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

As previously described, I carefully coded the content of each interview with pseudonyms and secured both electronic and paper files with a password or locked cabinet. The human subject’s information remained completely confidential and private to the researcher and the participant throughout the study.

To protect the identity of study participants I assigned each individual a pseudonym. The interview narratives were collected in face-to-face interviews lasting approximately 30-90 minutes. Voice recordings and notes were collected from interviews. I recorded the interview after gaining permission from participants. All interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist signed a transcription confidentiality agreement (see Appendix F), and I kept a copy of the agreement in a locked file cabinet.

I stored interviews as a separate recorded digital file, labeled with a pseudonym. Additionally, I stored data collected through note taking, voice recording, and transcription in a secured locked file cabinet and/or on my password protected personal computer.

A paper copy of the field notes collected during the interview is provided as a secondary data storage method. Field notes increased the accuracy of the transcribing. A paper or electronic draft of the transcribed interview was provided to the participant for accuracy, correction, and for any additional comments. No participants provided corrections or additions to
the interview transcripts. I did not share information with anyone that linked an individual’s name to an individual response without written permission from the participant. No actual names of individuals appear in the dissertation; I used pseudonyms when using quotes or describing an individual’s story.

I maintained digital files on a secure personal computer. I backed up all digital audio files and transcribed interviews on a portable hard drive for the duration of this research project. I allowed only my dissertation committee chair access to the data. All data, both paper and digital, and all backups will be destroyed within one year following the approval of my study.

I offered each participant access to the completed study. Upon completion and publication of this study I will provide a link to the digital copy. I will make this study available to them by contacting participants by e-mail or in-person visits.

I did my best to ensure anonymity. The nature of this study makes absolute anonymity impossible. I knew some of the participants. Some public articles regarding individuals with similar experiences exist with some notoriety in the community. The story may well be familiar to some. I did my best to mitigate risk by describing results in terms of trends, patterns, and summary statements.

Data Analysis

The transcriptions allowed me to analyze the narratives, identify themes, and develop composite descriptions of the phenomena of my study. The data provided was detailed, personal, and complex with a lot of data. I created categories after I collected all the data. Pre-established categories were not used to create quantitative frequency (Maxwell, 2013). I made no assumptions prior to data collection and avoided biasing my data analysis.
I used the data analysis steps proposed by Creswell (2013) from the steps originally created by Moustakas. First, I described my personal experiences with the phenomena of harassment. By doing this, I attempted to set aside my personal experiences and biases. Second, I developed a list of significant statements from the interview data. I grouped these statements into themes. Once I identified the themes, I wrote a detailed description of the experiences of the participants of the harassment phenomena. I explained what happened to each participant in the harassment experience described in the interview. I used significant statements or phrases from the interviews to give context. I grouped the explanations and statements into meaningful units to inform the study. I paid close attention to how the participant experienced the harassment to develop an essence of how it occurred. I also wanted to clearly understand the final impact of the experience.

As I reviewed the data I analyzed and applied analytical theory to interpret the data. I used these theories to provide a lens for extracting meaning from the harassment experience. Using the lived experience of individuals created context and understanding of harassment and its effects on the victims.

**Validity and Reliability**

This study examined the experiences of 13 individual victims of workplace harassment. The transcribed interview data was analyzed according to commonly used qualitative research methods. Validity and reliability are defined differently in qualitative research. Maxwell (2013) described his meaning of validity: “I use validity in a fairly straight-forward, commonsense way to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 122). Merriam (1998) described validity as the “internal validity [that] deals with the question of how research findings match reality” (p. 201). Validity
questions whether researcher observes or measures what they think they are observing or measuring. Explaining potential biases helps to prevent problems of validity (Maxwell, 2013). Eliminating bias in a research study appears impossible, but understanding a researcher’s background, experiences, values, and expectations may account for potential bias, and help to further validate the study.

The issue of reactivity may influence validity of research. Reactivity is the influence of the researcher on the interview participants or on the setting (Merriam, 1998). To mitigate the possibility of reactivity, I created a comfortable setting and private location for the interviews to eliminate distractions. Frequently the interviews were conducted in conference rooms at the public library or our local Public University Center where anonymity could be maintained. I remained very quiet and did not interject during the interview. The participant and I stayed on script with the interview questions. I encouraged participants to share their story but did not offer comment until the interview ended.

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research replication becomes difficult if not impossible. As researchers interview human subjects, the researcher seeks to describe the human experience that is unique and every changing (Merriam, 1998). The question of reliability is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 1998, p. 206).

All 13 participants in this study provided a unique story, enriching the data for this study. The stories described different situations but revealed patterns showing similarities. Participants understood harassment evolves continually, which made replication of the research ever changing with the phenomena. The repetitive nature of harassment allowed for comparison of
the situations as well as the opportunity to apply to future cases. Leaving an audit trail provided a method of authenticating how the researcher arrived at the results. Explaining the process of analysis allowed independent judges to authenticate the findings (Merriam, 1998).

**Research Ethics**

The majority of participants of this study continue to live and work in the immediate area. Each participant of this study worked/works with the public in his/her chosen career. Each participant has experienced loss and continues to suffer. Each participant in the study continues to serve the public even though the public has caused personal suffering for him/her. The public continues to see leaders as having ultimate power and not vulnerable to harassment. As they say, “that’s why you get paid the big bucks.” In other words, the public feels they paid for the leader’s suffering.

Being aware of the extreme need for confidentiality and privacy demanded extreme care in producing the research. Society may not see vulnerability but as a researcher I must. In order to address this fragile population and provide understanding of the issues, the research proceeded with the highest ethics and integrity. The next chapter compiled the data of the shared experiences of the participants. The detailed stories of harassment and how each participant experienced it follow within a reference to the causes of harassment. Three themes create the understanding of the experiences which cause harassment. Personnel conflicts create the first cause. Financial challenges provide us the second and systems change efforts completes the documented causes.


CHAPTER 4: CAUSES OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT FOR LEADERS

Harassment has an initial cause. After interviewing harassed leaders, I identified common categories for harassment events. Personnel conflict, financial challenges, and systems change efforts constitute the primary causes for a harassment episode. Individual harassment cases may include more than one category contributing to the harassment, but each case has a primary cause with possible additional cause factors. The other factors may contribute additional cause with the evolution of the phenomenon of harassment for that leader. Personnel conflict presented the most common harassment cause.

**Personnel Conflict**

The first category of harassment relates to personnel. Employee issues are the most common cause of harassment. Regardless whether that employee holds a subordinate position, superior or governing board position, or work associate position, the relationship creates a hostile environment which escalates into harassment. From nine of thirteen interviews of harassed leaders, personnel conflict caused the harassment. The following descriptions of leaders speaking in their own words about their workplace harassment provide data regarding personnel issues becoming harassment.

**Subordinate**

Bill held the position of superintendent in the same small school district in the upper Midwest for 25 years. He achieved success as a leader and provided great service to his district and community as well as held high regard from his peers. Many fellow administrators in neighboring districts began their career as a subordinate of Bill’s. Practitioners in the field valued Bill’s opinion and frequently followed his suggestions.
As Bill searched for a new elementary principal, he faced a hiring decision. A local community member with children in the school system, who frequently challenged decisions of the school district, applied for the position. Bill stated it this way regarding hiring the position:

Nancy didn’t get the job, and according to her husband, the person that got the job got it because I needed a drinking buddy. He (the successful applicant) had twenty-two years of experience as a superintendent and principal, and he was the best choice . . . worst person in the world according to her. So now all of a sudden there’s nothing right about anything ever.

Nancy became the most difficult patron in the district, making it nearly impossible for Bill to do his job. The employee that did not get hired created the harassment. Each day brought a new harassment situation.

Jake became the chief administrator of a private school in the upper Midwest at a very young age. The Christian school imparted strong Christian values and promoted the school environment as Christ centered. As he settled into the school, he realized the need to make personnel changes in order to improve the school and address several parent complaints and student issues. The need to remove an incompetent long-time employee consumed Jake’s time.

The employee engaged the Christian community of the school to attack Jake and paint him with the brush of incompetence and un-Christian behavior. Jake described,

There was one employee that was a major, major issue. It got so bad that I remember thinking it was the same year that my Dad passed away. I remember thinking, “How can a situation at school be ten times more bothersome than my own Dad dying?”

Following due process regarding progressive discipline, Jake met numerous times with the employee who objected to every discipline or correction. She refused to agree to a plan of improvement. Jake related,

She just went off on the e-mail saying that nobody ever trusted me. I heard a lot of like ‘Everybody thinks that you’re a bad leader or nobody ever trusts you.’ And stuff like that. It was four people that hated me and over 100 that were legitimately good, solid relationships that still are today.
The employee frequently resorted to social media to rally her supporters and encourage fellow harassers. She wrote, “I know that God has everything under control, but I seriously believe—I seriously think that the administration of the school is a cult and they’ve all made a pact to say, ‘Thanks for the information.’”

Paula received an appointment as executive director of a statewide professional licensing commission after a highly successful career in member service organizations. She served in a wide variety of non-profit organizations starting at the entry level and rising to executive director. Her expert management skills as well as her ability to direct a governing board made her a perfect choice for this licensing commission. The commission operates independently under a governing board but has an affiliation with the state for legal review and advice. The state does a review of the executive directors of the commissions to ensure proper and consistent procedure. Paula modeled exemplary service for the commission and had glowing reviews. She had six very successful years guiding the actions of the commission having little or no controversy. Paula stated, “I didn’t really realize anything was going on until one day I get this e-mail from the state that said I needed to come to the state office at two o’clock.”

An employee of Paula’s at the commission, Rita, complained to the state regarding Paula, claiming she required Rita to do her (Paula’s) work, she didn’t respect the staff, and she demanded the staff complete personal tasks. The accusation included a variety of other claims that were simply not true. After a confrontational meeting with the state human resource director and the state commission supervisor, the state reprimanded Paula and placed her on a plan of improvement. Paula was devastated, but the state believed the accusations and would do no further investigation. Paula found in a later conversation with a fellow employee, “Rita was texting the state all the time.” The state commission supervisor was a personal friend of Rita’s
husband. Rita had complained to everyone. Paula continued, “Rita had called every commission member and had called all three (licensing) inspectors. No one had ever said anything to me about it.” Rita had also developed a personal friendship with a commission board member who happened to live in the same community as Rita. Another commission member developed a friendship with Rita during commission meetings, beyond a professional relationship.

At a commission meeting where Paula could not attend and Rita sat in her place, obvious measures took place, resulting in a third commission member calling Paula, saying, “You need to watch your back,” but not giving any details. Paula didn’t understand until the discipline process was in place. Paula explained, “So I think there was a little behind the scenes stuff, if we can get rid of Paula, Rita can advance to director, to my knowledge, to make more money.” The actions of a subordinate placed a process in motion to harass a successful, well-meaning executive director until she would leave or be forced from her position.

Superior – Governing Board

Frank enjoyed a successful career in education working his way to a superintendent position in a small district in the upper Midwest. He served successfully for six years in the district before he experienced a situation regarding an employee that spiraled into a terminal battle. His relationship with the school board and the micromanaging of the school board president limited his ability to perform the duties of superintendent, resulting in Frank leaving his position of leadership.

Frank explained his situation working with the school board president: “The board president was always calling me . . . claimed the coach had a drinking problem, wondered if he got to school on time. The kids would all come over to the coach’s place and he would drink in front of them.” The coach’s son played on the team and held close friendships with all the
players, frequently inviting his friends to his house. Frank continued, “The board president thought his nephews were the greatest basketball players in the state. And, without a doubt, the coach’s son was one of the premier players in the state. They (the students) loved him (the coach) and he was a great coach.” The board president didn’t feel his nephews got enough court time. He insisted if his nephews had as much time as the coach’s son, they would hold all-state individual titles as well. Bill concluded, “The board president says to me, “If the coach is not gone at the end of this year, you will be.”

Eli accepted a position with a nonprofit educational organization as the new executive director with a local board and a national organization. The national organization sought change at the local chapter level; the local organization wanted to remain the same. Conflict arose from change initiated by Eli, the new executive director. While serving in this leadership capacity, Eli accepted an opportunity to provide consulting services to a grant with full permission of his local board of directors and the national organization. When questions arose related to the grant which Eli provided consulting, Eli appeared implicated. No proof or correlating data developed.

The local individuals who wished to remain static took the opportunity to attack:

There were some behind the scenes. You’ve got strong financial supporters, if they call (the national organization) and they have given X amount of big dollars over the 25 years, well, people are going to call them back and hear them out. They called all the way up to the national president. They really came after me at that point and said this is our opportunity to get the new guy that we’ve, you know, we’ve been battling with a bit.

Prior to this attack, the board recommended a new young gentleman for the position of development director. Eli stated what the board explained to him: “This is the guy that we should hire. He, you know, loves the organization, knows what it’s about. He’s raised money, you know.” Eli recognized an opportunity, “a great opportunity for me to show that I valued, you know, donors and previous donors, people within the organization and so I said, ‘Okay.
Let’s do it.” Eli later identified the new development director was promised by some board members, “when we get Eli to move on, you’ll be the director.”

Sally became the CEO of a specialty hospital after progressing successfully up the ladder of health care. She served in several positions of direct patient care as well as managing others in direct care. Sally managed the residency program of a medical school for a time but felt she could serve more in another capacity. She accepted a position with a rehabilitation center within the specialty hospital, allowing her to provide a greater service and promote change in the organization. While serving in this management position as part of the leadership team, Sally received an offer to become the CEO. The board presented the current CEO in a very negative light. Sally turned down the offer but continued to serve in her management capacity. After witnessing several candidates, none possessing the skill set necessary to really succeed, Sally decided, “I never thought I wanted this job, but maybe I can do it.” Sally also recognized shortly after taking the CEO position a problem within the structure.

Before Sally could start her duties, the foundation board changed by-laws to make them equal to the hospital board. The foundation president acted as a peer to the CEO. When the hospital board became fully aware of the changes, conflict developed between the boards. Sally shared, “It got to a point where there was no way to win because this board and this board weren’t getting along, and then it got to the point where the people that I thought were my allies, I couldn’t trust.”

Then Sally developed the core problem:

There was one senior staff member that I found not pulling her weight. And I initiated a progressive discipline process, I had HR supporting me through this process, I was communicating with my executive committee and they were basically stopping it. . . . They blocked me from terminating her. The reason why was she had been with the organization twelve years and was like a sacred cow.
Every decision from this point forward became suspect, and progress slowed.

Kathy accepted a position as a superintendent of a smaller school district in a western state. She held several administrative positions over her career and successfully, progressively developed into a veteran senior administrator. Changes in Kathy’s life story led her to this western state and her interest in improvement and school improvement led her to this district. Under state sanctions, this district required a significant school improvement plan. Creating and implementing this plan generated confrontation and conflict. A turn of events which can only be described as politics occurred.

Early in Kathy’s administration, the district held a school board election. Kathy explained,

Interestingly, one of the new board members turned out to be my secretary who had been fired from the school district the year before . . . I had chosen to place a lot of trust in her . . . You know it was just real bizarre, and she was on the board, I had no sense of what she was planning or might do.

Kathy continued, “Later looking back on it, I think she probably tried to remove me from the superintendency.”

A group of teachers began pushing back on the changes of the improvement plans while the board member saw a chance. “The board president took it upon herself to think that she is the person coming in, the knight in shining armor that was going to get me out of there so they could improve and do better because I was an outsider.” Kathy defended the teachers, saying, “It’s kind of like they were so dysfunctional, so absolutely dysfunctional that what they did they thought was right. And what this board member was doing she thought was right.” Every decision Kathy made from this point forward required extreme effort. “I really wondered who was in on what, who knew what, who was going through the back door.” Efforts to remove Kathy spanned three years but ultimately resulted in her leaving the district.
Work Associate

Sam received an appointment as a branch campus CEO of a multi-campus technical college system. He arrived at the campus with successful experience as an administrator in several university systems prior to accepting this appointment. Sam shared his situation by relaying his initial introduction to his colleague:

A woman walks up who introduces herself as the VP of academic affairs. She says, “I don’t know if they’ve told you yet, but you’ll be on my academic affairs committee and you’ll be the campus representative on that . . . on Monday starting at 12 o’clock.” “Oh, well that’s apparently going to be a conflict because, you know, I’ve been told that I’ll have weekly Rotary meetings that I have to be here in town, so I’ll have to figure out what I do.” Then just dead silence in the group that was around because, you know, I learned later they knew her and they knew exactly what was going on. . . . She was an absolute dictator in terms of how she ran things. We started out on the wrong foot and it went downhill from there.

Sam explained,

I was in charge of the campus, but she had people who reported to her: deans, assistant deans, and people like that. So the very people I had to forge relationships with who I considered part of my team on the campus, she at the same time was putting them in a very awkward spot. One guy I trust and I believe him said, “Well, what do I do here? I know what she’s telling me and I know I need to try to work with you, but how do I?”

Helen found herself in a harassing situation she thought would never happen. Helen won re-election to the state senate and won election to the post of chair of the senate appropriations committee. The appropriations committee holds arguably the most power of any committee in the state legislature. Her associate in state government helped elect her to this post, and he also acquired the position of majority leader. Soon Helen found her associate needed full control and refused to accept any discussion or disagreement from her.

At one point he interrupted a meeting of eight to twelve people she had organized. Helen related,
The majority leader comes in and I am in a meeting. We are in a small room chitchatting about how we are going to get this budget balanced. He throws a document in front of the eight or so people in the meeting and says, “What the fuck, do it yourself!”

His public display of temper in front of the members of the meeting revealed a small portion of the abuse he leveled against Helen. It required constant coalition building to subvert and accomplish any action around him. Allegedly Helen and her associate work the same side of the aisle, but his demand for complete power made it impossible for her to get the job done. Helen’s associate did not return to the legislature after the next election cycle, but the damage had already occurred. Helen no longer holds the chair of appropriations and finds herself pushed into a powerless position within the legislature.

**Financial Challenges**

Financial challenges open individuals to harassment opportunities, resulting in individuals suffering the same workplace harassment exhibited in personnel decisions, only less frequently. The public management of funds produces a high level of scrutiny and a great need for transparency. Perceptions vary regarding appropriate and wise use of public funds, frequently producing conflict. Harassment has great potential in this environment. Three of the thirteen interviews revealed the primary cause of harassment as a financial challenge. The subjects explained the harassment through the recorded data within the interview.

Jennifer developed a prestigious career over her lifetime, accepting many executive as well as technical positions throughout the state. She held high esteem among her fellow educators and rose in responsibility over the years. Jennifer accepted an appointment to the highest educational position in the state. Recently, a particularly dark situation came across her professional path which led to harassment.
A large federal grant, audited under routine audit, had a problem. The use of funds proved to be inappropriate and required further investigation. Upon investigation, more evidence compounded the need for a decision. Jennifer made the call and terminated the grant management, citing the lack of fiscal accountability and further investigation would continue to determine how to respond to the federal grant authority. She described, “The media blitz started on grant oversight incompetence . . . why didn’t you do X, Y and Z.” “So again all these ethics conversations (in the media) . . . ‘if she had integrity.’” It was not about incompetence anymore. It’s about Jennifer. It came across loud and clear from the media, “Her head should roll.”

In public conversation with family members, individuals subtly implied, “Oh she is the one who is responsible for the big (grant) scandal.” One of the most damaging parts of the harassment came to family. Jennifer’s daughter lost an opportunity to speak on a major education initiative. Jennifer explained how her daughter received the message from her boss, “I don’t think we should have you do that presentation because of your last name’ . . . that totally devastated my daughter.” The pressure to quit, compounded by the suffering of family members, weighed heavily on Jennifer. Jennifer concluded, “It doesn’t only directly affect me... I feel the responsibility to hang in here and make sure they understand there was nothing done wrong by my department or me... If I had not done it, it’d still be happening.”

Betty became the dean of education at a small Midwestern university following an incident which could have changed the professional course of her career. Betty served as the president of the state board of education while she professionally led both school counselor organizations and held a full professorship at a university. She managed a private consulting firm as well, providing evaluation services for grants and educational contracts. Due to Betty’s involvement through an evaluation service contract, a harassment situation developed.
Betty presented anemic results to a grant management agency for a large federal grant, validating less than expected impact. The program evaluation led to further investigation into the grant, asking about proper use of funds. The data showed weak results, making it hard to prove any positive outcomes of the grant. Investigation into management of the grant proved management failed to have good oversight of the funds. This grant had developed great financial problems and again produced weak outcomes. These challenges persisted and made Betty’s task difficult. Betty’s consulting firm remained as a minor player until the media tried to draw conclusions regarding the evaluation contract and financial mismanagement with the grant.

Betty explained,

The media dug into the person running the grant who held a position on the state board of education as I also did, saying we were colluding on the contract. While at the same time making a big deal out of the amount of money that had come through a consulting business of mine. It had made it sound as if this was all money I had gained from the grant for the work that I had done, when in reality there were many people working on the program evaluation. I was being lumped in, I think, with people that were perceived as having mismanaged money.

The assumptions of a biased media led to members of the public coming to state board meetings to confront Betty. At the time, she had accepted an appointment as dean of education at a university which she felt could be in jeopardy. The grant was under full investigation, but the cloud of implication remained. Betty remains dean of education but feels the need to retire and get out of the eye of the media.

Chuck served the state in many capacities. His record of service remained impeccable. He led the state education department, he served as a superintendent in numerous districts, held the position of dean of education at a university for a number of years and now provided consulting to emerging leaders and assisted in superintendent searches. As a favor to a friend in education, Chuck agreed to serve as a consultant on a grant offering technical assistance for the
programmatic parts of the grant. To make things easier, he combined his various service contracts under the umbrella of the friend’s educational agency for business purposes. Chuck said,

Bruce told me, ‘Chuck, everybody that we have is under a grant or a contract of some sort from some external agency. Many of them are school districts but you’re like everybody else. You’re being paid out of separate pots for different work that you’re doing.’

Chuck felt the business practices of the agency made his life easier and provided him with a separate financial accountability.

Soon after the agreement, the grant for which Chuck agreed to provide technical assistance developed concerns regarding the misuse of funds. Chuck declared, “At no point did I ever have any access to financial data or any kind of information that the manager obviously was working on.” Once the alleged embezzlement and misappropriation of funds hit the news media, Chuck suffered attacks, guilt by association with the grant:

The media had a real interest in this issue, and they just started to grab names of people that were somehow affiliated with the grant. My name was one of the more prominent ones given my past work. There were questions, you know, what was Chuck’s involvement? . . . Is this him reaping the benefits of the grant? There were bloggers jumping on this and throwing names around.

Chuck lamented, “It was beyond my control, I had very little to say or do about not only the momentum that this had, but to try to sort of stop the presses and say, ‘Can we just talk about what really happened?’”

The media made the situation sound as if Chuck cleared $400,000 for his work on the grant. Chuck explained, “About 85% of it came from other services I provided from other contracts over a period of two years. But the news story, interestingly enough, said Chuck made $400,000.” The implication appeared Chuck had taken a large portion of the grant for his services alone and created the problem with the perceived misappropriation. The silence from
associates in the region astounded Chuck. The many work associates who had developed and supported the system no longer contacted him. The harassment of not including and somewhat erasing the achievements of a very successful leader continues. Chuck maintains his consulting services, but his business has slowed to a small number of contracts.

**Systems Change Efforts**

A third cause of harassment comes from systems change efforts. Organizations face change constantly, but certain situations make change that much more difficult. The agent of change frequently finds him or herself suffering harassment. One of the thirteen participants in the research had systems change as the primary cause of harassment. However, as identified in the section following this, the process of systems change frequently provides a secondary or contributing factor to leadership harassment.

Roxie accepted an assistant superintendent position in a school district as a change agent for school improvement. Roxie held many positions of leadership over her career. She served as a leader in K-12 administration, state department of education, and higher education. Roxie said, “I was very welcomed into the district by school board members and the executive team. I would say my first year there was pretty stress-free, being able to really go in and start working with the standards.” Roxie explained,

The whole shift with my experience on the executive team came while working with DuFour’s model of PLC (Professional Learning Communities). You really have to model that from the top down. You have to be a working PLC team that’s collaborating, really understanding how all those components you manage come together and work in tandem. . . . I had a colleague at the executive level who worked with federal programs. She had been in the district probably 20 years and had a lot of really strong ties. She sat in on plans for a workshop to help implement PLC’s and how it would impact some of the principals and how they were doing things. She just ripped it apart. “That’s not going to work.”
The colleague had managed an improvement program for many years and had developed a core of colleagues who received extra funding for projects as well as extra training and support help in the classroom. With the changes implemented by Roxie, those extras would go away. Roxie explained, “I would say I probably had, out of the 15 elementary principals, probably 9 on board, only 1 out of 3 high school principals, and maybe 1 middle school principal of 5.” Roxie continued, “They were the negative ones that would run to the board members or those kinds of things. The conflict actually started the spring of my first year.” Each action of Roxie resulted in an additional round of reaction from the individuals resisting the change. The push back and conflict over school improvement and change escalated until the school board acted to remove Roxie. She received no support or intervention from the superintendent.

**Secondary Causes of Harassment**

The three identified primary causes of harassment of leaders can also present as secondary causes of harassment. In some cases, more than one of the three causes plays a role in harassment at a time. The situation may include a change process necessary for improvement or a change which meets the needs of the clients, while the primary cause remains a personnel conflict. Change elicits conflict. Individuals may lose power in a change effort which creates a very resistant group ripe for harassment of leadership. Personnel conflicts may cause the initial harassment process but systems change can drive the conflict. Change holds the secondary position for harassment causes of four out of thirteen cases in my research.

Financial challenges provided a secondary cause in three of thirteen cases. Personnel conflict frequently occurs due to a financial challenge resulting in a reduction in resources which allows for the harassment process. A combination of systems change and financial challenges can lead to a personnel conflict, which occurred in two out of thirteen cases. All three may play
a significant role in the harassment, but the triggering event holds the primary cause of harassment. The participants in my research provided several statements which show the secondary nature of harassment causes. I organized the statements to first show secondary systems change causes on harassment, followed by secondary financial causes, and finally a combination of all three causes leading to harassment of the leader.

Betty evaluated a grant designed to help college access for a minority group. Betty is white and not directly affiliated with this minority group. She sensed a problem when the manager of this grant challenged her. Betty offered,

I think the fact that I was not a minority was probably something that maybe this person didn’t appreciate. He was a minority. . . . I think also, I began to kind of ask questions about some of the things that were going on that didn’t seem like a good use of resources.

Betty continued,

A lot of kind of nitpicking at the work (by the manager) that we were doing and questions about things and not wanting to gather data that we really thought would be meaningful data to help inform the outcome of the program, which the evaluation was supposed to do, very critical of that and kind of got some of the other people that he had a big influence on the board to begin to become critical of some things too.

Betty felt the push back and realized her recommendations for the grant would be ignored. The board managing the grant believed the grant manager and disregarded the evaluator because she was not a racial minority even though she held data, statistics and knowledge of the field. Change needed to happen, but she could not provide it due to the subtle harassment. A second grant managed by the same individual would lead to greater problems due to a similar evaluation by Betty. The subsequent grant evaluation implied Betty received excessive payment which led to her experiencing harassment from the public and media. Change efforts did not offer the primary cause of harassment but definitely contributed.
Sam saw himself as a change agent. He wanted to make his technical college campus responsive to the community where it resided and responsive to industry in his region. Sam explained,

I had industry people I would talk to regularly about campus issues, college issues. One of them was a real blue collar guy, straightforward, said what he thought no matter if you liked it or not, but he went to a lot of trouble to support the college. We actually gave him an award that year as, like, the Supporter of the Year for the college.

Sam continued,

He brought forward some issues to me that I felt were really significant. So in the midst of a meeting (with administration) at a break, I told the VP of academics I had information from a community person that I wanted to share with her. ‘Well, let’s go outside on the patio here and talk.’ And so we stepped outside the meeting room onto a patio which had all glass walls, so everybody inside could see us talking. I said I talked to this industry guy and I wanted to make you aware of his concerns. He’s pretty upset and I think his comment matters.

Sam wanted to change the practices of the institution and help meet the needs of the industry and community. Sam continued, “She lit into me, ripping on this guy, saying how off target he was, calling him an asshole, telling me I should not be paying any attention to him.” Sam could not be a change agent with such harassment and resistance from his colleague.

Sally made progressive change for the improvement of the hospital. Sally described a situation:

I said to a board member during a phone call one day when he was questioning why I changed pharmacies because our pharmacy bills are quite expensive. I said, “I can drop the keys off to this organization to you this afternoon. You don’t need to pay me anymore because obviously you have a better understanding of who is the best (least expensive) pharmacy company in town, if you’re questioning my decisions at this level, then you don’t need to hire an opinion anymore.”

The board had the habit of questioning every move, every decision working diligently to halt or at least slow change.
Kathy came to the position of superintendent to provide educational change. She said, “In the process of the educational turnaround because we had such terrible scores for our kids there were a lot of school improvements going on, and that’s very political.” Kathy continued,

I know, as boards happen, teachers talk to them, and so there were some disenfranchised teachers and some who didn’t think we were in the right direction. There were some who just were the kind of people that just blurt stuff out. They never functioned properly, so to them they didn’t know any better.

Implementing the improvement plan included a qualitative study conducted by an outside person. Kathy related, “He uncovered all of this angst and this drama and trauma that had gone on way before me getting there.” The fact of history, the conflict of change and resistance to an outside view provided the backdrop of harassment.

Eli suffered a secondary cause of harassment for having consulted for a federal grant receiving fair compensation for his service. The grant came under scrutiny for misappropriation of funds and Eli suffered implications in that misappropriation. The financial challenge, although not primary, influenced the harassment. Eli said,

I got paid what I was offered and fulfilled the contract, and got what the contract said, and I signed on the line and got paid. And at the end of it, you’re made to look somehow dirty for that, and that, you know, that scarred my name and hurt me professionally.

The implication afforded Eli’s opponents the opportunity to proceed with a full assault on him. Eli’s oppressors made a path for his removal, although unsuccessful, it still held an impact on Eli’s future employment. The opportunities professionally started to diminish. The harassment silently continued.

Jennifer led change as a part of holding her executive position. The common core standards created great controversy because it brought a perceived change. Each public hearing on the standards brought a massive number of people to oppose the standards and blame Jennifer for bringing them to the state. In order to keep things the same and not change curriculum or
standards, the opposing individuals wanted Jennifer gone. It became an obsession of the conservative public. Jennifer held no fear or animosity for the passion of these individuals, but she also held true to her principles and continued to champion the common core standards.

Some friends and colleagues feared for Jennifer’s safety, warning her frequently and offering to accompany her wherever she might go including to the gym. System change efforts provided a secondary avenue for harassment of Jennifer, but even further into the harassment cause came the personnel decision to eliminate the grant management of a federal grant.

When Jennifer made the call to the grant manager terminating the contract, a succession of tragic events cascaded forward. The evening after the call, the grant manager killed his wife, four children and committed suicide while burning his residence. Jennifer responded,

I was personally dealing with more of the tragedy of the family and feeling like I was responsible for when I made the call . . . You know, questioning if I had not made the call, would the children still be alive, . . . You know, you question yourself and all those decisions you make up to that point in time and trying to maintain the integrity of the grant.

The media reported many very hurtful inferences. They alleged Jennifer should have known more and could have averted this tragedy and even may have colluded with the grant manager, receiving some sort of kick back. No allegations were substantiated by any facts. The media called it investigative reporting when it truly didn’t help make sense of the tragedy of a grant manager caught in fraud and embezzlement. Blame for a tragedy, blame for misappropriation of funds and an opportunity to stop change provided the catalyst to attempt to remove Jennifer from her position.

Roxie experienced personnel issues that led to a variety of problems with the district and a contributing factor to her harassment. Roxie explained,
The board member that had been on my interview committee had a meeting with me regarding a friend of his who was a social studies teacher at the high school. This friend was against the whole PLC concept. We’re making them work collaboratively with people who are subpar.

This set the stage for real resistance.

With change came a requirement to cut the budget. From the data gathered and information available, Roxie created a plan:

So what I started to find out is when we would meet on executive teams and I’d start to lay out some strategy and planning with the team, it got around the district quickly. So before I ever had a chance to lay a plan forward people already knew it and had started sabotaging certain things.

Roxie even said to her superintendent, “This is becoming a hostile work environment because we know when my team is leaking all this information to people, we get resistance built up so people won’t make changes.”

Later Roxie decided to move some of her team to different positions. Roxie stated, “My reorganization, my whole org chart, my whole plan got approved at a Saturday special board meeting, Monday I was meeting with my staff to let them know where they were going. On Tuesday morning, the business manager told me to stop the re-org.” A board member had questions and wanted to reconsider. The board overturned the previous decision and asked for Roxie to be removed.

The primary and secondary causes of harassment of leaders provide the initial and developing stages of harassment. Beyond the causes of harassment explained in this chapter, I recognized more issues regarding how organizations presented themselves and how it predisposed organizations to harassment behavior. While reviewing the transcripts of the leaders and their stories of harassment, I discovered another aspect to harassment with regard to the
organizational cultures which harass leaders. In my next chapter I offer information collected from the interviews of leaders regarding organizational culture and harassment.
CHAPTER 5: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

In collecting data through interviews with harassed leaders, I found a pattern which suggested more to harassment than an individual phenomenon and experience. Harassment of a leader happened less spontaneously than I originally thought. The environment which the leader inherited played a great deal in regard to how and if they experience harassment. I call this environmental phenomenon organizational culture. I narrowed the organizational culture to include governing board behavior, public information and the media, and leadership style.

Gareth Morgan defined organizational culture in *Images of Organization*: “the pattern of development reflected in a society’s system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day rituals” (Morgan, 2006, p. 116). The culture of the organization develops harassment as part of its values and day-to-day rituals. The culture of an organization continually changes with time. Government, religion, the media, and other institutions and individuals shaping opinion play important roles in the process (Morgan, 2006). Harassment shows the darker side of organizational culture. Culture defined as

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1992, p.12)

Organizations exhibit various behaviors that lend themselves as clues to harassment of leadership.

**Governing Board Behavior**

In the interviews for my research, I found similar instances of governing board behavior making it difficult for leaders to progress. It took the form of micromanagement, systemic violation of personnel management, and unrealistic expectations of performance. From the 13 interviews collected, seven had direct governing board actions that established an organizational
culture conducive to harassment. I present accounts of the lived experience of leaders from the interviews regarding governing board behavior. I organized the accounts from most severe harassment to least severe.

Frank endured a very brutal situation with school board intervention on every issue and micromanagement. Basketball and sports created a situation very common in the upper Midwest. Not only does the school board have a culture of believing they own, operate and manage the day-to-day functions of the school, but basketball is synonymous with culture or at the very least identity. Organizational culture can have sacred aspects which transcend the day-to-day. Sports, such as basketball, embody one of those aspects. In smaller communities, the standing of the school’s sports team within the region gives the school status. Individual players develop an identity based on their performance as an athlete.

Frank said,

The first day of practice the board president was sitting in the bleachers watching practice. He was trying to micromanage the school and micromanage the basketball program. It was probably the most successful basketball program in the state and it didn’t need micromanaging. We had a great coach. We had superior athletes. We won the state championship. He questioned this and that and everything that went on.

Frank listened to the school board and addressed their concerns, but the constant need to control never ended. The organizational belief held by the board placed them as the leaders and gave them ultimate control of the success of the district. Full credit came to the board, not the superintendent or the school. When specific basketball players did not receive recognition or exposure to the extent the school board believed necessary, the desire to control and punish or eliminate the source erupted. Frank became the source and problem.

After a specific incident, Frank stood between the school board president and the basketball coach. Frank explained it this way:
The next morning, in came the dad of this boy and the board president who is his uncle. They wanted to meet with me, and they wanted to meet right now. And they wanted to meet with the coach in the office right now too. I said, “He’s teaching. He’s got class. Who is going to cover his class?” “We don’t care! We want him in this office right now.” They wanted me to fire him on the spot because he reprimanded a basketball player in the huddle at a game. He probably had it coming. All the people, the principal, the business manager, the secretary were all just shaking because these two people were in my office screaming. It was just ugly.

The power struggle and harassment continued and proceeded until Frank’s contract ended. The culture of the school district and school board allowed the harassment to develop and explode into a full elimination of a successful superintendent.

Roxie came to the school district with a wealth of experience from a diverse career in education. The district hired her to make change and improve the district to achieve better outcomes for students and make the adjustments in allocation of resources to provide efficiency. The district had financial challenges with a shrinking tax base and lower tax collections while experiencing a higher demand for resources. They looked to Roxie to perform a miracle. The expectation presented itself over reality. The culture of the organization dug deep into an entrenched belief of it having done all it could do.

The district also believed the school board must question everything. Roxie presented a situation:

The teachers of the district believed they could not deliver instruction to all students because they had so many students that had so many problems. They weren’t looking at where the problem is. We had done a lot of work with my coordinating group looking at how we impact the teacher so that they have the capacity to work with all students.

Roxie continued, “They had been given coaches to go into a classroom to work with small groups. That is a major luxury. The budget did not support this. These kinds of things were not producing results.” The teachers received the support and added resources for a number of years
and now faced losing those benefits. Even with Roxie providing all types of alternatives and practices that worked, the culture of the organization resisted change.

Teachers began contacting school board members, complaining the actions of Roxie would negatively impact their ability to teach. Roxie commented, “Change is hard. I think in this district it is even more difficult. It is a very ultra conservative community. They are very ingrained in past success and always about me, me, me, me and how this was affecting me.” In order to save their own positions and work environment, teachers and school board members worked together to sabotage change efforts. Roxie continued to develop a plan and implement the strategy to provide classroom education for all students. Progress developed slowly with each move having a counter move from faculty and staff. Using her experience with well-established research practices, Roxie continued to move forward with her plan presenting to the school board and receiving approval from the school board.

The staff pulled a last-minute blocking effort which succeeded, even with the well-researched and methodic approach offered by Roxie. Roxie said, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast, doesn’t it?” With all of her planning and process Roxie could not overcome the strength of an entrenched culture which included micro management, blurred lines of command and reliving past successes.

Eli stated, “I stepped into the organization not realizing the depth of the culture. Who had supported it and who was in place and how entrenched the culture and the people were in the organization. So from the beginning I think there was pushback from me being the new guy with the whole idea that we were going in a new direction.” Eli struggled to make change and met resistance from the governing board every step of the way. Eli said, “I constantly felt that the board members, donors, and people in the organization asked, ‘why are we doing it this way or
that way?” and I always got the stiff arm from within the organization.” After three to four years of fighting with the board to make change and making slow but steady progress, Eli faced the ultimate challenge.

The harassment began over a consulting contract outside of the organization but with full knowledge of the organization. The organization saw the opportunity to push Eli out by questioning his integrity and character. Eli experienced the attacks and felt the emotional struggle of guilt and shame without any documented evidence of wrongdoing. The experience, rooted in an attempt to eliminate Eli, stemmed from organizational culture. It appeared as if Eli had not fulfilled the values of the organization, real or imagined. Eli violated the entrenched belief structure, values and daily rituals of an organizational image.

An observation of the organization I had during the interview and review of the situation occurred when I recognized the history and development of this specific organization. The organization started at high risk of failure. The financial support, structure, and involvement of the local community were weak. The founding members felt very strongly about having a local chapter and suffered to create the organization. The organization had struggled to maintain and recently felt undue pressure from the national organization imposing a set of unreasonable standards to their hard-fought development of the organization. The multiple issues developed a stiff resistance to new leadership and change.

Kathy stated, “The district was a very contentious district. They had a lot of problems for years and years and years, I mean 16 or 17 years before I ever got there.” She continued,

The reason I knew was because, as part of our processes to try to get well, so to speak, we had an outside person come in and do a qualitative study. He was the one that uncovered all of this angst and this drama and trauma that had gone on way before my getting here.
The students of the district had terrible test scores with a clear need for improvement, which brought with it much political drama. Kathy explained,

I know, as boards happen, teachers talk to them and so there were some disenfranchised teachers and some who didn’t think we were on the right path. There were some who just were the kind of people that blurt stuff out and I think the board president took it upon herself to get me out of there so they could improve better. According to her, I didn’t know what was going on. It’s kind of like they were so dysfunctional, so absolutely dysfunctional that what they did what they thought was right.

The organizational culture of the school district revolved around a colloquial belief that only local people know the true way to improve. Outsiders presented a threat to the norm of the culture and thus must be bad.

Not only did the individuals involved from the community feel they must eliminate the outsiders, they also felt the need to check themselves. Kathy described, “Through the process they were jockeying for positions and trying to save their own skin and were not loyal by any means. There was that part of the dysfunction as well.” Kathy struggled to maintain the will to continue with the organization but felt a commitment to her professional beliefs. She was committed to the children of the district and to their personal learning and growth. She would not give up.

The district’s organizational culture developed into an impossible scenario for improvement of outcomes or the ability to lead the district to a new level of achievement. Kathy admitted,

I would say during the time that I was there, when I look back, they had a long history of incredible turnover at the administrative level. I was there the longest, four years. It was the longest historical amount of time for a leader in that district. The other thing that was different about my situation, it was the first time I had been a superintendent.

She continued, “I came into it as a novice. Then you throw on top of that the whole what was going on in the federal and state education environment. They were going through incredible
changes.” Through all of the muck of the situation Kathy pulled the district out of “turnaround” and improved it in a variety of areas for the students. She does not regret having served the district.

Bill attended a school board meeting where the community delivered a petition citing several concerns against him to the school board. The petition had over 100 signatures, but the signatures had not been validated nor did it have any due process provided to Bill. Also, the petitioners notified the media, who developed a story as they presented the petition to the school board. Bill said,

What really made me mad is that they thought that they could just give that to the school board and anonymously just evaporate and nobody would ever know. I would never see it. Nobody would ever know that they signed it, that’s kind of the Mennonite way.

A very homogeneous community founded by a sect of German Mennonite settlers created the culture of the community. Much of the culture of the sect incorporated non-confrontational practices. Bill explained,

We want to bitch and whine about things behind your back in the cover of darkness, and we want to smile and shake your hand during the day and say what a wonderful person you are. But by God we don’t want him to know that you’re a horse’s hind end.

Bill responded in the board meeting with a rebuttal presentation. The concerns presented in the petition were unfounded and the rebuttal exposed a core group of individuals as the culprits for harassment. Bill’s rebuttal failed to make the news media report. Bill explained to the petitioners, “As soon as you handed it to the school board, it became a public record. It’s a public record, and I’m a part of the public, whether you like it or not.” The part of the petition complaint regarded a sports team. The volleyball team had several poor seasons. A parent who felt the coaching staff failed to perform and who had athletes on the team requested a group of parents coach instead. Bill politely explained he could not sanction parents as coaches. The
athlete whose parent brought the parent coaching idea wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper having every girl from the team sign the letter as they got on the bus to go to a game. The letter described Bill as inflexible and mean with the added caveat that Bill called them lazy and over involved while not dedicated to volleyball. The letter also addressed the coach as inadequate.

Bill said,

First of all, the coaches, there isn’t one of them here that doesn’t want to win and be the best that they can possibly be. You know, it’s pretty unique and it’s kind of a neat deal to actually be on a team. Some of you are faster. Some of you are taller. Some of you can play the piano, I can’t. Forget about all the stuff that’s been in the paper and just go out and play and have fun. You have every right to put your letter in the paper. But it’s never going to stop. You have inspired a bunch of people at the coffee shop. They are going to write a letter to the editor and then someone else will write a letter. The more you fan the flame, the bigger that circle gets and it’s not really doing us any good. The lesson that I learned is that it doesn’t do you any good to kick the skunk.

The community used the school board as a device to reach what they believed created a problem. They wanted first to address Bill anonymously with a petition to the school board and secondly through the media and local newspaper. They used the students to offer a one-sided letter to the editor without first talking directly to the coach and superintendent. Culture steeped in history and religion masked as community norms created a massive harassment of the superintendent. Community values, beliefs and day-to-day rituals pushed the school board to continue to question every move Bill made. The intervention of daily practices and decisions made it a hostile environment for Bill. The culture, without change, will definitely affect the next superintendent or leader of the district. Without change, the same behavior will occur again and again.
Sally experienced an interesting situation with a specialty hospital board structure. She said, “There are two boards of the organization; I had the hospital board singing my praises.”

She continued,

Before I started there was a foundation vice president, he was crafty. I liked him but he was very crafty. He and the foundation board quickly changed the by-laws without the hospital board really being awake and knowing it. The CEO was an acting CEO and he was asleep at the helm.

The by-laws change created a president of the foundation which would be equal to the CEO of the hospital. The hospital board demanded Sally get control of the foundation president.

Conflict developed between them as he did not appreciate Sally’s overtures of control.

Sally spent considerable time addressing the issues of the by-laws of both boards in order to create a better organization. She worked with an attorney to fix the situation. Sally said,

I implemented term limits. I added term limits to our scenario and I absolutely needed this. There were board members that had been on forever and ever and ever. They just stay forever. If you never have newness on a board, then when you try things, I get people dragging their feet and not open to change. I’m a change agent. The new things I was trying, I was getting backlash.

Sally tried several practices to make the organization more efficient and could not get the board to move with her. The culture of the board remained the same.

They had survived many years and did not see the need to change existing practices. The attorney rewriting the by-laws had written the original by-laws and also had held positions on both the foundation board and the hospital board. He saw no need to change and resisted Sally’s suggestions. The two boards fought for control with neither willing to change or compromise.

Each idea offered by Sally met resistance. Even ideas which might save significant money met resistance because of some deeply held conviction of the organization such as not partnering with a Catholic hospital because the boards refused any religious affiliation. The culture of the organization made Sally’s life miserable as she negotiated the tight rope of two boards and a
resistance to change. Her powerless position created a harassing environment which eroded her confidence and left her questioning her future.

Paula found a culture had developed on her licensing commission. The members of the commission all held a license for the profession except one member came from the general public according to state law. Due to the state being small, it allowed commission members to quickly get to know each other. Also, due to the lack of training institutions, the members likely attended the same school. Paula noticed two of the members had begun to develop a close friendship.

Paula said,

I had noticed the last couple times the commission had done boards that two commission members were real chummy with Rita, and it’s like as if I wasn’t there. They directed their questions to Rita, totally ignoring me, it seemed just weird. It just wasn’t right.

The harassment of Paula developed around a rogue employee attempting to push her out of her job. The employee enlisted the assistance of commission members to make Paula leave or be forced out. One of the board members lived in the same community as the commission office. She frequently dropped into the office. Paula related, “She would walk into the office and kind of whisper to the receptionist ‘Well, how is it going?’ and walk across the hall to Rita. She was sort of like this little spy or something”

Paula knew the commission member would contact the state with her observations hoping for an investigation into Paula. The culture of the commission allowed members to create coalitions and harass the executive director. The organization developed a very political approach to their behaviors with no reason or documentation beyond not liking the individual. The culture of the organization allowed for easily creating harassment scenarios without
accountability. The unclear lines of authority between the commission and the state reflected a structural flaw as well. It allowed harassment to grow and flourish.

Public Information and the Media

I recognized within the interviews for my research a culture related to public information, the media and how it developed. The general approach of the media toward reporting a story on public organizations appeared to have a set of biases. Four of the interview subjects out of thirteen experienced a media culture that enhanced the harassment of the individuals. What information makes the news and what does not, as well as the depth of research the reporter includes in the news article makes the difference between a report and harassment. The culture of media developed a desire in which the individual be implicated and tried by public opinion rather than simply reporting complete information without sensational biases. The public outcry from the reports harassed the individual leaders presented in the reports.

Chuck suffered under the media coverage of his involvement with a federal grant. Chuck said,

The media had a real interest in this issue. They started to grab for names of people that were somehow affiliated with the grant. My name was one of the more prominent ones given my past work. The question of what was my involvement in the grant. Is this a matter of me starting the grant and now reaping the benefit?...I felt like I was a victim of some circumstances that were beyond my control and had very little to say or do about not only the momentum that this story had, but to try to sort of stop the presses and say, “Can we just talk about what really happened?” I attempted to do that with the story with an interview with the media. I talked with the reporter for about 30 minutes, and about 2 minutes of the story ran on TV, and it was clearly the most unflattering 2 minutes of our 30 minutes that we had together.

Chuck merely wanted to set the record straight, but the media wanted a bigger story. It clearly appeared they did not want the truth. Chuck identified, “If they decided not to show it, then nobody hears it.” He received advice to let it go. “Don’t give it oxygen and it will eventually die on its own.” The story continues yet today.
The media culture believes leaders should be open to any and all reporting. The media lacks complete truth, full facts, unbiased opinion and full context. The media created a story, a story which could last over time. Even though the story has dropped references to Chuck directly, the smear of the story reinforces the harassment. The culture does not allow for vindication of the victim because it might diminish the story. Chuck suffered and continues to suffer the attack upon his integrity as the media continues to grab a story at all costs.

Betty provided the evaluation for a grant which developed inconsistencies in an audit. The audit sent a red alert to the media. Betty only evaluated the outcomes of the program not the financial aspects of the grant. Her name appeared only marginally in the grant because of her limited exposure to the full grant, but her name was well recognized. Since Betty sat on the state board of education and held a prominent position in higher education in the state, she became a target for the media. She said,

The media got a hold of kind of what was going on with this investigation into some spending with the grant, my name ended up coming up. Originally, I thought it was just about the program evaluation, but then they began to make a kind of a big deal and one person in particular in the media began a witch hunt, for lack of better word.

Betty suffered under the implications of her having something to do with the misappropriation of funds. The culture of the media proved itself. They sought a story regardless of whom or how it implicated the person. Betty also found the media relentless in pursuing the story. They would not stop until they could stain the reputation of a very successful leader in education. Betty said,

The media made a big deal out of the amount of money that had come through a consulting business that I had. They made it sound as if this was all money I had gained from this grant for the work that I had done when in reality there were many people working on the program evaluation.
She continued, “I fulfilled the contract, and it had all the data and the work logs and everything to back that up. And that was the huge point of harassment for me.”

The media only reported a portion of the story. They refused to look at the detail which was available through the grant documents. The media had no ability to discern the information from the grant documents or knowledge of the grant. They reported only part of the information, which did not tell the true story. Betty described, “I had been kind of trying to avoid the media during a state board meeting, and the media followed me to the restroom. It was just a really bad experience being waylaid out in the hallway.” The media stops at nothing to get a story even if it destroys a person without cause. The culture of needing information to report even if it is incorrect creates the perfect opportunity for harassment.

Jennifer also suffered under the slanted reporting of the media. As the leader of education in the state responsible for the administration of a federal grant, Jennifer expected to have a certain amount of public exposure. She found the struggle with the media to be more of a barrage or blitz on her incompetence for not catching the problems sooner. Jennifer felt the coverage was fair but the tone changed. Jennifer said, “I think the grant report became more focused on pointing out or questioning my integrity. It was a big difference.”

She saw the media taking the position of a personal attack rather than addressing the public issue of the grant. The media culture focused on various people to implicate rather than report on the facts. Jennifer explained, “Every time you read about the grant they bring up a scandal implying she had no integrity, it is not about incompetence this time.” The media perpetuated a scandal theme throughout their reporting. Jennifer said, “They were looking for who can they blame.” The culture of the media continues to present the story as a reoccurring feature. The objective of the media to sell and get viewers overshadows the responsibility to
report the information accurately. The public affirms and supports poor reporting by continuing to read, view, and listen to an inaccurate storyline. Media culture which presents the story at all costs creates the harassment environment, making leaders’ lives a misery.

**Leadership Style**

The interviews for my research revealed another type of culture phenomenon which impacted the harassment of leaders. The style of leadership a particular organization expects. Expectations have developed into a potential for harassment. Strong leadership styles frequently created a situation where harassment would and could become severe. When the leader shows an almost absolute control over the organization, leadership within the organization exhibits vulnerability to harassment. Three of the interviews of the thirteen offered situations of strong leadership models but also significant potential for harassment. Each situation created a different scenario. Each case brought another aspect of strong leadership to a position for harassment.

Expectations of leaders form a very important part of organizational culture. The expectation predisposes the organization toward harassment. When a leader does not meet the expectation of the organization, they will attack the leader and move toward elimination.

Jake held a position of total authority as superintendent of a private parochial school. The school established the role of the leader in this organization creating an “us” and “them.” The faculty expected the leader to come after them. Jake said,

What that looked like at my school is there were four teachers that would all eat in a closed room. Shut the door and just totally come after me. And I noticed that when that started happening, the people that I previously had had good relationships with all went south all at the same time, and it was directly correlated to those conversations. Using the expectation of conflict to fuel the harassment, the teacher receiving discipline projected her situation on others through the perception of the culture. The one teacher used e-mail to project her anger but wrote as if all teachers agreed with her. Jake explained,
She went off on e-mail saying that nobody ever trusted me. Everybody thinks that I am a bad leader. Nobody ever trusts you. Stuff like that when, on the other side, it was four people that hated me and over 100 that were legitimately good, solid relationships that still are positive today.

The view of the leader as the opposition and having full control over the organization made the harassment possible.

Sam held a campus CEO position for a multi-campus college. The organizational structure of the college allowed for conflict to arise easily and collaboration to be difficult. With the campus CEO’s reporting to the president and the academic division reporting to the vice president of academics or provost position, an organizational culture developed. The culture provided an opportunity for harassment. Sam said,

It set up a couple of people who, in my mind, were kind of problematic people anyway, but you could just see the dynamic changing where they started moving in her direction and they became part of this, “I’m not sure about how well you are doing your job.”

Sam continued, “I could see, it was obvious that there was something going on and people were standoffish.”

One incident allowed the provost and the president an opportunity to create a visual effect to show the power they held over the CEO’s. Sam asked to speak to them about a campus matter at a meeting of the entire college. They asked him to step out onto a patio to speak in private. Sam described,

They lit into me, ripping on this guy, saying how off target he was, calling him an asshole, a pain in the ass, telling me I should not be paying attention to him. I said he was a key member on committees and we’re giving him an award for partner of the year. The provost turned to me with the most vicious look and said, “That’s because we hoped it would just shut the asshole up and he’d go away.”

During this incident, the entire staff watched through a large glass wall to the patio. They could not hear the conversation, but they could see the expressions and tone of the attack. The conversation managed the staff as much as it provided an opportunity to discipline a campus
CEO. Sam recognized the president and provost carried a lot of weight with the board. He said, “They were the two top dogs in the college, so anybody who was worrying about keeping their job will do whatever they think is right and not worry about others. They were scared of their shadow.” Sam understood the president did what he did to create control through fear. Sam said,

He was deliberate in what he did and he did his own version of bullying that he was a great glad-hander, usually smiling and then he could turn on you on a dime and rip you to shreds, and then a minute later pat you on the back and say, “Have a great weekend.” He had just totally humiliated you in between the two.

The strong leadership style allowed for harassment of any and all leaders within the system.

Sam explained it this way, “He put you in your place in front of people, humiliated you, and let everyone know, ‘Remember you are next.’”

The culture of the organization allowed a leader within the organization to control all aspects of the college while limiting collaboration and growth. The organization almost fostered harassment as a method of day-to-day activity. Progressive leaders cannot survive the structure of this style of leadership and the culture of control. The divide and conquer mentality reduces the productivity of the organization and destroys initiative among leaders.

Helen held a very powerful position within the legislature but fell victim to the system which supported a strong leadership culture within the organization. Helen said,

Keep in mind he was the one that put me into this position of leadership. Any time I would push back at him, even a little bit at his leadership authority he would come back at me whether it was a budget issue or one of his issues that I didn’t agree with.

She continued,

Even if we were in a restaurant or public setting, he would come after me with F*** this and F*** that. He didn’t care who was around. It didn’t become about making good public policy. It was about how you moved the chess pieces in order to get what you needed to get done to do your job.
Helen recognized the culture of the organization responding not to logic, research, and facts but to position, personality and bias. The organization holds a predisposition to harass the leaders of the organization by a strong leader culture.

Organizational culture presents a perfect opportunity for harassment to take root and grow. I presented the three themes of organizational culture found in the interviews of this research. I did not expect this to be a finding within the study, but the evidence shows harassment has beginnings in the culture of the organization. Exposing the culture and providing awareness to the organization can help leaders find relief from harassment and perhaps prevention.

In the next chapter I present the ways leaders manage the experience of harassment. The interview data from the lived experiences of harassed leaders presented a wide range of emotions, impacts, and outcomes. Each leader explained how they experienced the negative impacts of harassment and the long-lasting effects of harassment. Each leader developed personal and professional outcomes. Some leaders had external outcomes with the loss of employment or career path. Others developed internal losses of confidence, peace of mind or collegial relationships with peers. Also, harassment caused family suffering. Each leader tells a story of how harassment affected their lives.
CHAPTER 6: WAYS PARTICIPANTS MANAGE THE HARASSMENT EXPERIENCE

The harassed leader experiences a variety of responses to harassment. In my research, several themes appeared from the interviews with leaders experiencing harassment. Although they may not have all experienced each of the themes, many of the themes repeated among the interviews. The most common theme from the interviews represented the damage to reputation, character, and integrity caused by harassment. Leaders also suffered changes in relationships with strong feelings of isolation, loss of colleagues, anger, and family struggles. Health concerns developed. I found it common for leaders to look toward their faith to help them make sense of harassment.

Reputation and Character

Leaders primarily experience the effects of harassment by the personal attacks on their character and integrity. Twelve of thirteen interviewees experienced attacks on their character. The public reputation of leaders affects their future or their legacy or both. Leaders value their reputation and how the public views their character. Losing those attributes leaves them questioning their integrity and the core values they hold.

Reputation

Each leader suffering attacks to his/her reputation had spent years developing a track record of positive outcomes. Having people and particularly constituent communities question and attack the leaders’ record was quite painful. I organized the statements around school system-related leaders, non-profit leaders, and state government/grant-related leaders.

Bill struggled with the harassment from one school district family who constantly challenged his competence. To the extent the family filed a complaint with the state Professional Practices Commission to have Bill’s credentials revoked. Bill stated,
It all goes back to this. The guy writes nasty letters to the editor of the paper, of course it sells papers. He sends letters to the school board all the time and he indicts the school board members for keeping me. And, you know, of course I really can’t get much done.

He continued, “We get through the Professional Practices and Standards Commission, and we go through all the depositions and all the bologna and the state throws it out. So winner, winner, chicken dinner.”

Bill remarked,

The new board members elected to the school board continue questioning whether you’re competent, questioning whether you have a right to make that decision, disavowing the fact that even though you are the superintendent, do we need to talk to you about basketball coaching if we don’t want to. And it continues.

After a long career of great service to the community, the constant barrage of comments and attacks damaged his reputation, leaving him impatiently waiting for retirement.

Frank faced a situation with the school board wanting him out at the end of his contract, but he had a signed contract for the next year. The discussion became extremely contentious with a final settlement buying out Frank’s next contract. The damage of the battle with the board in a small state where everyone knows everyone’s business created a long-term problem for Frank’s reputation. He said,

I knew the superintendent in another larger district, next year was his last year and I had already been called by a couple of the school board members to see if I would consider applying. I could have had that job if I had stayed.

After his departure from the district, Frank struggled through several small district administrations before retiring. He never had the opportunity to advance in his career. As for the coach that stood in the center of the controversy, he remains the basketball coach in the same district.
Roxie struggled with the school board to make change happen in a very reluctant school district. When she brought a reorganization plan to implement change, first accepted and then rejected by the board, Roxie suffered at the hands of the board president. Roxie explained,

The president ripped me apart at the board meeting, named me as someone that had not done my job for the last two years. I had not been supporting the principals, had not been moving the curriculum or doing development with them. It went on and on and on.

Roxie did not attend the meeting because the board wished to discuss her plan but did not want her input. The culmination of the meeting resulted in Roxie’s employment being terminated. All school board meetings are broadcast on local access TV. Such direct assassination of character in public moved beyond a mere attack on her reputation but became slander. She sued the district for slander, and the board settled, removing the video/audio recording of the specific board meeting from the archives, but the damage was done.

Kathy held the administrative position of superintendent in a small school district that had a history of trouble. She maintained the office longer than most of her predecessors, but nonetheless she was asked to resign from her contract. “When you are applying for jobs, you have to indicate if you’ve ever resigned from a contract on the application. It hurts every time I have to say that I was not continued. I wasn’t fired,” Kathy said. The result follows her as she continues searching for employment. The reminder of a reputation damaged on the application continues to haunt Kathy.

Eli relayed, “If I wanted to do other things that I think I could have qualified and done, and there were other opportunities for me, they disappeared. I don’t know that they’d ever come back with the negative deal that I went through.” The unfounded negative attacks, as well as the lack of defense by the public, leaves Eli to battle within his organization yet today. Eli said, “I didn’t do anything wrong. Nobody would call you back or give you a kind note or tell you that
they are excited to talk to you. You’re looked at like a pariah.” His reputation sullied, Eli found himself looking to what’s next. Eli continues with the non-profit he directs but recognizes he may struggle to find another opportunity in his field.

Sally struggled with the board of the hospital for nine years. The traditions of the board, the constant pressure to do more with less, micro managing every detail of the operation of the hospital, while never recognizing the improved outcomes or improved efficiency, took their toll. Sally said, “No matter what I do, it’s never going to be good enough for them.” She continued,

When I left there were two board members there, and they sat in the office while I put my stuff together. I said to them, “You’re treating me like I stole something or I embezzled from this organization. For nine years I worked harder than I’ve ever worked in my entire career. The thanks I get is this?”

Sally concluded,

Those same board members talked to folks, you know, the employees about me after I left, that’s why I have no respect for them because I know how they are. And the thing that was interesting is how those same board members talked about the previous CEO. Sally suffered the effects of a community sharing a negative view of a successful leader, damaging her reputation.

Betty had a stellar career until the unfortunate incident of the federal grant mismanagement. Betty began, “I felt like I, for whatever reason, must have been perceived as an easy target because there were certainly other people that had things that were probably a lot more realistic to go after and make into a big case in the media.” Betty continued,

I think one of the things that I learned that is so unfortunate is that you can be doing really ethical, good work and people can still criticize and the media can take things out of context and make you look bad when you’re not doing anything wrong.

Betty has taken a low-key approach to her career and looks forward to retirement.

Chuck had a fantastic career in education. He served in many powerful capacities over the years. Chuck said,
I had enjoyed, I think, a really, really good reputation for a long time and realized how quickly it can change, you know, in a matter of a week or a month where you would say, even though I had no connection to anything that happened here, I’m being included in it and people are wondering. If I hear it enough times, there must be something to it.

Chuck felt the sting of harassment affecting his legacy and reputation. Chuck reflected,

In the scheme of the biggest worries you have in life, this wouldn’t have made the top ten. But to me, it was an attack on my reputation, something that I’d worked hard for my entire life. But it also helped me put that in perspective too, that you know what? I worked all this time for this reputation that can be destroyed like this [snap].

Jennifer basked in the glow of a great career of wonderful accomplishments. Since the scandal of the federal grant embezzlement and misappropriated funds she has continued to serve in leadership. Her concern with reputation comes down to this. She said, “There are people I love dearly, but yet they are concerned about their reputation based on my reputation.” Jennifer continues, “I feel the responsibility that my hanging in here and making sure that they understand that there was nothing that was done wrong.” Jennifer grows weary with the weight of making things right for those who worry about their reputation and their future. Even though they may not be family, the relationships in Jennifer’s office bind leaders with subordinates. She takes issue with attacks to her reputation personally and wants to resolve the issue. She looks forward to retirement.

Paula defended her reputation after a subordinate complained to the state regarding her work behavior. The state supervisor believed the complaint and reprimanded Paula without fully investigating the situation. Paula explained, “The supervisor is like, ‘you need to quit being negative.’ I am absolutely not being negative. I was just sitting there with my mouth open saying, ‘Negative what? I’m one of the most agreeable people there is.’” She continued, “I am sitting there thinking, what in the world could she be talking about. The improvement plan had
14 or 15 points for improvement, and it was either things that were totally blown out of proportion or downright lies.” Paula worked through the plan successfully retaining her position.

Recognizing she would not be successful in removing Paula, Rita quit the commission office. She moved to another commission which resided in the same building. Rita continued to harass Paula. She gossiped with the supervisor, reported what she saw as inappropriate and continued a relationship with the commission members who joined in Paula’s harassment. Paula continues to repair and maintain her reputation, which will never be quite the same.

Helen realized her independence and strong views targeted her for harassment, but she did not realize her reputation had also become a target. Helen tells us, “I got involved in the primary to assist a young kid fresh out of college. I became aware of how abusive he (follow legislator) can be with his use of power.” The young candidate opposed a well-established politician who constantly harassed Helen. Helen had worked with other legislators to support the young candidate. He ended up not being successful in his bid for election.

Helen explained, “We didn’t realize that he (incumbent legislator) was going to come after us on social media and have a poll in the press.” The barrage of negative social media and constant triage of facts from fiction left Helen and her positions on policy in danger of never being heard. Her reputation being attacked placed her ability to perform her job in jeopardy. With such fierce opposition, she could not continue to hold a leadership position.

**Character**

Ethics, judgement, and a sense of common decency comprise the essence of character. Integrity composes a code of excellence by which individuals measure one’s character. In harassment situations individuals frequently fall victim to personal attacks. It goes beyond the disagreement, behavior of individuals involved, and conduct of the organization. The essence of
the leader/victim becomes damaged. Their very character falls to attacks and questions. I
organized the leaders’ statements around the severity of the experience. Each attack of a leader
proved damaging, but some suffered longer term.

Frank put it this way,

It is a powerful experience, being terminated without just cause, I think that’s the part
that just wells with you forever. You’re doing a good job. You have had all the results,
the stats that showed you were doing well. And it all is over some stupid, little athletics.

Frank continued, “I had four evaluations, and every one of them was stellar. Where was the
problem?” By the personal attack on Frank without just cause, his very integrity fell damaged.
It took several years to recover.

Bill suffered a very public attack on his integrity when a group of patrons from the
district circulated a petition to have him removed as superintendent alleging a wide variety of
grievances. They delivered the petition to the school board but thought the petition would
remain anonymous. Bill quickly informed the group the petition would be public record and all
names and grievances recorded in the minutes. Bill addressed the group, “I will just do you this,
there is a famous quote, I think it was Adlai Stevenson. It goes, ‘I’ll make you a deal. You quit
telling lies about me and I’ll quit telling the truth about you.’” Bill’s return attack left him
compromised to a public outburst. Even though it may be justified, it remains an outburst. The
petition effort failed to remove Bill, but his outburst damaged his integrity as an administrator
and also eroded his effectiveness. Bill said,

That’s when I decided those good intentioned people suddenly start thinking you’re not
really doing your job or you’re not good at what you do, and they second guess
everything from that point on. I’ve learned that even people that have trusted you and
thought you were doing a good job and were confiding in you and, I mean, just
something like this and it’s just all gone. I don’t know how you ever get that back, quite
honestly.

Eli explained,
We all know that in leadership roles that people aren’t going to agree with you, but you don’t think people are going to undermine you and cut your knees out and backstab you, all the way as you try to get to the finish line, people are trying to just not let you finish.

He continued, “I had some great board member who said this guy we’ve hired hasn’t done anything wrong.” Eli struggled with the attacks. He lamented, “The media ran it. They would mention my current role and people would put my organization in a negative light because of me.” But he could not address the media. He said, “The media is looking for a story and they tell the story from their point of view and angle they want without telling all the facts.” Eli suffered the personal attacks and recognized the damage to his integrity with no method to address it.

Sam faced an administrator who openly targeted him, encouraging others to question and confront Sam. He said, “You plant enough seed and they’ll start looking critically at you just because they’re told, ‘Stay clear of him,’ and probably explaining why she feels that way and what’s wrong with how I do my job.” It placed a question in the minds of the subordinates. It set up the change in dynamic, moving people in her (academic VP) direction and away from Sam’s leadership. Staff began to avoid Sam, making it obvious that something happened. When a leader’s integrity comes into question and people avoid that leader, his or her ability to succeed diminishes.

Kathy worked hard for the dysfunctional district with a truly challenging situation. She desperately wanted the students to improve and succeed as learners. She put it this way:

It caused me to try harder. My personality is to prove myself and try even harder. It was a hard lesson to learn in this situation. It doesn’t matter how hard you try. It doesn’t matter what your integrity is. People who don’t like you or are against you or are causing you to feel intimidated are not going to see you in a different way.

Recognizing she could not change the district resulted in Sally deciding to leave. The attack on Sally, challenging her integrity, made it impossible to improve the district.
Betty provided solid, professional evaluation services for grants as a professional consultant. The media pulled her into an investigation of mismanagement of a grant presenting half-truths and incomplete information. She spoke of it this way, “I learned unfortunately that you can be doing really ethical, good work and people can still criticize and the media can take things out of context and make you look bad when you’re not doing anything wrong.” Betty suffered damage to her integrity. She still feels targeted as an easy mark for the media.

Chuck consulted frequently and provided great improvements to education. The publication of his contracted amount for a federal grant under scrutiny of embezzlement and mismanagement brought substantial negative attention to Chuck. He said,

Making money in education sometimes implies you’ve sold out or you’ve abandoned your roots and all the things that go with it. I had a couple of administrators who I hold with a lot of respect say, “Chuck, the biggest issue I hear is you made a lot of money.”

The implication from the statement suggests Chuck has lost his integrity and making money holds more importance than education. Not taking into consideration if the amount proved as fair compensation, the individuals merely indicted Chuck. Quick assumptions made for a harassing gesture because they questioned his integrity.

Jennifer specifically mentioned integrity. As a public servant and having served in the capacity for many years, she never took any attack personally. She witnessed many passionate people working toward a specific policy or goal. In a free society, everyone has a right to that passion. When the issue of the federal grant came about and she experienced the full range of attacks, it appeared differently.

She said, “The grant thing has been more focused on really, I would say, pointing out or questioning my integrity. It said, ‘we don’t like you because we feel there’s an integrity issue’—
that’s the more difficult thing to deal with.” The media kept the story alive well beyond a standard news cycle. Reliving the events, the decisions, and the individuals involved made for a sensational story. Each new media story about the grant brought back each named individual. Jennifer explained, “So again all these ethics conversations. And every time you read about them, they bring up the scandal. The question, if she had integrity these sorts of things wouldn’t happen.”

Sally disciplined a long-time employee using progressive discipline. With full documentation and full disclosure to the employee, she submitted a recommendation to the executive committee for termination. They refused the recommendation. Sally said, “My integrity is very, very important to me.” She had the data and the documentation, but unknown to Sally, the employee had written a letter to the executive committee. The executive committee called Sally to a meeting. They expressed how employees were unhappy with Sally. Sally point blank asked if a letter had come from the disciplined employee. They skirted the issue. Sally said, “Long story short, at the very end I was supposed to put a plan together to improve the happy factor of the staff.” Sally trying to make the organization efficient and accountable resulted in an attack on her character. It became her responsibility to keep employees happy.

**Relationships**

Many of the interviewed leaders felt personal isolation, lack of support from colleagues, anger toward harassers, and a burden to their families. The emotions developed from the responsibilities of the office which produced the harassment. Communities and organizations carried a great silence which enhanced the isolation of the office. Few offered words of encouragement or even support for the leaders. Those individuals thought to be friends soon disappeared or avoided the leader/victim. A common theme of anger toward the harassers also
presented itself in the interviews. Family suffering from the harassment also impacted the leader, motivating the outcome. The interviewees rarely spoke to anyone other than their spouse or family regarding the harassment. I organized the following sections with the least expressed experience to most expressed.

**Isolation**

The interviews revealed how the harassed leaders frequently felt isolated, without friends, angry, and a burden to their family. Each interview held a story of how the individual felt and processed why they would feel that way. Three interviewed leaders spoke of isolation and how they changed their behaviors and even their mindset about the position and people involved.

Kathy recognized how individualized harassment presents itself and how emotions developed. She stated, “I was fearful, very fearful and always looking over my shoulder, wondering who was saying what.” She continued, “It was so weird how powerless you are to change those circumstances.” Kathy concluded, “I really lost trust in others, which is not my nature.” In processing her harassment Kathy felt the isolation and powerlessness of being targeted. Her experience with the school district left her questioning her ability to perform professionally and challenged her ability to move to another district.

Sally had great success within the specialty hospital until the harassment began. Sally said, “I am going to prove to them I’m their person, and I thought I was. And all of a sudden it’s like they’re not listening to me anymore. They don’t believe in me anymore. They are not allowing me to progress.” Sally found the board questioned her every move. Sally continued, “I felt like I had to look over my shoulder continuously. No matter what I do, it’s never going to be good enough for them.” The need to continually worry about how she performed, who she could trust and what she could do led to an isolated leadership.
Bill found the public continued to question his competence but with no evidence to back up the accusations. It came to the point where he questioned what would happen next. He said, “I am to the point I don’t go, I never go down to the post office. I don’t go to the grocery store. I put my gas in after a school board meeting or at 11:30 at night when I get home from a basketball trip.” Bill refused to interact with the community any further because it just wasn’t worth the battle. So much of his time ended in discussions with patrons who wanted to question him or challenge him. Bill continued, “The people of this community have made it easy for me to just have this be a job. And after 40 years, I would have never, ever, ever, ever, ever guessed that would be the case.” Bill encountered harassment which pushed him into isolation to avoid further conflict. A continuous attack from the public forced a long-serving exceptional administrator into silence.

**Lack of Support from Colleagues**

A lack of support from friends, the community, or public at large influenced five of thirteen leaders to respond during the interviews. Each leader saw the lack of support as an indictment on them personally or the leadership they provided. In many ways, it eroded the confidence of the harassed leader and created an environment where the leader felt helpless and worthless.

Bill took the abuse from a community where he had lived and worked for 40 years. The level of support for the abuse surprised him. He said, “I tell you what made me even angrier that the good people in town never said a thing. Publicly they never said a thing.” He continued, “I had phone calls, emails, or face to face messages from 86 different people in the community and yet not publicly did anybody say a thing. Not once.” He felt publicly betrayed and abandoned.
Frank left the district but continued to live in the community he once served. His wife worked at a local bank as a teller. The patrons in the bank in the beginning greeted her warmly and asked how her day was. After Frank left the district, people avoided her teller line and would go out of their way to do their banking business through someone else at the bank. Frank relayed, “Very few people asked, ‘How is Frank doing?’” Frank and his wife built a lake home and moved from the community but stayed only a few miles down the road. He shared, “I cannot stand to go into the community. I can’t stand it.”

Chuck realized, through the trauma of the incident regarding a federal grant controversy, how few of his friends came to his aid. He said, “I also had moments where I realized that people that were my, I thought were my friends, I wasn’t hearing from them. They weren’t reaching out to me to say, hey, hang in there, hope you are doing okay.” Chuck continued,

People that I would have thought I would have heard from, you know, and I did hear from some, of course. I didn’t hear from others. You find out who your friends are and you start to realize there is some level of truth to that old story.

He said, “You feel victimized.”

Sam suffered from having few, if any friends, in his work environment. Because he moved frequently and served in various higher education institutions, he had very few close friends. He said it this way, “I think I’m a typical male where, especially when I moved around a lot, the friends I have are distant friends. They don’t always give you the best advice. It is usually ‘aw screw ‘em!’” He continued, “I think that can also play into this as well, you don’t have anyone to really talk to.” Sam wanted to process what happened to him and seek ways of managing the situations but had no friends to discuss the experience.

Paula found a very different situation with friends. Her harassment evolved from a friendship within the office which quickly turned into a very difficult experience. Paula stated,
“One huge mistake I have made was I got too close to Rita.” They both had children with autism. They understood the difficulty of parenting special needs children. Paula provided advice and also support beyond just verbal support. Paula allowed Rita the opportunity to make those emergency trips to school and healthcare whenever she needed to go. Rita began to believe she ran the office and took ownership of the small office of three permanent staff. Paula gave this example, “Rita said, ‘I won’t be in the next two days because we’re taking some respite care kids.’ I said, ‘You’re telling me you’re not going to be in?’ I thought that you kind of have to ask.” The relationship deteriorated from this point forward. Paula thought they had a mutual friendship around the lives of their children. Rita looked for a way to push Paula out and abused the friendship to get it done.

**Anger**

Six of thirteen interviewed leaders in this study developed a strong anger toward the individuals and groups who perpetuated the harassment. The level and intensity of anger varied in each case. The quotes captured from the interviews of the leaders experiencing anger offer the best understanding of the emotional roller coaster of harassment.

Frank suffered greatly from the circumstances of his departure. The community and school board made his life difficult and miserable until he left. He knew well who the individuals making his life miserable were. Frank said it this way, “If a doctor walked in and told me, ‘Frank, you’ve got six months to live.’ I always tell my wife, ‘I’m not so sure I wouldn’t take a fricking shotgun out and shoot that son-of-a-bitch because I’m going to die anyway.’” Frank continued,

The one guy drives truck, he dumps milk at the cheese plant every day, so a lot of times I’m driving to work and I see his truck coming. I don’t know if he sees it or not, but when I’m driving and I meet his truck, I flip him off.
The residual anger continues to this day, and the departure happened nearly a decade ago. Frank told me it felt good to tell his story. He hadn’t considered it in years. It helped to dissipate the anger and move forward.

Bill struggled with the constant barrage of attacks both to his competence and his integrity. He just couldn’t catch a break. His frustration grew into anger which reached a very dangerous level of irritation. Bill fantasized,

I was at a gun show last spring in the city. There was a guy from Montana that had a brand new Sharps 45-90. He wanted a lot for it. I told other gun dealers I know, if this whole thing had happened 150 years ago, I would have saddled up my best pony, thrown in a couple rounds in my Sharps 45-90, and I’d have went over and shot and killed them all.

Bill continued, “When I came back to town, I would walk into the bar, I’d buy a round of drinks. If I was particularly happy with the results, I might buy two rounds.”

Bill holds a huge amount of anger to the point it borders on unhealthy. Bill further explained, “I’ll just tell you straight up it’s just pissed me off. Publicly they never said a thing.”

The betrayal by the community toward his situation generated a deep pain for Bill. He served the community for 40 years, and not one person wrote a letter of support or made a public statement reinforcing Bill’s professionalism or success as a school superintendent. Bill sees the end of his education career and looks forward to a new chapter.

Roxie managed a huge change project for school improvement that met all kinds of resistance. With the undermining of her plans and a collective resistance to every move she made the final moments of her employment held contention. As the school board reversed their decision and put the change project on hold, Roxie met with an executive committee. Roxie said, “We had all agreed on this plan and I’m trying to understand, why we are backing out on this now? I’ve already met with half of my staff. We all agreed that this was going to be the
best direction to move.” The committee started bashing the plan and the people involved. Roxie replied, “This is just crap.” She walked out of the meeting. The superintendent met with Roxie the next day and acknowledged that she had a right to be angry. He also stated the board wanted to meet without her present. The meeting was broadcast, and the board president defamed Roxie to the point she retained a lawyer and negotiated her departure. Roxie resolved her anger and has used the experience to understand the dynamics and prepare people through training for such events.

Sam experienced the attacks of colleagues and an administration that encouraged the behavior of harassment. After struggling to make it work and continuing at the technical college, Sam finally decided to resign and find other employment. Sam said,

I went through a lot of anger and shit for a long time. I feel very strongly that I was done wrong. I was treated poorly. I don’t want to do it to anybody else. But I also know that I had a hand in allowing or creating the situation to some degree. And to some degree I let it happen to me. So I have a responsibility to some degree to learn from it.

Sam realized he needed to let go of his anger and find a new reality. He feels it makes him a better person and a better leader today. He explained, “Believe the best about people, but don’t make the mistake of expecting people to stick up for you, especially if it might put them at risk because most people won’t.”

Sally endured a very difficult tenure as the CEO of a specialty hospital. When she decided to resign and seek other employment, two of the board members came to watch her pack and leave her office. She felt very irritated being watched as if she were some criminal or untrustworthy employee being escorted out the door. The board members explained it was just their policy when a CEO leaves. Sally explained, “One of the board members said, ‘I can help carry boxes,’ I said, ‘No, please don’t.’ I mean you should have seen me. ‘I don’t want you to touch my things.’” The board member walked her to her car and said, “Well, thank you.” Sally
replied, “Thank you? Thank you for the way that I’ve been treated? Don’t. Don’t.” She continued, “I’ve lost all respect for them. I have no respect.” The anger at how she was treated up to the very last moment left a residual anger. She can’t even be in the same room with these people.

Betty suffered from an unfortunate agreement to provide evaluation services for a federal grant. When the grant developed a problem of embezzlement and mismanagement, she struggled with the media and the public drawing conclusions about her involvement in the grant. Betty became frustrated with the media for constantly chasing her for a story. One particular incident, the media commentator followed her to the restroom and basically demanded an answer. Betty said, “It was just a really bad experience of waylaying out in the hallway. A very uncomfortable experience while I was taking a new position as the dean of education, I was concerned about how that might be perceived.” Betty anxiously waits for retirement and plans to move out of state to avoid her irritation and start fresh.

**Family**

Family suffering plays a major role in the experience of harassed leaders. Seven of thirteen interviews described family involvement and suffering. Leaders explain how important their families became in harassment situations. The statements of the harassed leaders regarding family support and involvement in the lived experience and recovery of the leader show how the leader would not have survived without them.

Chuck said it perfectly, “I’m married to a wonderful woman who was a terrific support for me. Sometimes when I was at my lowest, she was a good encourager.” He also explained, “All the while I recognized, none of this is as serious as other people have gone through. I didn’t lose a spouse or a child.” Chuck realized he needed to not worry about the harassment and focus
on family, spending time building family unity, strength, and investing time with children and grandchildren. Chuck gratefully accepted his recovery from harassment and has moved to a new chapter.

Sam moved to Wisconsin to be closer to his children’s grandparents and family. The opportunity provided a chance for career improvement as well as family connections. As the harassment developed and took over Sam’s life, it became apparent he must leave for not only his career but his health. He said,

The hardest part of it was ultimately when I had do get the hell out of there. I had to uproot my kids. My oldest one was going into his senior year, my younger one going into ninth grade. I have to move them away from their grandparents when Grandpa was sick and dying.

He continued, “Everybody wanted to stay there because we liked living there. It was a major family issue.” The family moved and supported Sam. Even knowing the family supported him and reluctantly moved, he struggled with the guilt of needing to move. The family understood the need and sacrificed to save Sam.

Sally had her daughter explain to her, “Mom, even when you’re home, you’re not home.” She worked constantly and tried harder and harder to please an ungrateful board. Sally finally realized, “My daughters deserve better than this because I am killing myself to make this board appreciate everything I’m doing for the organization. No matter what I do, it’s never going to be good enough for them.” It took her children pointing it out before Sally could recognize she needed to make a change for her health and the health of her relationship with her daughters.

Jennifer worried for her daughter. She said it this way, “She is my soul mate, and we’re very, very close. I have seen what it’s done to her, she agonizes over her Mom. My husband has taken some too, but they worry about me.” Jennifer’s husband had a major heart attack and the family farm needed labor. Their son, who gave up his job in law enforcement, took the
responsibility for the farm. Jennifer herself would return home on weekends to work the farm. Through it all, the family has held each other up and managed the situation. Each family member worried about the other more than themselves. The harassment only leveled another burden on the family.

Eli moved his family back to the state from a career in Washington D.C. He and his wife felt the family atmosphere and the close proximity to both their extended families made this city a great location to raise a family of five girls. The harassment made him question what he needed to do next. He said, “If I hadn’t had my wife and great friends I wouldn’t have made it through it.” He continued, “It puts a ton of pressure on the home. I mean you go home, every day, you discuss and talk through things for months.” Eli recognized his wife made the difference. He said,

My best friend and the person I relied on was my wife. I am so grateful for her. I think our marriage is stronger because of what we went through, we are closer. We got tighter. I mean we got more reliant on each other.

Bill’s family had a different reaction. He said, “My family, my girls in particular, I mean they wanted to physically come out and harm people they were so pissed.” The anger Bill’s girls felt for such disrespect and unreasonable attacks of their father left the family at a crossroads of wanting to make very blunt statement. Bill’s wife transcribes for the local health care facility and provided a level head. She believed moving out of the community and getting closer to family would provide the best answer. The time to move on had come. No need for further conflict when the community made it easy for them to take their leave. The family was in it together.

Roxie suffered a reprimand which resulted in a suspension for a week. The beginning of the end came with this suspension. She immediately went to her husband’s office across town.
He knew the content of a board meeting where the president of the board had torn into her both professionally and personally. Her husband helped her make the decision. She told him, “I think I need representation.” He helped her process the situation, hire the right lawyer, and create a conclusion which would lead to the culmination of the harassment and a settlement.

**Health Concerns**

Leaders also suffered health concerns, but in limited numbers. Health concerns from my research proved less conclusive, with only four of thirteen directly commenting on health-related concerns. Leaders lost sleep or had some level of anxiety, but few had debilitating physical responses to the event or process of harassment. Leaders internalize and move forward, masking the symptoms of stress. The long-term effect of the harassment on physical health of leaders may appear in the future.

Concerns develop regarding the health of harassed leaders. The stress of workplace harassment creates a variety of issues. The stress can elevate blood pressure, create anxiety, and sleeplessness can interfere with cognitive processes. In my research with harassed leaders, I found these health concerns in four of thirteen leaders.

Paula developed a severe health problem after several months of harassment. She described it this way:

> I go to leave for lunch to go pick up my husband and I get in my car and I start backing up, and all of the sudden I feel like I’m having a heart attack. I end up calling my husband. I tell him we’re going to the ER. My chest hurts.

She found she had a panic attack. Her diagnosis showed she had an irregular heartbeat. Paula’s doctor placed her on an anti-anxiety prescription to reduce the episode but also explained to her she needed to reduce her stress. Paula explained, “The doctor told me, if it doesn’t settle down at work, you need to go find a different job.” The constant harassment from a coworker and the
subsequent discipline made Paula a physical wreck. She needed the position she held to maintain her family economically and she needed the insurance the position provided, yet the position and the harassment created the health risk she must address.

Sam endured a long period of harassment from his colleague and his superior. The colleague demanded full control of not only programming but also Sam. The superior sided with the colleague on numerous occasions making Sam’s life a living hell. The stress and lack of sleep compounded upon itself until Sam said, “This isn’t an exaggeration, and I don’t think it is pure coincidence, but that was the first time in my life I started to really develop any health problems.” Sam knew he needed to make a change and struggled with the reality.

Sam explained, “It had to be related, stress, not sleeping as well, and then that feeds you that you don’t perform as well or handle the situation as well. It’s a giant snowball. It affected my thinking and job performance.” Sam left the position for other employment but not because he truly wanted to leave. The harassment forced him to confront his health and make a change.

Jennifer lived through a wide variety of attacks both to her integrity and her reputation. Each time an article came across social media or a person from the public fired a verbal shot at her at a meeting, it took its toll on her personally. She said, “I’ve never had to be on an anti-depressant in my life or have I had anxiety, I don’t like that.” Most people when they get stressed eat, but Jennifer didn’t. She struggled with weight loss and needed to find a way to see pleasure in food again. She described, “There just isn’t a way that food is appealing, I would say it took a personal toll more that way.” She explained sleep comes easily to her, but she said, “The panic, it’s right there in the morning, but I can sleep like a rock.”

Jennifer described a feeling of loss that she called her happy factor. “I just wanted my happy factor back,” she said. She continued, “I was visiting with someone not so long ago about
not remembering. It was a silly thing that somebody talked about around Halloween a year ago. I have no memories from about October through December, January. It’s a total blank.” The stress of the harassment took her memory of everything else at the time. Jennifer repeated, “I call it my happy factor and when that’s not there, that’s how I kind of think and function and I just wasn’t really happy.”

Eli found the experience of harassment exhausting. He said of that time in his life, “I don’t think I can get up and do this again tomorrow.” Eli committed to not giving up. Each day he tried again and again. Although he suffered sleepless nights and embattled days, he persevered. Eli remains in the position he held during his harassment. The harassers have receded and not much health damage has remained from the incident. He has a rare outcome in the research. His health concerns have all but disappeared because the harassment stopped and his healthy sleep returned.

Faith

I found a unique aspect of strong faith in the interviews. Those leaders who spoke of a deep faith in God appeared most comfortable with and adjusted to the next chapter in their career. Acceptance of one’s fate and having a great belief in a divine plan helped leaders find perspective and adjust to what might come next.

As leaders experience harassment, they may find solace in their faith. Explaining the harassment circumstances through a lens of belief in a higher power makes it easier to adjust and accept the consequences of harassment. The following statements from my research interviews showcase the experience of faith in harassment for four of thirteen interviewees.

Chuck held a strong belief in Christian values and life eternal. He said,
I am a man of faith, and so there were a number of times when I did some one-on-one business with God to kind of go, so, I do believe that everything happens for a purpose. I just tried to say I guess, Lord, this was part of the plan. I don’t know why. It doesn’t make sense to me right now, but I feel like I have to trust that you have a role to play here and that maybe I’m just still being shaped into a better person.

He further commented,

I think God was, you know, sort of helping me understand a lot of these relationships I’d been investing in aren’t eternal. So don’t spend as much time as you’ve been on them. Spend more time on the ones that are going to, you know, including a relationship with the Lord that is going to prove to be fruitful forever.

Chuck made great points regarding how faith and God relate to the experience of harassment.

Eli leaned on his faith during his harassment. He said, “If my faith hadn’t been so strong, I laid down each night and prayed. I’d wake up the next day and sure enough I felt like, Eli get up.” He continued,

I didn’t turn to God and say, ‘Why, God?’, ‘Why me?’ You know it’s like this is something you’re giving me. It’s for my good and I’ve got to use it for that, I’ve got to stay who you tell me to be, which is bold and strong and courageous in my faith. Do not trust man-made things which are the media and people you work with and friends who leave once things go bad.

Eli held to his faith, and it brought him through as he continues in the same position he held during his harassment experience.

Kathy professed a strong faith, saying, “God is in control.” Her belief system held firm in that statement. As she struggled through the harassment as a superintendent she relied on that statement. She expressed it this way: “It was a weird set of circumstances, and it was an interesting blip on the radar of my life. And God uses all things to good. That’s scriptural, and I just really praise Him for getting me through that, helping me to be as successful as we were down there.” Kathy took comfort in knowing she had succeeded in helping the district recover somewhat. She took pride in the improvements that occurred, regardless of the awful conditions and negative experiences.
Jake sees the experience very simply with a single statement. He said, “This is where God wanted me.” Jake felt that the time and place came from God's choosing. The development of Jake happened because he had this experience, because he had a deep faith in God. He worked within a faith community for a Christian school. Working through the harassment, learning a better way to manage the situation, all have created a stronger, better person from Jake. Knowing that God is in control and there is a greater purpose helped Jake become a better leader. Jake helps shape the next generation of educational leaders as a professor of education at a university.

Leaders experience attacks which result in harassment after multiple episodes. The situations and feelings from those episodes create a challenge for leaders to manage and recover. Each story from the interviews explained how and who attacked them. Some understanding of why they were attacked comes from their stories as well. How leaders manage these episodes and recovered to move to new leadership positions or move on to new careers has been presented through the transcribed data.

The next chapter analyzes the data and applies the theory which best explains the situations described in the data. The use of three theories informs the analysis of the study to the greatest degree. The metaphor of an organism as an organization with a broad understanding of biology, ecology and the organism, followed by organizational culture as defined in organizational theory, concluding with coming to grips with loss explaining individual loss experiences, inform the research within the analysis.
CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS

The process of interviewing harassed leaders allowed me an opportunity to understand how leaders first experience harassment, as well as how the organization impacts harassment and how it affects individual leaders. Because workplace harassment of leaders involves people and in many cases a variety and number of people, I adopted the organism metaphor of organization theory (Morgan, 2006) as a lens to explain the harassment of leaders occurring within organizations and communities.

Organizational culture (Bolman & Deal, 2013), which focuses on the everyday informal interactions of people within organizations, greatly impacts the nature of harassment of leaders. I continue to offer explanations of harassment through the further application of organization theory using organizational culture as the lens. Organizations can develop a likelihood or predisposition toward harassing leaders. Using the aspect of organizational culture as described in Bolman and Deal (2013), I have determined the culture guides the organization toward legitimizing and supporting harassment of leaders in the workplace.

After positioning leaders within organizations and describing how organizations hold predisposed cultural practices of harassment of leaders, I next analyze the professional and personal experiences and effects of workplace harassment. To make sense of the damage to victims, I describe how harassed leaders experience losses using Coming to Grips with Loss Theory (Cummings, 2015). Cummings’ (2015) models show how the grieving process occurs and also reoccurs. I begin with the organism metaphor of organization theory because workplace harassment begins in organizational settings, continuing with organizational culture which creates a structure for harassment and completing the analysis with how organizations sometimes leave a permanent mark on leaders’ personal and professional lives.
Organism as a Metaphor for Leadership

Morgan (2006) developed a description of an organism as a metaphor to an organization. Morgan’s organism metaphor had origins in the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Bertalanffy developed General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1969). He used the example of an organism: “Living organisms are essentially open systems, i.e., systems exchanging matter with their environment” (Bertalanffy, 1969, p. 32). The adaptation of an open system to the environment distinguished Bertalanffy from other researchers in the field of organizational theory.

Morgan saw how organisms worked as a unit to deliver the maximum for the whole organism through the work of each of its parts (Morgan, 2006). Burns and Stalker wrote of a unit which develops to accomplish the tasks necessary to address the concerns of the whole organization (Burns & Stalker, 1961). “An industrial concern exists in order to carry out a specific task. To exist at all, a concern employs a number of people. These are assigned to specific bits of the total task” (Burns & Stalker, 1961, p. 97). Recognizing how an organization works within an environment and reacts to the environment, as well as having people involved in accomplishing the objective through working within their unit, the metaphor of an organism fully describes organizations which experience harassment of leaders.

The metaphor of an organism allows for creative thinking within organization theory to help make sense of workplace harassment of leaders in organizations. Morgan described the use of metaphors as a tool for thinking. When considering the metaphor of the organism with regard to workplace harassment of leaders, the environment and the reaction to change in the environment create the reality within an organization. The harm to the organism exists in making the individual or organization less fit to survive in its environment than its predecessor (Burns & Stalker, 1961).
Morgan (2006) explained the workplace by using the metaphor of an organism to reveal the inner workings of an organization. He found organizations could be viewed as living systems (organisms) existing in a wider environment. The best definition of the organism as a metaphor of an organization states,

In the process, organization theory has become a kind of biology in which the distinctions and relations among molecules, cells, complex organisms, species, and ecology are paralleled in those between individuals, groups, organizations, populations (species) of organizations, and their social ecology. (Morgan, 2006, p. 34)

The organism metaphor represents a broader biology system in order to apply to my study, which responds to the environment – just like in nature. Morgan (2006) defines the organization in terms of interrelated subsystems:

If we define the whole organization as a system, then the other levels can be understood as subsystems, just as molecules, cells, and organs can be seen as subsystems of a living organism, even though they are complex open systems on their own account. (p. 39)

The organism metaphor applies to my study of workplace harassment in the following ways. Whether a fox or a human, the organism exists in an environment. The environment affects survival, and the environment may protect or eliminate an otherwise healthy person or animal, or habitat or ecosystem. Taking the organism metaphor and expanding it to the greater biology of living things in an ecosystem, I will explain workplace harassment through the organism metaphor using a simple metaphor. The simple metaphor has subsystems or units within the greater biology. Each species of animal viewed as an individual unit in the metaphor stands within the greater system allowing us the opportunity to view the groups or units within an organization as parts of the whole organization.

A cat strolls across the farm yard. The cat alerts a group of birds by his presence. The birds sense a threat to their group and begin to swoop toward him, first one and then several and soon all the birds in the farm yard swoop and chatter at the cat. The birds know they cannot fight
the cat alone or even in a group. They will never completely destroy the cat. The birds can only attempt to scare the cat away for as long as possible. Their sole purpose revolves around making the cat so miserable he leaves. If the cat leaves, the environment returns to the previous status and life goes on as usual for the birds.

In this situation, the environment of the ecosystem alerts a group or unit such as the birds of a possible threat whether real or perceived. The cat rarely has any ill intent toward the birds. The cat has no ulterior motive other than to continue on his way to do his business. Rather than attempt to determine the severity of the threat or to adjust and work around the cat, the birds move toward elimination of the cat by driving him out. The same holds true for leaders in organizations. A group or unit of individuals within the organization, which does not hold authority, identifies a threat to the group (the birds). The leader (the cat) becomes the target of the group. The leader appears to threaten the group by some action. The causing action identified in my study holds three basic categories: a personnel action involving an individual within the group, a financial challenge which may affect the livelihood of the group, or a system change which would alter how the group functions. The motivation for the desire to eliminate an individual by the group comes quite naturally and applies to workplace harassment of leaders.

Every organism has three appetites: for food, for sex, and for elimination (Westhues, 2005). All agree that hunger and sexual desire have a physiological basis in the environment. The third craving is ordinarily not grouped with the other two: “Notwithstanding its less evident basis in biology, the eliminative impulse, the lust to wipe another person out, is categorically similar” (Westhues, 2005, p. 25). The third natural impulse exists in the environment and in organizations. When alerted to a real or perceived threat, groups desire the threat to be
eliminated. The urge to eliminate plays a large role in the harassment of leaders within organizations.

I have determined through the analysis using the organism metaphor that the term mobbing should replace the term workplace harassment. This study presented mobbing through the review of literature. Mobbing more closely aligns with the farm metaphor described in the previous paragraphs. The actions of a weaker group against the strength of an animal or unit which could inflict consequences leading to termination, describes mobbing better than harassment. The descriptions of the leaders and their experiences illustrate the more detailed understanding presented through the definition of mobbing. The suffering and continued misery of harassing behavior from a wide group of individuals and units of individuals brings the definition of mobbing to life.

In my analysis, I use the organism metaphor to interpret the actions and reactions of chief executive officers or superintendents charged with providing direction, stability and growth to an organization. I analyzed my data using the metaphor of an organism within the broader ecosystem using it in review of the initial actions which start the mobbing process: (1) personnel actions which a group within the organization question and see as a threat, (2) financial challenges which a group interprets as threatening to the organization, and (3) a system change effort which a group finds unacceptable for the organization. Any form of threat may lead to a mobbing and may be viewed as an action with the potential to damage or cause the demise of the leader.

I begin my analysis with a review of personnel actions by leaders and their perceived threat and reaction. I will continue my analysis using actions or inactions by leaders regarding financial challenges and system change efforts. I present several situations from the data of my
study illustrating the perceived threat within the environment of the organization. The leader performs the action within his or her normal course of duties utilizing his/her authority to perform the action. A group within the organization finds this a threatening act. The leader interprets the reaction as not only a threat to his/her authority but to the performance of the organization. The group within the organization interprets the threat as potentially damaging to the future of the organization.

Figure 1. Cat mobbed by birds

Personnel Actions

Bill held the position of superintendent for over 20 years. During that time, he made many hiring decisions of various levels including administrative positions. When Nancy applied for an administrative position and Bill determined another candidate fit the needs of the district better, Nancy decided to threaten Bill. He stated it this way,

Nancy didn’t get the job and according to her husband, the person that got the job got it because I needed a drinking buddy. He (the successful applicant) had twenty-two years of experience as a superintendent and principal and he was the best choice . . . worst person in the world according to her. So now all of a sudden there’s nothing right about anything ever.

The threat of questioning the superintendent’s authority to hire staff according to best qualifications created an internal stand-off. A personnel issue created a catalyst for mobbing the leader, and the organization reacted according to the metaphor of an organism seeking to drive out the perceived threat to the organization. Challenging the discretion of the superintendent to
manage the staffing of the school provided the initial mobbing of the leader. Similar to the metaphor of the birds and the cat, Nancy rallied others within the school system to join in the attack to continue to annoy and challenge Bill. He saw the challenge to his authority as challenging his actions to appropriately manage the organization. Nancy believed Bill was a threat and held the district from success. Her response progressed toward elimination. Nancy engaged the community in agreeing the perceived threat required action against the leader. Just as the birds swooped and chattered at the cat, so did Nancy engage the community to swoop and chatter making Bill’s life miserable.

Bill experienced an initial threat from an individual (Nancy) who had determined she should have the position of principal. She would make it her mission to question all of his decisions. The threat escalated to an external threat as Nancy circulated a petition to have Bill removed as superintendent. The petition listed several reasons Bill should be removed. All of the reasons could be easily explained or were lies. The media covered the story and supported the petition circulators’ views, escalating the threat even further to include the greater community. The school board meeting allowed Bill the chance to respond to the petition. The petition became part of the meeting minutes. He explained each accusation and dispelled the lies, but it only set the stage for the next threat. The community and the system now attacked Bill with regularity. The greater biology of the many complex organisms’ response to a perceived threat within the environment used in the expanded metaphor from Morgan allows us an understanding of Bill’s mobbing.

Frank received threats from the school board president almost immediately. The desire of the school board to remove a specific coach and teacher led to the situation. Frank saw no evidence or reason to remove the teacher. The constant threat from the board only increased
over time. Frank said the board president put it this way, “If the coach is not gone at the end of this year, you will be.” The organization micromanaged the superintendent until the board president gave a final threat. The farm yard metaphor must be expanded to a much larger ecosystem for Frank’s situation.

The farmer perceives the farm yard has a problem. He believes the cat needs to catch and remove a bird which the farmer believes to be a problem. The farmer sees no positive reason for a bird and wants it replaced. If the cat won’t do his job, the farmer will remove the cat. The cat doesn’t agree or perceive the threat from the bird and does not follow the command. The farmer removes the cat. In all organic structures, an order of authority exists. Frank (cat) reported to the school board (farmer) and ultimately must accept the demands of the greater authority.

![Figure 2. Farmer removes cat](image)

Jake became the chief administrator of a private Christian school. He assessed the school and determined a particular employee needed to be removed from the classroom. Through progressive discipline processes, Jake proceeded to remove the employee. She fought back each step of the way. He said, “She just went off on the e-mail saying that nobody ever trusted me. I heard a lot of like ‘Everybody thinks that you’re a bad leader or nobody ever trusts you.’” The incompetent employee rallied her friends in the school to make Jake’s life miserable. Jake took action to improve the organization. The action signaled to a subgroup or unit of the organization
a perceived threat to the system. As in the metaphor, the birds from the farm yard perceived a threat from the cat to one of their own. The birds attacked the cat to force the cat to leave and bring the farmyard back to the balance before this cat appeared.

As the process escalated the employee proceeded from e-mails sent to Jake to sharing her situation through social media. She wrote, “I know that God has everything under control, but I seriously want—I seriously think that the administration of the school is a cult and they’ve all made a pact to say, ‘Thanks for the information.’” The information circulated through members of the church sponsoring the school as well as school board members. The incompetent employee formed alliances against Jake to make him go away. She felt certain the organization would support her and bring stability back to the environment. As in the farmyard metaphor, the employee expanded the threat to include as many birds on the farm as possible. Even with all the extra birds, she did not have success removing the cat. Her use of the external threat of alliances did not have the desired effect of maintaining her in the organization.

Sam held the position of branch campus CEO for a technical college. He reported directly to the president of the college. The VP of Academic Affairs required complete control and managed numerous employees on the branch campus which Sam managed as CEO. The VP did not recognize Sam’s authority. She made his life miserable. He said, “She was an absolute dictator in terms of how she ran things. We started out on the wrong foot and it went downhill from there.” Sam could not do his job effectively while managing relations with the VP. The constant threat of creating turmoil for the staff and disrupting the campus made the environment of the organization extremely unstable.

Using the farm yard metaphor, two cats manage the farm. One cat demands territorial rights from the other cat. Each cat sees the other as a threat to their existence on the farm. One
cat believes the farm belongs to her and no other cat should exist in her yard. According to her if one must exist, that cat must follow strict orders from her. The proverbial cat fight ensues if she does not get her way. The higher-level organisms perceive threats in the environment and react.

![Figure 3. Cats contest territory](image)

Paula achieved success as an executive director of a statewide licensing commission. A coworker (Rita) within the small organization determined she should have the position of executive director instead of Paula and proceeded to threaten Paula. Rita filed a complaint against Paula with unsubstantiated accusations and marginal facts. Paula received an improvement plan from the state office purely from the accusations leveled by Rita. The personnel action started the mobbing of a successful leader. Paula said, “So I signed the thing, and then the State moves an auditor into our office for about a month working remotely.” His initial purpose involved subjecting Paula to constant micromanagement. The auditor had the advantage of observing the office activity daily. The threat from Rita provided the catalyst to review everything within the office, not just Paula.

I offer a metaphor of the farm with a cat (Rita) and a dog (Paula). The dog worked the farm for many years as a loyal servant. The farmer adds a cat to the farm to expand the service to the farm. The cat believes she has greater importance and does a better job than the dog. She appeals to the farmer to remove the dog as she doesn’t believe the dog provides the service she does. The cat believes she can do everything the dog does. Until the farmer observes the dog
and the cat, he believes the dog has threatened the cat. The farmer observes the cat attacking the dog and intervenes.

Paula knew something happened behind the scenes. She had an employee (Rita) who wanted her position as executive director. Rita had filed a complaint to level the first threat but also worked to establish external alliances just in case the internal threat wasn’t enough. Paula explained, “Rita had called every commission member and had called all three inspectors. No one had ever said anything to me about it.” Rita became very friendly with several commission members to create alliances with them against Paula. The external threat came from the commission who hired Paula designed to undermine her authority. The organism metaphor with an expanded ecosystem explains the desire to stabilize the environment of Paula’s organization and eliminate the threat. When Rita failed to remove Paula, Rita resigned.

![Figure 4. Dog or cat control of the yard](image)

Sally accepted the challenge of taking a specialty hospital to new levels of efficiency. While assessing the organization, Sally determined one member of the organization failed to meet acceptable levels of performance. The employee needed evaluation and discipline, resulting in removal from the organization. The governing board refused to accept the employee removal. Sally stated, “They blocked me from terminating her. The reason why was she had been with the organization twelve years and was like a sacred cow.” From this point forward Sally met opposition to any action she presented. The organization saw Sally as the problem and
moved to eliminate her through micromanaging every decision. The constant mobbing by the board of Sally’s decisions and actions made her life a misery. Sally determined she must leave the organization.

The metaphor of the farm can explain Sally’s situation. The farmer (board) believes the cat (Sally) has attacked one of the chickens in the hen house. Even though the farmer has no proof the cat did anything wrong, no farmer tolerates an attack to his property. Also, the chicken may have grown old and unproductive and suffered from some other failure not a direct attack from the cat. The farmer considers, “if the cat attacks a chicken, what else is the cat doing?” The farmer continues to intervene with the cat until the cat finally says, “Enough, I’m out of here.”

Helen served as chairperson of the appropriations committee, the most powerful committee in state government. The majority leader felt threatened by her authority as committee chair and frequently chose to humiliate her to keep her in her place. His signature act came when he interrupted a private meeting, threw open the door, and said, “What the fuck, do it yourself!” He did all of this in front of constituents and interns. Once he turned on Helen, he did not stop. He enlisted other legislators to keep her from re-election to the chair of appropriations or any leadership positions. The internal threat to the majority leader’s ego left Helen compromised. The organization preferred stability over effective leadership to provide equilibrium. Helen was a casualty.

The metaphor of the farm with a dog (majority leader) and a cat (Helen) applies to Helen’s situation. The dog has full access and domain over the farm. The cat also has access but is subject to the attacks of the dog. The dog recognizes the need for the cat but by nature wishes
to attack the cat. When the dog finds the cat creates a challenge for him he chases the cat until
the cat either leaves or hides. If more dogs join the chase, the cat has no choice.

Financial Challenges

Jennifer experienced a threat from the public through the media regarding a decision she
made on a federal grant. The financial challenge developed around embezzlement by the grant
manager and the subsequent tragedy resulting from the discovery of the embezzlement. The
media made a clear accusation the grant had not had appropriate oversight by Jennifer and her
department. According to the media and greater public, had Jennifer provided appropriate
oversight the tragedy would not have happened. “Her head should roll!” The escalating threat
pushed for Jennifer to resign or leave her position. The organization would right itself if she left
the department according to the media and public opinion. The public environment wanted
Jennifer eliminated.

The metaphor of the cat and birds in the farm yard applies to Jennifer’s situation. The
media creates a greater call for the “birds” to multiply and make the mobbing even greater. The
birds (the public) attack the cat (Jennifer) hoping her removal will make the resources reappear
and the system will right itself. The broader biology of a major ecosystem represents the
metaphor of an organism and the behavior that results within the organization. Using my simple
farm metaphor created from the organism metaphor, the situation for Jennifer becomes easier to
understand.

Betty held an administrative position within higher education. She also provided private
consulting on program evaluation. Her work as a private consultant led to a mobbing. The
threat stated Betty had received a large consulting contract to a failed federal grant. The public
believed Betty somehow colluded with the manager who embezzled from the grant. Betty said,
“I was being lumped in, I think, with people that were perceived as having mismanaged money.”

The media hounded Betty wherever she went. The media confronted her during a state board of education meeting. The birds (the public) from the farm swarmed around the cat (Betty) clearly believing the cat threatened the farm yard and particularly the resources offered to the birds. The loud chatter of the birds, whether the chatter was necessary or not brought more birds. The birds believed if they removed the cat, the resources would reappear.

Chuck developed a sterling reputation for many years of successful service to education in the state. He provided consulting services to a federal grant that developed financial challenges. The federal authority indicted the grant manager for embezzlement. Chuck provided technical assistance for program implementation. Chuck had no direct contact with the finances of the grant. He became immediately implicated by the media as somehow colluding with the manager. The media and the public opinion proceeded to mob Chuck. The elimination of Chuck from the public record and destruction of his reputation reflect the outcome desired by the public. The metaphor of the farm again shows the birds (the public) attacking the cat (Chuck) who merely did his job and nothing wrong. The birds escalated the attacks until the cat had to leave.

**Systems Change Effort**

Roxie saw her mission as bringing change to a district suffering a variety of problems but still ripe for systems change. Through a thorough process of review and planning Roxie recognized the district had had many past glories and lived on past accolades. She knew restructuring needed to happen which would include not only staffing changes but changes in how things were done. Roxie related,
You really have to model that from the top down. You have to be a working PLC team that’s collaborating, really understanding how all those components you manage come together and work in tandem. I had a colleague at the executive level who worked with federal programs. She had been in the district probably 20 years and had a lot of really strong ties. She sat in on plans for a workshop to help implement PLC’s and how it would impact some of the principals and how they were doing things. She just ripped it apart. ‘That’s not going to work.’

The one colleague destroyed any chances for change to occur while attacking Roxie as the problem. The attack started a series of questions of Roxie’s leadership. The organization desired to shake off Roxie to return to a previous system. The changing organization desired the return to a previous environment.

Roxie had received several threats from colleagues and subordinates within the school district. She believed it came as part of the job. Change agents attempting to bring systems change come under attack frequently. Roxie proceeded to implement change within the district until the escalating threats removed her from the district. The colleagues presented very negative accusations. Roxie said, “They were the negative ones that would run to the board members or those kinds of things.” Once the board members became part of the process, the mobbing began in earnest. Roxie suffered until the board fired her in a public forum. The school board and community eliminated the perceived problem to a struggling environment.

Roxie had the most extensive example of the farm metaphor. The cat (Roxie) endured repeated attacks by the birds with an ever-escalating trauma. The initial birds gathered the impact of many, much larger animals until the cat simply could not survive. The cat left wounded and bleeding never to return to the farm. The birds wished only to return to the old farm and make it the same as before. The problem remained, the resources no longer existed to maintain the farm but the birds did not believe this. Roxie never returned to education, changing careers completely.
Kathy accepted the leadership of a school district in crisis. The school district had not performed to state standards for many years and had improvement plans implemented to address performance. Kathy experienced constant push back from the school board and the community. A group of teachers started the push back against changes suggested in the improvement plans. The new school board president resisted the improvement plans. The board saw Kathy as an outsider who could not possibly provide leadership to school improvement. The attacks from the school board and the community continued to mount. Kathy said, “I really wondered who was in on what, who knew what, who was going through the back door.” The organization eliminated Kathy through a non-renewal of her contract.

Again, the birds (the community) from the farm metaphor pushed the cat (Kathy) from the farm yard. The cat’s only offense is that she did her job. The attacks came frequently and grew in size and duration with more and more birds. The farmer finally removed the cat to alleviate any further damage to the cat. The birds wanted the farm back the way it was, not realizing that was impossible.

Eli held the position of executive director to take the organization in a new direction. The organization attacked each action Eli took to change direction or modernize. He believed the reaction to change was normal. When an accusation against Eli arose from a separate contract with another organization, the board chose to attempt to remove him. The media presented a very negative picture of Eli for his involvement in the contract. The local board chose to use the media report to attack Eli. Eli stated,

When that (the media report) went publicly in papers and on the TV news, the people who hadn’t cared for me and the leadership role I was in, which was to create a new path for our organization, really came after me.
Eli suffered the mobbing of the board and media reporting. The organization did not wish to meet the changing environment.

Eli’s situation fits the farm metaphor also. The birds (the board) decided early in the experience, the cat (Eli) held a threat to the farm as it stood. The birds worked diligently to make the swoops and chatter count. They waited for a vulnerable moment and attacked with fervor. The cat did not leave but no longer had the energy or ability to perform at the same level as before. He remains the cat on the farm but not nearly as productive.

The metaphor of the organism to explain organizations applies directly to mobbing of leaders. The situations stated above, provide examples of how an organization behaves like an organism in the environment, reacting to conditions. The greater biology of ecosystems reflected as social systems or subgroups/units creates the metaphor to organizations. Organizations develop patterns of behavior related to mobbing as reaction to a perceived threatening environment. Organization theory as explained by the metaphor of an organism provides a great lens to understanding how mobbing of leaders occurs.

The simple metaphor of the farm yard with the cat, birds, and farmer allows the understanding of organizations trying to work in harmony. The intent of the farm metaphor shows all animals existing together for the survival of the farm. Each unit (cat, bird, farmer) within the metaphor has the best intentions and performs his/her own tasks. Each unit perceives actions of the other differently, creating the alleged threat which begins the mobbing. The demise of the leader or the misery which renders the leader less productive proves how damaging mobbing can be.

With my analysis of workplace harassment/mobbing of leaders, I also discovered an application for organizational culture explaining a predisposition of organizations to harassment
behavior. I discovered organizations which had a tendency to harass leaders also had a specific set of aspects designing their organizational culture.

**Organizational Culture**

Morgan (2006) provides a concise definition of organizational culture: “The pattern of development reflected in a society’s system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day rituals” (p. 116). Organizations which have harassed a leader find the process and action as part of their values and rituals. The organization adopts the behavior as part of how they conduct business. Culture also includes such things as government, religion, media, and other institutions shaping opinion (Morgan, 2006). Culture produces an ongoing process of reality construction (Morgan, 2006). In my analysis of workplace harassment of leaders, I found the harassment of leaders becomes an ongoing process for organizations who have accepted it as part of their culture.

Through my study I found three main factors driving organizational culture predisposed to harassment: (1) The governing board and community lack boundaries with leadership creating a clear culture prone to harassment. The leader constantly receives questions on his/her decisions. (2) The media creates a story to implicate leadership with a perceived failure or question of integrity. The story leads the public and local community to harass the leader implicated by the media. (3) A perceived style of leadership and behavior expected by the community establishes the organization as hostile. Whenever a leader fails to meet an expectation, the organization attacks the leader.

**Governing Boards and Community Culture**

Organizations which have a flawed structural design with numerous points of authority and reporting structure can easily fall into a culture of harassment. Governing boards who
believe they provide all aspects of leadership for the organization cross boundaries between policy and management, making it impossible for a leader to direct the organization. This also produces workplace harassment of leadership by virtue of organizational culture.

Eli experienced harassment through organizational culture of the board the moment he arrived. He said,

I stepped into the organization not realizing the depth of the culture. Who had supported it and who was in place and how entrenched the culture and the people were in the organization. So from the beginning I think there was pushback from me being the new guy with the whole idea that we were going in a new direction.

The values, knowledge, ideology, and day-to-day rituals of the organization had solidified before Eli arrived. The movement to change and go in a different direction had not developed through a change in culture. The national organization pushed a new agenda for all affiliates and brought Eli, a highly successful champion, to advance the local chapter. A shared understanding had not occurred. Resistance grew quickly and a method to remove the problem developed equally as fast. Harassment becomes a tool to maintain the status quo of culture.

Kathy stepped into a difficult district with numerous problems. Kathy said, “The district was a very contentious district. They had a lot of problems for years and years and years, I mean 16 or 17 years before I ever got there.” The district definitely showed a culture steeped in the past and the glory days of a by gone era. Refusing to give up old values, ideology, and ritual produced a way of doing business which rooted out new ideas labeling them as foreign and bad. The very culture of the organization prevented it from improvement and set it on a course to destruction. Leaders became grist for the mill.

Roxie explained, “Change is hard. I think in this district it is even more difficult. It is a very ultra conservative community. They are very ingrained in past success and always about me, me, me, me and how this was affecting me.” She continued, “Culture eats strategy for
breakfast, doesn’t it?” The culture Roxie encountered had multiple factors which encouraged harassment of leaders. The organizational structure of the district had blurred lines of authority and boundary issues with governing boards. The culture allowed micromanagement of each leader, stopping any type of development or progress. The organization held many sacred cows (Deal & Kennedy, 2000). Deal and Kennedy explained a sacred cow in organizational culture presents an individual from a particular event or period of time which gave them hero status. The individual accomplished something very important and key to the organization at one time. The sacred cow may not perform in the future, but because they produced something heroic at some point, they are forever protected. Any actions against a sacred cow lead to harassment for whoever attempts it.

Frank said,

The first day of practice the board president was sitting in the bleachers watching practice. He was trying to micromanage the school and micromanage the basketball program. It was probably the most successful basketball program in the state, and it didn’t need micromanaging.

The culture of the school and community allowed each individual and especially governing board members access and input to all parts of the school. The line between management and policymaker blurred the legitimate authority of the leader, making harassment not only tolerated but encouraged. Frank described a situation exemplifying the board’s over-reaching authority:

They wanted to meet with me and they wanted to meet right now. And they wanted to meet with the coach in my office right now too. I said, ‘He’s teaching. He’s got class. Who’s going to cover his class?’ ‘We don’t care! We want him in this office right now.’ They wanted me to fire him on the spot because he reprimanded a basketball player in the huddle at a game. He probably had it coming. All the people, the principal, the business manager, the secretary were all just shaking because these two people were in my office screaming. It was ugly.
The culture of the school allowed the governing board the opportunity to use fear and intimidation to force a particular action or eliminate the barrier between them and the intended subject.

Bill experienced organizational culture with powerfully negative fury. A petition circulated around the community by a disgruntled, well connected community member, was presented to the school board demanding Bill’s removal as superintendent. The culture of the community reflected a non-confrontational ideology. The disgruntled community member circulating the petition offered the signers anonymity without having that authority. At the school board meeting where the petition was presented, the petition signers were identified, as required by law, exposing them to the superintendent. Instead of trying to resolve the situation and talk through their differences, the petitioners fell silent and moved into the shadows. The community continued to reflect a non-confrontational ideology but the silence spoke to a willingness to harass or not defend against harassment. The board did not remove Bill.

The movement to remove the superintendent continued. It went underground and made Bill’s life a living hell. The culture silently harassed the leader into retirement. No one in the community, even Bill’s friends and supporters, would confront the issue or support the superintendent. Community culture weighed heavier than the experienced, successful leader.

Bill’s difficulty began with one individual attacking him for not having hired her into the school district as an instructional leader. She held a family connection and cultural place in the community. She was a sacred cow to the community. Not hiring her led to an affront to the community’s organizational culture. To further the cultural concern, a letter published by the editor of the local paper written by the sacred cow’s daughter condemned the superintendent for not supporting the volleyball program. Constant turnover of coaching staff resulted in a less than
average record. The community blamed Bill for not developing sufficient coaching. The community felt they could manage the team better without Bill’s intervention. Each time a problem arose, the sacred cow rallied her family, community, and church to make Bill’s life miserable.

Sally tried to change the practices of the specialty hospital she led. She explained the situation she acquired and how she handled it this way:

I implemented term limits. I added term limits to our scenario and I absolutely needed this. There were board members that had been on forever and ever and ever. They just stay forever. If you never have newness on a board, then when you try things, I get people dragging their feet and not open to change. I’m a change agent. The new things I was trying, I was getting backlash.

The organization saw change as unnecessary and the source of change as bad. The board felt threatened and defended existing values, ideology and ritual. Sally became the target of organizational culture. The organization needed to eliminate her to sustain the culture. No matter how successful, innovative, and efficient Sally had been, she could not win this battle.

Paula experienced hostile organizational culture through the design of the organization. Because of the rural nature of the state, the lack of diversity in board members backgrounds and statutory requirement of licensed professionals as board members, the organization allowed a structure ripe for harassment. A majority of board members had taken training from the same institution. They all knew each other personally as well as professionally. The board members developed into an exclusive club and did not appreciate having an executive presenting rules or requirements that did not agree with their experience or education. Paula said, “I had noticed the last couple times the commission had done boards that two commission members were real chummy with Rita, and it’s like as if I wasn’t there.” The organization tried to shut out Paula to
make certain their culture was supported through another person. This allowed a way around Paula and any necessary change. It allowed the commission to continue without change.

**Media Coverage**

Media biases also drive the harassment of leaders and come from a culture which stands auxiliary to an organization to act as a tool in harassment. Chuck suffered under the media coverage of a grant with which he became associated. Chuck explained how he experienced the media,

> The media had a real interest in this issue. They started to grab for names of people that were somehow affiliated with the grant. My name was one of the more prominent ones given my past work. The question of what was my involvement in the grant. Is this a matter of me starting the grant and now reaping the benefit?

The media created a story without fully developing the information. Creating facts from partial research, presenting them as absolute, and pushing the story for a public outcry made the media a significant player in the harassment of Chuck. An organizational culture of presenting a controversial story to boost ratings to sell advertising at all costs developed within the media outlet. The media continues to be a tool for other rogue organizations wanting to eliminate individuals who challenge the organizational culture.

Betty also struggled with the media who challenged her regarding the grant misappropriation. Betty had nothing to do with the financial aspects of the grant but through the media story became implicated. Betty said, “Originally I thought it was just about the program evaluation, but then they began to make a kind of a big deal and one person in particular in the media began a witch hunt, for lack of a better word.” The media culture would not let the issue go. The reporter continued to dig looking for connections that do not exist. The culture of “investigative reporting” allows the partial use of facts without the full truth, just to sell the story.
The organizational culture of the media puts a premium on stories which entice the public, true or not. The harassment continues as the reporter feels justified in her limited facts.

**Leadership Style**

Sam worked in an environment which allowed harassment by design. The campus executives reported to the president of the college, but the faculty reported to the vice president of academics or provost. Conflict developed almost immediately. The culture of the bi-polar situation lent itself to become harassing. Sam explained the experience,

> It set up a couple of people who, in my mind, were kind of problematic people anyway, but you could just see the dynamic changing where they started moving in her direction and they became part of this, ‘I am not sure about how well you are doing your job.’ I could see, it was obvious that there was something going on and people were standoffish.

The organizational culture of the college allowed people to accuse the leadership without any real evidence or cause. The structure gave free reign to develop conflicting cultures under different values, ideology, and rituals, competing on the satellite campuses. The result develops into harassment of the campus leader.

Organizational culture provides a background to organizational structure predisposed to harassment of leaders. A culture which allows the organization with no legitimate authority over a leader to constantly question executive decisions is an organization with a culture of harassment. My study revealed a predisposed culture within organizations making them ripe for harassment.

Leaders suffer personal and professional damage from workplace harassment. As described in my analysis regarding the metaphor of an organism, the mobbing/harassment of the leader holds a long-standing loss to the harassed individual. Organizations inflict damage on leaders through the predisposed culture they exhibit. Each leader experiences a wide variety of
feelings and outcomes. In the next section I analyze the effects of loss on the individual leader and a process which allows the individual hope of recovery.

**Coming to Grips with Loss**

To understand the ways participants manage the harassment experience, I engaged a theory from Kate Cummings. She called it “coming to grips with loss” (2015). The theory provides five simple stages which each harassed leader may experience. The damage a harassed leader experiences develops with each individual and measurement of damage must follow by using a process. Through the stages provided by Cummings, leaders can find or progress toward resolution and healing.

The stages of loss include discovering, assessing, mourning, coping, and resolving. The first stage composes leaders discovering they have loss. Leaders may not realize they experienced harassment and also may not have realized they have a loss. In my study, I found most of the participants did not realize they had suffered harassment and loss. Many continued to struggle with what to do next. Once the leader understands they have a loss, they determine to what degree they have experienced loss through a process of assessing. The leader must mourn the loss. It remains common place for individuals to try to skip the mourning stage or get stuck in it. Individuals experiencing loss develop coping skills to help overcome the damage of loss. The final stage completes the process with resolving the loss and moving forward. Reaching the final stage of resolution does not always occur. Anyone can stop or return to any stage in the process up to and including discovery.

**Discovering**

Each of the participants from this study suffered loss. Whether the loss presented as internal or external, each leader who suffered harassment also suffered loss. To help the victims
manage the loss, I looked to the five stages of “coming to grips with loss” theory and how each leader might approach his/her own loss. Looking at each stage individually determines what the subjects have experienced from which stage. Individuals from the study can benefit from the theory.

The first stage of “coming to grips with loss” is called discovering. In the study, all of the participants expressed a loss. Whether it was their job or health or something less obvious like reputation, peace of mind, or potential, each leader told a story of loss. The first stage proved to be 100 percent applicable to each participant in the study. From the data, one can identify loss for each participant.

Each and every participant interviewed for this study experienced loss. Most participants needed to tell about the experience of harassment before they identified their own loss. Losses due to harassment may appear through an external force such as job loss but also may appear as an internal loss such as reputation, peace of mind, social status, friendship, or loss of potential. In the research data collected in this study, the split between external and internal losses showed seven leaders suffered internal losses while six suffered job loss or forced resignation due to their harassment. The external losses display obvious results. The leader lost their current position or lost income from future contracts or positions. The internal losses varied but the losses never the less damaged the leader which impacted their future.

Internal losses definitely impact one’s potential in a career field. Eli said, “If I wanted to do other things that I think I could have qualified and done, and there were other opportunities for me, they disappeared. I don’t know that they’d ever come back.” Eli’s experience eliminated the opportunity for further career development. A loss to his future career development left him damaged.
Leaders require confidence and motivation to continue effective leadership. Betty spoke of her loss of confidence, and peace of mind, saying, “I learned unfortunately that you can be doing really ethical, good work and people can still criticize and the media can take things out of context and make you look bad when you’re not doing anything wrong.” Betty’s experience left her with an internal loss which damaged her reputation and left her longing for retirement.

A strong reputation for excellence develops over time and leaders cherish their reputation. The loss of reputation produces an internal loss. Chuck put it this way:

I had enjoyed, I think, a really, really good reputation for a long time and realized how quickly it can change, you know, in a matter of a week or a month where you would say, even though I had no connection to anything that happened, I am included in it and people are wondering. If I hear it enough times, there must be something to it. But to me, it was an attack on my reputation, something that I’d worked hard for my entire life. But it also helped me put that in perspective too, that you know what? I worked all this time for this reputation that can be destroyed like this [snap].

Chuck experienced a deep loss for something he treasured, his reputation.

Bill expressed a loss of community and friendship: “I tell you what made me even angrier, that the good people in town never said a thing. Publicly they never said a thing.” Through the entire ordeal of harassment and constant public questioning and accusations, none of Bill’s friends or colleagues spoke in his defense. The lack of support from the community left Bill with a deep sense of loss. After forty years of public service, Bill no longer felt supported. He needed to leave the community he called home.

Jennifer struggled with the loss of peace for her family through attacks to her integrity and character. She stated, “She (her daughter) is my soul mate, and we’re very, very close. I have seen what it’s done to her, she agonizes over her mom. My husband has taken some too, but they worry about me.” Jennifer struggles to overcome the guilt because of the abuse her
family endures due to harassment. The loss of peace of mind and knowing the actions taken against her has affected her support system creates a massive example of an internal loss.

External losses present much more obviously to the observer but provide the same damage. The loss of a job, future jobs, credibility as a valued employee, and the loss of the community of professionals within one’s career make the public expression of an external loss. Another external loss stems from one’s precious health which can be damaged by the stress of harassment, providing another example of loss.

Frank stated, “I had four evaluations, and every one of them was stellar. Where was the problem?” Even though Frank performed at an exemplary level, the harassment cast shade on his ability. Frank resigned, forced to do so within a negotiated termination of his contract. Once he signed the deal, his career took a turn for the worse. “I knew the superintendent in another larger district, next year was his last year and I had already been called by a couple of school board members to see if I would consider applying.” Once the harassment occurred and Frank left his position, the calls stopped and he received no further contact from that district. Frank would never reach his potential. He endured an external loss.

Roxie suffered a very public, damaging loss. Not only did she lose her position but received a public, degrading, character assassination, which was broadcast on public access television. Roxie explained,

The president ripped me apart at the board meeting, named me as someone that had not done my job for the last two years. I had not been supporting the principals, had not been moving the curriculum or doing development with them. It went on and on and on.

The external loss developed into a condemning of Roxie which affected her career to the point of leaving education and becoming an organizational development specialist.
Kathy experienced an external loss even while trying to make it work. She said, “It doesn’t matter how hard you try. It doesn’t matter what your integrity is. People who don’t like you or are against you or are causing you to feel intimidated are not going to see you in a different way.” Kathy left an abusive organization after the school board did not offer her a new contract. The damage of leaving a district not of her own free will haunted her. She said, “When you are applying for jobs, you have to indicate if you’ve ever resigned from a contract on the application. It hurts every time I have to say that I was not continued. I wasn’t fired.” Her external loss continues to present a problem.

Sally struggled to lead an unwilling organization. She said, “I am going to prove to them I’m their person, and I thought I was. And all of a sudden it’s like they’re not listening to me anymore. They don’t believe me anymore. They are not allowing me to progress.” She continued, “I felt like I had to look over my shoulder continuously. No matter what I do it’s never going to be good enough for them.” Sally realized she could no longer make any progress for the organization. She resigned but endured a process of being ushered out. The board watched as she packed and forced her from the building, as if she had committed a crime. The board for her organization had deep connections within the community making future employment challenging, perhaps even more damaging than the harassment she experienced within the organization. Her external loss embarrassed her and left her with a very public scar.

Paula suffered the lasting effect harassment inflicts upon a leader. She developed a heart issue which threatened her health. Health problems present an external loss which makes it difficult to continue as a leader. Paula explained, “The doctor told me, if it doesn’t settle down at work, you need to go find a different job.” Harassment causes health issues leading to the need to leave an organization or change one’s environment if possible. The external loss of
never holding a leadership position again because one cannot endure the stress demoralizes the individual.

Sam experienced the long-term effects of harassment. The loss of sleep and constant stress compounded themselves until Sam developed health issues. Sam said, “This isn’t an exaggeration, and I don’t think it is pure coincidence, but that was the first time in my life I started to really develop any health problems.” Sam had to make a change for his health. The external loss forced Sam to move his family out of state, and he remained at a mid-level position, which did not allow him to advance in his career.

Assessing

The assessing loss stage presented a more varied experience by individual. The harassed leaders ranged from the very heavily impacted by the job loss, character assassination, career change, move, and life style change such as Roxie’s experience, to the leadership learning opportunity Jake experienced. The severity of loss affects the progression through the stages. The more severe cases may take more time and more effort to find relief. Life experiences with factors of spirituality, family support, available resources, and political conditions make the difference in assessing the loss and finding the resolution.

Several of the leaders spoke of spirituality helping them assess the situation and manage the loss. Chuck said,

I am a man of faith, and so there were a number of times when I did some one-on-one business with God to kind of go, so, I do believe that everything happens for a purpose. I just tried to say I guess, Lord, this was part of the plan. I don’t know why. It doesn’t make sense to me right now, but I feel like I have to trust that you have a role to play here. Maybe I’m just still being shaped into a better person. So don’t spend as much time as you’ve been on them. Spend more time on the ones that are going to spend it with you, you know, including a relationship with the Lord that is going to prove to be fruitful forever.
Eli said, “If my faith hadn’t been so strong, I laid down each night and prayed. I’d wake up the next day and sure enough I felt like, Eli get up.” He continued, “I didn’t turn to God and say ‘Why God?,’ ‘Why me?’ You know it’s like this is something you’re giving me. It’s for my good, and I’ve got to use it for that.” Both Chuck and Eli used their faith to help them assess the degree of loss and how to move forward.

Jake spoke of why he experienced the harassment and how he made sense of it. He said, “This is where God wanted me.” Even though the experience measured greater than the loss of his father, he assessed that it was God’s will and he would survive according to his faith. Kathy said,

God is in control. It was a weird set of circumstances, and it was an interesting blip on the radar of my life. And God uses all things to good. That’s scriptural, and I just really praise Him for getting me through that, helping me to be as successful as we were down there.

Kathy and Jake used their belief system to pull them through and assess that there was a reason for their loss which was for the greater good.

**Mourning**

This stage requires any individual experiencing loss to express their feelings. Everyone expresses feelings in different ways regardless of the situation, but loss presents itself with a myriad of deep emotions. Harassment promotes a very broad spectrum of emotions. The participants in this study experienced the full range of emotion as well.

Kathy spoke of feeling isolated, saying, “I was fearful, very fearful and always looking over my shoulder, wondering who was saying what.” She continued, “I really lost trust in others, which is not my nature.” Bill said, “I never go down to the post office. I don’t go to the grocery store. I put my gas in after a school board meeting or at 11:30 at night when I get home from a
basketball trip.” Kathy and Bill each chose to avoid the confrontation of harassers. The feeling of isolation shows one feeling within the mourning stage.

Frank, Bill and Sam spoke of anger at their loss. Frank put it this way:

The one guy drives truck, he dumps milk at the cheese plant every day, so a lot of times I’m driving to work and I see his truck coming. I don’t know if he sees it or not, but when I’m driving and I meet his truck, I flip him off.

Bill said, “I’ll just tell you straight up it’s just pissed me off. Publicly they never said a thing.”

Sam said,

I went through a lot of anger and shit for a long time. I feel very strongly that I was done wrong. I was treated poorly. I don’t want to do it to anybody else. But I also know that I had a hand in allowing or creating the situation to some degree. And to some degree I let it happen to me. So I have a responsibility to some degree to learn from it.

Sally spoke of how she was treated and how she felt upon reflecting on her leaving the specialty hospital. Sally said, “I’ve lost all respect for them. I have no respect.” She can’t even be in the same room with them. Roxie said, “We had all agreed on this plan and I’m trying to understand, why we are backing out on this now? I’ve already met with half of my staff. We all agreed that this was going to be the best direction to move.” She continued, “This is just crap.” Both Sally and Roxie left their respective organizations with a deep anger and bitterness toward the people involved. Expressing the anger allows the leaders to mourn the loss and prepare to move to the next stage. Recognizing the value of expressing the feelings helps the individual move forward with managing the loss and resolving it.

**Coping**

Interviewing the participants revealed a variety of emotions and stories of their experiences but very little strategy developed for coping with the situation. Many reacted to the circumstances and moved either to a different position or managed within the position they held. I realized many of the participants had not spoken of the harassment to anyone or at the very
least anyone other than their spouse or family. This information came from observations and inferences from the data not actual transcript quotes. I had several participants thank me for listening. The simple act of talking through the experience and telling the story helped them. Frank shook my hand and thanked me. He said he had not thought of the situation in over 10 years. He said it felt good to get it off his chest.

Bill needed to tell his story. The range of emotions ran from a barely contained rage to a deep compelling sadness. I hung on every word and could feel his emotions through the journey. We held a long and knowing handshake which expressed congratulations of survival but also a knowing of a shared experience.

Paula asked how much I charged for the therapy session. She needed to explain her experience. We laughed, we cried, we cussed. The experience became very real but the simple act of listening made a huge difference in moving forward. Also, I supplied support, allowing them to be open and express it all. I provided a safe, friendly environment to tell, feel, and reflect which allowed each participant to get it off their chest. I helped each participant find a little peace toward coping with their loss.

**Resolving**

The participants in this study stand at different points of resolution of their loss. I believe each of them has found some resolution while some maybe just stabilizing and making sense of what happened. Others have moved far enough along toward normalcy they have internalized the important lessons of the harassment and are salvaging the relationships they can salvage. Either they are moving on to the next phase of their life or they are making plans to move on. Each participant may not have recognized their harassment but once they told their story and
expressed the emotions of the harassment, loss was evident. The “coming to grips with loss” theory provides the perfect lens to explain harassment experiences and provide a path to healing.

My analysis presented three aspects of harassment of leaders. Organizations reflect the behavior and actions of an organism (unit) within nature. Harassment of leaders develops naturally as perceived threats present a natural response from the organization. Culture of an organization presents a predisposed nature of an organization toward harassment of a leader and leaders attempt to manage the loss and damage of harassment.
CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My study examined how chief executive officers and senior-level administrators experienced and made meaning of workplace harassment while serving in a leadership role. I conducted this study to understand how others experienced workplace harassment. I experienced the difficulty of workplace harassment and wanted to understand the patterns and outcomes other leaders experienced. I interviewed participants who held senior leadership positions and experienced harassment. My study described their lived experiences and the outcomes of harassment. My study helps prepare future leaders with the ability to identify and potentially manage harassment as well as help and heal leaders who suffered harassment.

I identified several catalysts associated with workplace harassment. The initial harassment typically occurred due to one or more of the following causes: personnel conflicts, financial challenges, and systems change efforts. Identifying these categories allowed the research to provide indicators to potential harassment of leaders.

I also uncovered how organizational culture invites and fuels workplace harassment of chief executive officers. Some organizational cultures appear to be predisposed to supporting harassment of leaders. The harassment situations expressed in the data by Roxie, Frank, Kathy, and Bill showed organizations which crossed boundaries into micromanagement by governing boards or communities who isolated leaders who were perceived to have breached institutional values or rituals. The strong institutional values and rituals created an organizational culture which predisposed the potential for harassment of leaders.

Viewing this situation from the victim’s perspective, victims described the trauma associated with workplace harassment, and how they experienced trauma during the situation and long after the experience ended. Leaders suffered long lasting damage from harassment
experiences, ranging from the loss of employment and long-term health consequences to losses in career opportunity, mental well-being, and peace of mind. All harassed leaders suffered loss of some type.

The actions, reactions, and strategies used by senior leaders to manage and understand their experiences differed. Leaders managed the phenomenon of workplace harassment differently, and this affected their future careers. Different circumstances affected their decision to remain in their leadership roles or to leave the position as a result of their experience. I summarize my findings in greater detail next, and then use these findings to recommend ways to prevent and manage harassment.

**Causes of Workplace Harassment**

Leaders encounter difficult situations every day and often expect to address challenges. Rarely does a leader expect harassment. Harassment may happen without warning and when least expected. Certain situations raised leaders’ awareness of harassment. The most common situation involved personnel decisions. The personnel actions ranged from employee discipline leading to termination, to governing board interaction, to conflict with colleagues, and/or to community involvement in personnel actions. Leaders also faced difficult decisions regarding finances, sometimes involving a tight budget and the use of funds. Yet another source of harassment involved the promotion of systems change. These efforts almost always experienced conflict. Workgroups fought the change and attacked leaders who promoted change. I explain each harassment cause and my recommendations in the following sections.

**Personnel Issues**

Considering the human nature of harassment, it makes sense that personnel issues dominated the data. Conflict arose around personnel actions or interactions causing individuals
and groups to protest the action and rally a group of fellow workers. Some of the fellow workers joined in the conflict by supporting the employee in some way. Some became by-standers, avoiding the conflict and remaining silent to the situation. However, others became intent on stopping the action and/or eliminating the leader involved in the conflict by engaging in collective action. The actions of the fellow workers ignited and fueled the harassment. Harassment due to a personnel conflict typically involved the employee and co-workers who joined forces against a targeted leader.

**Recommendation – Assessment of Threat, Relationships with Employees**

I recommend dealing with personnel issues with greater awareness of the effect of a personnel decision on relationships. Leaders must review not only the actions or inactions of the individual in question but also the history and relationship of the individual to others and the organization. Recognizing the potential for harassment may help leaders manage the situation. The greatest defense for leaders to address the possibility of harassment lies in awareness. Certain conditions, history, culture, personalities, and circumstances lead to harassment.

Leaders must develop awareness of the consequences associated with certain actions against individuals within an organization. Being aware of various actions which may be perceived by workers as threats may allow leaders to anticipate and prepare for conflict. No action creates a perfect solution, and these actions may not resolve the situation.

When having personnel conflict with governing boards or colleagues, I further recommend developing boundaries and communication channels. This creates an opportunity to avoid conflict with governing boards, colleagues, and communities. Clear lines of authority and specific job descriptions may reduce the potential for conflict among leaders and with boards and communities. Utilizing boundaries, effective communication, and clear job descriptions may
prevent some conflict. Effective leaders should reflect on the history and relationships existing within organizations to possibly provide an avenue to avoid harassment. It may not always be possible to avoid harassment regarding personnel conflicts. Harassment is a powerful process.

I also recommend professional associations provide leadership development programs for becoming aware and responding to harassment. Organizations, such as school administrators associations, non-profit organizations, trade organizations, and any professional organizations which represent leadership, must raise awareness and support those experiencing harassment. Awareness allows leaders to prepare organizations to avoid harassment situations. Leaders would have the opportunity to research an organizations’ history as well as communities history to perhaps address the situation before harassment starts.

To further prepare leaders for managing harassment, I recommend pre-service programs, such as school administrator education programs and other leadership education programs incorporate research and management practices regarding harassment prevention. Harassment occurs in all aspects of work, including employees with senior leadership roles. The practice of harassment prevention requires awareness and continued research. Incorporating prevention strategies in courses and programs of leadership study allow education to raise awareness and perhaps reduce the occurrences of harassment in organizations.

Finally, I recommend human resource departments view leaders as employees, and incorporate protections against workplace harassment using the following steps: First, identify harassment when it happens. Second, provide a process to address and remediate harassment at the source. Third, implement consequences for perpetrators of harassment. Along with protections, organizations need to perform self-studies to identify if their organizational culture supports harassment. If the findings indicate the culture contributes to harassment, then
organizations should implement change. Also, continuous awareness presentations and prevention training must be implemented within the practices of the organization to keep the issue of harassment top of mind.

**Financial Challenges**

Public or non-profit dollars have higher scrutiny in a community due to a perceived stake in the use of those dollars. Whether through tough budget decisions in a tight year, controversial utilization of grant dollars, or perceived misallocation of resources from various sources, a financial challenge brings out strong feelings against leaders. The organization or community confronts leaders who encounter financial challenges. The media provides a common tool for harassment of leaders with financial challenges, questioning the leader and his/her competence.

**Recommendation – Community Involvement**

The community must be involved early in the public process of budgeting, grant management, or funds allocation. Community involvement gives them a stake in the process and reduces challenges to financial actions. The community, with the help of the media, may already have inflamed the public to attack the leader. Managing the situation quickly and clearly allows for a full discussion before the majority of the public make a decision. Harassment is a process. If the perceived threat of the financial challenge is great enough, it will be difficult to stop.

**Systems Change Efforts**

People rarely welcome change. Even when change must happen, people resist and frequently fight implementation or even planning. Leaders who serve as change agents become targets quickly. Members of an organization confront change as if going to battle. The leader of the movement most likely receives the brunt of the attack. Personifying change in a person, especially the leader, provides the organization an individual to blame.
Recommendation – Develop and Engage Change Process

Creating an implementation plan for change and assuring members agree to the change provides the best opportunity to avoid conflict in a change effort. Systems have inertia. They do not change without a fight. Regardless of how strong the plan or efforts of leadership, if a majority of the organization refuses change, the leader will experience harassment. Helping the leader become aware of the situation offers the best potential for the leader to survive. Systems change efforts have been researched and processes have been documented. Engaging one of the well-established change processes, utilizing the research ensures leaders have a better chance of succeeding.

Organizational Culture

Organizations hold a common knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and rituals. I discerned from the data collected from interviews of harassed leaders, a predisposition among organizations toward harassment. If an organization exhibits a desire to afford a governing board complete and total power over an organization with no limits, they easily harass the leader when they disagree. Governing boards without boundaries clearly established micromanage leaders and create conflict.

In the same respect, the media might harass a leader if the organization uses the media as a tool. The desire of the media and the public to create a story with partial information shows how the organization allows harassment using the media. The organization could make a value decision to stop or clarify any media report but if the practices of the organization support utilizing the media to present conflict, harassment ensues. The organization presents a practice of trying the conflicts within leadership in the court of public opinion.
Finally, leadership style within an organization presents a potential for harassment. If the organization believes the leader must behave in a specific way or react to a situation with a certain response and doesn’t, harassment may occur. The history of the organization and previous leaders creates a pattern of leadership behavior. Strong leaders with strong personalities produce strong influences on organizational culture. Leaders who succeed a strong personality suffer the expectations of the organization as to how the leader should behave.

**Recommendation – Organizational Culture Awareness**

Awareness of the organizational culture is the best possible preparation for managing harassment inflicted by the practices of an organization. Awareness of culture, studying the origins, the history, the recent experiences, and the individuals who remain with the organization, allow the leader an opportunity to succeed and resolve. Harassment supported by culture is a tool for the organization to eliminate a leader perceived to not be a “fit” or even a threat. I recommend new leaders do research on the organization or community before committing to any decision. Now more than ever, significant data exists at our fingertips. News articles, blogs, newsletters, public documents can all be searched to understand what has happened in the past as well as currently happening. If at all possible seek a meeting with the outgoing leader. Interview him/her and discern what appears from the conversation.

**Managing the Harassment Experience**

All leaders in my study encountered loss and had some residual damage from the experience of harassment. The first step in managing harassment requires the leader to admit they experienced harassment and discover the loss associated with the harassment. Leaders who lost their job or resigned under duress have clear understanding of loss. Leaders who remained in that position or remained in another similar system have loss but it may not be as evident.
Loss of potential, loss of confidence, and loss of peace of mind all have impact on performance and productivity. All create damage to the leader who experienced harassment. Individuals may also have a health concern which may result in a life-long challenge.

Recommendations – Healing Through Loss Counseling

All leaders experiencing harassment and having a loss need to counsel with the five steps of Cummings. The first step discovers the loss. Upon reflection and discernment, the leader needs to accept they have a loss. The second step is to assess the loss: how damaging is the loss? The third step is to mourn. The leader has experienced loss. He/she has a right to grieve and get the emotions out. The fourth step is to develop a coping strategy. Each individual has different coping needs which are closely related to the damage of the harassment. In some cases, a professional may be necessary. The final step is resolution. The harassed leader manages to move forward and heals.

By-Standers

The by-standers in any harassment of leaders provide a key perspective but also a key solution to harassment of leaders. Throughout this study I have not addressed the by-stander. The focus of this study has been placed on victims and perpetrators. The literature on workplace harassment offered very little to help present the perceptions and experience of the by-stander. I also did not find significant data from the experiences of the participants to explain the position or effect of the by-stander. In many respects, a profound silence exists regarding by-standers and how they fit regarding workplace harassment.

I found two places in the data to offer a glimmer of the perception of the by-stander in this study. Bill explains, “I had phone calls, emails, or face to face messages from 86 different people in the community and yet not publicly did anybody say a thing. Not once.” Bill
experienced a lack of public support. Had he received public support the harassment very well could have ended. The by-standers existed and they saw what happened but would not express it publicly. Paula related a call from a commission member who stated, “You need to watch your back.” The commission member felt compelled to say something but did it in private, knowing the situation comprised harassment. The by-standers are a major part of any harassment experience of leaders.

**Recommendation - By-Standers Speak Up**

Workplace harassment of leaders could end quickly if the by-standers bravely addressed the situation in public. Most by-standers fear retaliation or becoming the next victim of harassment. The standard procedure remains speaking in private but not getting directly involved. By-standers need to understand the power they hold and how they can make the workplace a better place by boldly telling the truth and standing up for not only leaders but anyone harassed in the workplace. Organizations must support by-standers to freely offer perspective without retaliation or retribution. The solution to workplace harassment of leaders lies partially in the power of by-standers.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on workplace harassment of leaders. Hearing the stories of harassed leaders revealed how challenging the situation remains and how it affects everyone. My research on harassment and leadership revealed a multi-faceted concern. How do organizations nurture and maintain leaders with proven leadership? Hearing how organizations attempt to respect individuals and leaders without damage to either, proved to be a challenge. Harassment likely occurs more often than anyone knows.
As I reflected on my study of workplace harassment, and saw two areas in particular requiring further research. One involves the impact and influence of media on harassment. Social media, blogs, and electronic media of all kinds affect people, and may escalate workplace harassment. The impact of these tools on harassment on individuals requires attention. What individuals do with a computer or smart phone in the privacy of a home or car can damage another person forever. The second area involves by-standers. Little research exists on the perspective of by-standers in workplace harassment of leaders. The solution to harassment could be accelerated with understanding this group of participants in workplace harassment. Further research in these areas may uncover more types of harassment and provide more solutions for leaders in the workplace.

Summary

I learned good leaders with great intentions suffered because of harassment. The culture of the organization, the people involved, and specific circumstances combine to damage successful leaders, some of them forever. Acknowledging leaders suffer harassment, making this phenomenon public, and addressing the plight of “wounded” leaders provides the groundwork for resolution and recovery. Great leaders are in limited supply, and communities need to work against losing them. Protection and treatment of all employees, including leaders, must be a priority.

My study would not have been possible without the brave consent of the participants. The leaders whose stories live within the pages of this study gave freely of their experience. I cannot thank them enough for telling their harassment stories. Retelling a personal experience of harassment revealed great pain and suffering for many of the participants. A mere thank you does not seem adequate to express my deepest gratitude. The stories clearly defined patterns of
harassment and possible methods to prevent it from happening to others. I hope participation in
this study allowed each participant some level of relief and satisfaction for adding to the
scholarly research of harassment of leaders.
REFERENCES


*Journal of Academic Studies, 9*(34), 113-128.
Date: October 6, 2016
To: Jeffrey Holcomb
From: Sarah Muenster-Blakley, Institutional Review Board

Project Title: [960591-1] Workplace Harassment and Mobbing: How Senior Level Administrators Can Survive
Reference: New Project
Action: Project Approved
Approval Date: October 6, 2016
Expiration: October 5, 2017

Dear Jeff:

I have read your protocol and approved your project as reflected in the modifications that you submitted. Please note that all research conducted in connection with this project title must be done in accordance with this approved submission.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and assurance that the project is understood by the participants and their signing of the approved consent form. The informed consent process must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between you and your research participants. Federal law requires that each person participating in this study receive a copy of the consent form. All research records relating to participant consent must be retained for a minimum of three years after completion of the project.

Amendments or changes to the procedures approved by the IRB must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to your making changes to your research study. No changes may be made without IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participant.

Any unanticipated problems involving risks or harm to project participants or others must be reported to the IRB within one business day of the Principal Investigator's knowledge of the problem. Any non-compliance issues or complaints relating to the project must be reported immediately.

Approval to work with human subjects in connection with this project will expire on October 5, 2017. This project requires continuing review on an annual basis. Documentation for continuing review must be received at least two weeks prior to the expiration date of October 5, 2017.

Please direct questions at any time to Sarah Muenster-Blakley at (651) 962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu. I wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Sarah Muenster-Blakley, M.A.
Director, Institutional Review Board
Consent Form

Workplace Harassment and Mobbing: How Senior Level Administrators Can Survive

IRBNet Tracking Number 960591-1

You are invited to participate in a research study about *Workplace Harassment*. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you identified yourself or you were identified by a fellow worker. You are eligible to participate in this study because you have experienced workplace harassment in your current employment or past employment. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not you would like to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Jeffrey Holcomb as the primary investigator in collaboration with my research advisor Dr. Sarah Noonan as a requirement for a dissertation from the University of St. Thomas Graduate School. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

**Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of senior level leaders suffering from workplace harassment. Workplace harassment is defined as an interaction consisting of acts of harassment, discrimination, unwanted conduct with an adverse effect on dignity, social isolation or exclusion, public professional humiliation, criticism, intimidation, and psychological and sometimes physical abuse. Workplace harassment occurs with alarming frequency in the workforce. By interviewing victims of workplace harassment I hope to make meaning and help leaders cope with a hostile work environment.

**Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: First I ask that you sign this consent form to confirm your understanding and willingness to participate in this study. If you are not comfortable with any part of the process you may remove yourself from further involvement with the study. Your willingness and comfort are most critical to the success of this research. Second, following consent to participate, I will conduct a face to face interview of approximately one hour with you. The questions will be available for your review and consideration before the interview time. An agreed upon location and space will be determined before the interview and secured for the mutually agreed upon time of the interview. Third, I will audio tape the interview to have the entire conversation transcribed. By having the entire interview recorded and transcribed, each answer to a question will be fully captured for further reflection, compilation, and collaboration within the study. You will have the opportunity to read and review the transcription to correct or
add any information you feel necessary. If I have further questions I may follow up with you through e-mail or telephone to clarify or further develop the information. The time commitment will include the initial One hour meeting, a possible 15-30 minute follow-up and the final transcript review of approximately one hour for a total of a possible two and a half hours.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**
The study has risks. The experience of workplace harassment can be traumatic. Sharing your experience of harassment may trigger memories or ill feelings that can remind you of the victimization you suffered. As the researcher I will be very aware of reactions and behaviors that might show stress. I will periodically ask your comfort level and ask how you feel. Because the research deals with workplace issues the other risk may be related to employment or future employment. At no time am I asking you to risk your employment or future employment. It may also be possible due to the unique nature of harassment, to unintentionally be identified in the research. If you feel you are at risk, the interview will conclude and/or you can remove yourself from the study.
There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

**Privacy**
Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. Privacy is very important. By mutually selecting a location and time to conduct the interview your identity will remain anonymous. Your privacy will be maintained. All conversation collected during the interview will be coded to maintain your anonymous status. Your name or your company’s name will never appear in any information for the study. While using every precaution I cannot guarantee complete privacy, but every precaution will be used to insure your privacy is maintained to the best of my ability.

**Confidentiality**
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. Due to the unique nature of every harassment situation individuals who know of your situation may recognize the similarity in the research. Every effort will be utilized to protect confidentiality. The types of records I will create include interview transcripts, audio recorded interviews, field notes from each subject, master lists of coded information, and computer records of the study. I will maintain these files on a secure computer server with files maintained through external storage. Any paper copies will be in locked files and will be destroyed three years following completion of the study. Following three years of completion of this study all electronic files will be destroyed or permanently deleted. All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years upon completion of the study. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas reserve the right to inspect all research records to ensure compliance.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Jeffrey Holcomb or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to
participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will not be included in the study. You can withdraw by notifying me by telephone or e-mail of your desire to withdraw. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

**Contacts and Questions**
My name is Jeffrey Holcomb. You may ask any questions you have now and any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 605-941-5764 or jeff.holcomb@southeasttech.edu. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or muen0526@stthomas.edu with any questions or concerns. If a participant feels distress the following agencies are available to help:
Helpline Center [www.helplinecenter.org](http://www.helplinecenter.org) or dial 211,
Lutheran Social Services [www.lsssd.org](http://www.lsssd.org) or call 1-855-334-2953 toll free
Southeastern Behavioral Health 1-866-258-6954

**Statement of Consent**
I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission to be audio recorded during this study.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records**

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Study Participant              Date

______________________________  __________________________
Print Name of Study Participant

________________________________________
Signature of Researcher                  Date
Appendix C

Questions to Clarify Participant Understanding

1. What do you understand this study to be about?

2. What is your understanding of how information will be kept confidential?

3. What are the risks of participation?

4. What are your options if you feel uncomfortable answering a question?

5. What can you do if you feel uncomfortable about participating in the study?
Appendix D

Guide Questions for Interviews on Harassment

Warm-up questions:

1. Tell me about your current employment and company or organization.

2. Describe your education and work experience, include various career changes or position changes.

3. Describe your family or personal relationships.

Workplace harassment questions:

1. Please tell me about your experience of workplace harassment? Describe this experience in story form, beginning with your circumstances, and the event or experience first identified as a form of harassment. Please include details about this experience, such as who participated in this event and their role (board member, employee, member of the public, etc.).

2. Describe the types of harassment experienced from the beginning until the end of this experience.

3. Describe the effects of this experience on your personal and professional life.

4. Please describe what you learned about workplace harassment and how you might help others to prevent or respond to workplace harassment.

5. Describe how workplace harassment has changed how you function within the workplace today.
Appendix E

Participation Script Describing the Study

Thank you for considering volunteering for this study. The purpose of this study is to explore workplace harassment through the lived experience of leaders. Leaders and administrators suffer the risks and damaging effects from workplace harassment, as do other employees, and their experiences should be included in the literature on harassment. My study will contribute to literature on this subject focusing on how leaders experience this phenomenon.

Few think of leaders as vulnerable employees requiring protection from workplace harassment. I hope to help others learn how senior leaders initially encountered and managed episodes of workplace harassment, and also how they made meaning of this experience while serving in a public role. My study may inform leaders and the public regarding the serious nature of workplace harassment. Raising awareness of the issue, including how leaders experience the phenomenon, may lead to changes in human resource policies and also opportunities to provide protection and/or seek recovery for harassment experiences.

I am a doctoral candidate with the University of St Thomas applying this research study to a doctorate degree in educational leadership (Ed.D.). Participant interviews will become the key component to understanding harassment and developing research on workplace harassment. By undertaking this investigation, I hope to provide understanding and possible relief for those having suffered harassment.

The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes. We will meet in a private, mutually agreed upon location. The interviews will be documented via audio recording and observation notes. You may continue with the interview responses if you need extra time and desire to continue. Results of the interviews will be analyzed to determine commonalities of responses.

I will provide you a copy of the completed research study along with personal contact information as a thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study.
Appendix F

Intake Form

Personal

Name:
Age:
Gender:

Contact Preferences

Phone:
Email:

Profession:
Degree/s:

College or University attended:
Licenses:

Current employment:

Employment where harassed:

Total number of years in profession:
Other employment history:
Appendix G

Institutional Review Board
Grants and Research Office

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

A. INSTRUCTIONS

Please read through the entirety of this form carefully before signing.

Electronic signatures are not valid for this form. After completing the required fields, please print and sign this form in blue or black ink. After this form has been signed by the transcriber, it should be given to the principal investigator of the research study for submission. After receiving the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement, the principal investigator should scan and upload the signed form to their IRBNet project package.

The transcriber should keep a copy of the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement for their records.

This agreement is for transcribers only. However, if your duties as a research assistant include transcription, you will need to review, sign, and submit the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement as well as the Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement. Confidentiality agreements can be found in the document library in IRBNet.

B. CONFIDENTIALITY OF A RESEARCH STUDY:

Confidentiality is the treatment and maintenance of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure (the consent form) without permission. Confidential information relating to human subjects in a research study may include, but is not limited to:

- Name, date of birth, age, sex, address, and contact information;
- Current contact details of family, guardian, etc.;
- Medical or educational history and/or records;
- Sexual lifestyle;
- Personal care issues;
- Service records and progress notes;
- Assessments or reports;
- Ethnic or racial origin;
- Political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs.

As a transcriber you will have access to research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that include confidential information. Many participants have only revealed information to investigators because principal investigators have assured participants that every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. That is why it is of the utmost importance to maintain full confidentiality when conducting your duties as a transcriber during a research study. Below is a list of expectations you will be required to adhere to as a transcriber. Please carefully review these expectations before signing this form.

Revised: 08/08/16
C. EXPECTATIONS FOR A TRANSCRIBER

In order to maintain confidentiality, I agree to:

1. Keep all research information that is shared with me (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) confidential by not discussing or sharing this information verbally or in any format with anyone other than the principal investigator of this study;

2. Ensure the security of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) while it is in my possession. This includes:
   - Using closed headsets when transcribing audio taped interviews;
   - Keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews on a password protected computer with password-protected files;
   - Closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
   - Keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet;
   - Permanently deleting any digital communication containing the data.

3. Not make copies of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) unless specifically instructed to do so by the principal investigator;

4. Give all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) and research participant information, back to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a transcriber;

5. After discussing it with the principal investigator, erase or destroy all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that cannot be returned to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a transcriber.

Name of Transcriber:

IRBNet Tracking Number: 960591-1

Title of Research Study: Workplace Harassment and Mobbing: How Senior Level Administrators Can Survive

Name of Principal Investigator: Jeffrey R. Holcomb

By signing this form I acknowledge that I have reviewed, understand, and agree to adhere to the expectations for a transcriber described above. I agree to maintain confidentiality while performing my duties as a transcriber and recognize that failure to comply with these expectations may result in disciplinary action.

________________________  ______________________
Signature of Transcriber      Date

________________________
Print Name

Revised: 08/08/16