The professional lives of teacher victims of workplace bullying: A narrative analysis

CORENE DE WET

University of the Free State

In order to expand the body of knowledge on workplace bullying in South Africa the aim of this article is to report on findings from a narrative analysis. In this article the professional life stories of two teachers, who have been exposed to bullying by their principals over an extended period of time, are retold. The narratives describe how and why they were bullied and the impact of the bullying on their professional lives. By using narrative analysis this article gives a voice to victims of workplace bullying and creates an awareness of this scourge in an ever-changing South African education dispensation.

Keywords: workplace bullying, mobbing, teachers, principals, narrative analysis, South Africa.

Introduction

During the past two decades bullying in the workplace has received growing attention in research. The most developed research comes from Scandinavia, where there is strong public awareness, government-funded research and established anti-bullying legislation (Beale & Hoel, 2010:103; Quine, 1999:228). More than 90% of adults experience workplace bullying at some time during the span of their working careers (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003:472). Surveys carried out within the last two decades in the United Kingdom suggest that between 10 and 20% of British workers consider themselves to have been bullied at work and a large-scale nationwide survey has reported that one in ten had been bullied within the six months prior to the study (Beale & Hoel, 2010:103). A study by Quine (1999:231) found that 38% of the respondents reported being subjected to bullying behaviour in the previous year and 42% witnessed the bullying of others. Furthermore, the supervisors who inflict psychological abuse on subordinates represent one of the most frequent and serious problems confronting employees in the workplace (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003:472). Although workers are at times abusive towards their co-workers, researchers (Beale & Hoel, 2010:103; Einarsen, 1999:18; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2007:224; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003:474; Quine, 1999:229) have found that the overwhelming majority of abuse is carried out by superiors on their subordinates.

While there is a plethora of international publications on workplace bullying and violence (cf. Bowman, Bhanjee, Eagle & Crafford, 2009:301), De Wet (2010a) found that studies on the topic in South Africa are limited. Thus far, only a few researchers (cf. De Wet, 2010a, 2010b; Khalil, 2009; Kirsten, Viljoen & Rossouw, 2005; Pietersen, 2007; Steinman, 2003) have studied bullying in the South African work context. Steinman (2003) and Khalil (2009) researched workplace bullying in the health sector; De Wet (2010a & 2010b) and Kirsten *et al*. (2005) investigated the plight of teachers, and Pietersen (2007) studied the bullying of members of the academe. Bowman *et al*. (2009:310) believe that the dearth of research within the South African context is due to the phenomenon "often [being] regarded as an insignificant part of the greater violent problem in South Africa". Yet, workplace bullying remains a serious problem in South Africa. Steinman (cited in De Lange, 2007:11) told the National Assembly's labour committee in 2007 that 60% of public sector workers experienced verbal abuse, while 24% were bullied and 17% physically abused.

The vast majority of studies on workplace bullying were conducted as survey studies measuring the respondents' exposure to pre-defined negative behaviour (Hauge *et al*., 2007:221; Hoel & Beale, 2006:243; Quine, 1999:228; Salin, 2003:1226; Vartia, 2001:67). Salin (2003:1226) argues that the emphasis on surveys based on positivist assumptions limits our understanding of workplace bullying. According to her, surveys make it difficult to capture patterns and escalation processes, and they seldom provide enough data to identify the subjective meaning and experiences of the victims. An important finding of

Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik and Alberts' (2006:177) grounded metaphor analysis on workplace bullying is that victims struggle to translate their experiences into words. These authors therefore suggest that researchers conduct "a close narrative analysis of various target stories" as such an analysis could examine "the way targeted persons frame themselves, their bullies, and witnessing co-workers, and the way they define personal identities through the employment of their experience."

Framed by a narrative lens, the aim of this article is to report on the lived experience of two teachers who have been bullied by their principal for more than 15 years. The research was guided by the following question: How do teachers who have been bullied over an extended period of time make meaning of their professional lives and what are the implications thereof for their identities, relationships and future?

By using narrative analysis of the experiences of these two teachers, this article will attempt to fill the gap in workplace bullying research by increasing the body of knowledge on this topic in the South African context and will allow me to synthesise and contextualise fragmented experiences of two victims of workplace bullying. I therefore argue that narrative analysis can be used as a research methodology to answer the abovementioned question.

Margaret and Charles's stories, which form the core of this article, will be retold against the background of a short concept clarification of workplace bullying, as well as an exposition of narrative as a research methodology. Thereafter, findings emanating from the narratives will be discussed and juxtaposed with national and international research findings on workplace bullying.

Definition

There is no clear consensus on what constitutes workplace bullying. Definitions on workplace bullying usually share the following elements: the negative effect of the bullying on the victim; the persistency of the bullying behaviour and the power disparity between the victim and the bully/bullies.

Salin (2003:1214) defines workplace bullying as follows:

> ...the repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s), which involve a perceived power imbalance and create a hostile work environment.

Einarsen (1999:17) sees workplace bullying as:

> ... the systematic persecution of a colleague, a subordinate or a superior, which, if continued, may cause severe social, psychological and psychosomatic problems to the victim.

Many terms, such as "mobbing", "emotional abuse", "work harassment", "workplace incivility" and "employee abuse", have been used to describe interpersonal aggression and hostile workplace behaviour (Einarsen, 1999:17; Salin, 2003:1215; Tracy *et al*., 2006:151). To varying extents they overlap with the term "bullying", although some differences have been identified by researchers (cf. Salin, 2003:1215-1216). Mobbing is, for example, seen as the "ganging up" against an isolated and vulnerable individual by a group of workers (Beale & Hoel, 2010:103; Duffy & Sperry, 2007:401). Hall (2005:46) distinguishes between harassment, which can be manifested by a single event, and bullying, which involves a pattern of behaviour.

Hadikin and O'Driscoll (2002:16) find the commonest forms of workplace bullying behaviour to be intimidation, undervaluing of skills and humiliation. Other forms include belittling of work, undervaluing effort, questioning of professional competence, threats, blocking development/promotion, overruling decisions, moving goal posts, refusing reasonable requests, social isolation or silent treatment, rumours, attacking the victim's private life or attitudes, excessive criticisms or monitoring of work, withholding information or depriving of responsibility, and verbal aggression (Hadikin & O'Driscoll, 2002:17; Hall, 2005:46; Hoel & Beale, 2006:243; Pietersen, 2007:60; Salin, 2003:1215; Tracy *et al*., 2006:152). Acts of physical violence, such as hitting, slapping and shoving, tend to be rare in workplace bullying (Einarsen, 1999:18; Pietersen, 2007:60; Salin, 2003:1215). Gestures, tones, facial expressions and other non-verbal messages are often used to humiliate and intimidate victims (Van Fleet & Van Fleet, 2010:88). Most bullying is designed to undermine the victim's self-confidence and cause him/her to perform poorly (Hall, 2005:46). According to Tracy *et al*. (2006:152), workplace bullying is a combination of tactics in which

several types of hostile communication and behaviour are used. The intensity of hostility may increase when bullying is left unchecked (Einarsen, 1999:19; Pietersen, 2007:60).

Research methodology

This study began in 2008 as a qualitative exploration into teachers' exposure to bullying. During the first phase of this study attention was paid to teachers as victims of bullying by their principals, fellow teachers and learners. Since then I have kept in close contact with two of the original 10 participants – both have been relentlessly bullied by their school principal for more than 15 years. Several informal conversations with them formed the core of the second phase of the study. The findings from the first phase of the study (cf. De Wet, 2010a & 2010b) formed an important backdrop throughout my conversations with them and provided a context to understand their experiences.

First phase of the study

A snowball sampling technique, consisting of teachers and colleagues referring teachers whom they believe have experienced workplace bullying, was employed during the first phase of the study. Data were collected by means of in-depth personal interviews, based on the following questions:

- What is your experience of workplace bullying?

- What do you think are the reasons for workplace bullying?

- What have been the consequences of workplace bullying for your professional and/or private life?

- What have you done, if anything, to prevent the bullying? Give details.

- Have you reported these incidents of bullying? Motivate your answer.

Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. In total, ten educators participated in the first phase of the study over a six-month period during the course of 2008. The sample consisted of male (n=3) and female (n=7) educators from rural (n=3) and urban (n=7) schools. Both primary (n=4) and secondary (n=6) school educators participated. The average age of the educators was 48 years, and the average number of years of teaching experience was 23. Four of the educators interviewed were heads of department.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Reflective field notes were taken for the sake of triangulation. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit's (2004) guidelines for qualitative content analysis were followed to reduce, condense and group the content of the interviews into codes, categories and themes. The following forms of bullying behaviour by school principals emerged from data analysis: Principals ignore teachers' thoughts, needs, feelings and accomplishments; there is non-support of teachers; teachers are verbally abused and publicly ridiculed; unwarranted and unfair criticism is levelled at teachers; teachers are set up to fail; teachers are subjected to social and professional isolation; there is a lack of empathy; unwarranted written reprimands may be issued; favouritism is displayed; teachers are forced to resign or are reassigned and are even threatened with dismissal (De Wet, 2010b). Findings from the first phase of the study further highlighted the lack of an effective regime of monitoring the regulations which govern principals' behaviour and the characteristics of the bullies and victims as reasons for workplace bullying (De Wet, 2010a).

Second phase of the study

Using the data collected during the first phase, I asked Charles and Margaret, who were both teaching at Edumela Secondary School, if they were willing to take part in the second phase of the study. My decision to ask these two individuals was influenced by their frankness during the first phase, my respect for them as teachers and human beings, and the fact that they have being victimised by the same principal for nearly half their professional careers. Over a period of two years I had several informal conversations with them and two of their colleagues. Our conversations focused on the continuing victimisation of the

two participants by their principal, and their efforts to continue their teaching and survive emotionally. I did not record our conversations, but noted them in detail afterwards. I created a collaborative, non-hierarchical relationship with them (Eagle, Hayes & Sibanda, 2007:504).

Ethical considerations

My research on workplace bullying involves asking participants to talk about deeply felt personal concerns and trauma, raising difficult ethical issues. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that I invested considerable effort in obtaining the trust of the two participants whose narratives form the core of this study. I went to great lengths to inform them, as I also did during the first phase of the study, of the goals of the research and to ensure that their participation was willing and voluntary (Eagle *et al.*, 2007:504). Disseminating findings can also raise ethical issues. The narratives were therefore given to the two participants. Their insights were incorporated into the final narratives. Both were satisfied with the way I retold their stories (Merriam, 2009:233). Names used throughout this article are pseudonyms, and several identifying details of the participants have been modified.

Narrative analysis

Andrews, Sclater, Squire and Tamboukou (2004:115) see narrative analysis as:

> *... not only a way of finding out about how people frame, remember and report their experiences, but also a way of generating knowledge that disrupts old certainties and allows us to glimpse something of the complexities of human lives, selves and endeavours.*

It is important to distinguish between qualitative analysis applied to narratives and narrative analysis as a method. In the former, general methods of qualitative analysis such as thematic, discourse and conversation analysis may be applied to the interpretation of narratives as well as other sources of data while, in the latter, specific techniques are devoted to narratives alone (Bingley, Thomas, Brown, Reeve & Payne, 2008:654-655). Whereas in the "analysis of narratives" the narratives are the source of knowledge, the narrative in "narrative analysis" is the result of the research (Samuel & Van Wyk, 2008:144; Smeyers, 2008:698).

According to Polkinghorne (1995:15), the "outcome of a narrative analysis is a story ... in this type of analysis, the researcher's task is to configure the data elements into a story that unites and give meaning to the data". A narrative analysis seeks to synthesise rather than separate the data. By adding context through the use of plots, timelines, contextual descriptions and character development, researchers pull data together into a coherent story (MacMath, 2009:143). According to MacMath (2009:143), this story "becomes a new primary data set unto itself, constructed by the researcher for the purpose of providing a retrospective look at the original data". Narrative analysis is intersubjective, because the stories retold in the analysis reflect the voices of the participants woven together with the interpretive voice of the researcher (Bryant, 2009:554).

In the development of my story on the professional lives of two teacher victims of workplace bullying, I followed MacMath (2009:143) and Polkinghorne's (1995:18) sequence of steps: (1) identify a context for the story including characters and setting; (2) identify the final outcome of the story; (3) arrange data chronologically, identifying those data which are relevant to the story; and (4) write the story by drawing connections between the identified data. After having read and re-read Charles and Margaret's responses during the first phase of the study, as well as my notes on our conversations, I decided to write two rather than one story. Even though they were teaching at the same school and had the same bully (principal), the underlying reasons for their victimisation, as well as their responses to the victimisation, differed. Both stories commence with the portrayal of young, talented teachers who were recognised as leaders in their respective fields. The turning point in both their careers came about with the appointment of Mr Foster as the school's principal. I arranged the data chronologically and identified data (events) that shed light on the principal's relentless and continuous victimisation, as well as their responses to his victimisation.

While I was writing the stories I moved back and forth between the two stories and the data. I re-read my stories several times for flow. The stories that emerged from this process will be told in the next section.

I followed Creswell's (2007:207) guidelines to enhance the validity of this study: I formed a prolonged engagement, build on trust and mutual respect. Detailed written reports, as well as articles resulting from the first part of the study, together with my retelling of their stories were provided to the two participants. They were invited to offer their interpretation and assessment of their narratives. Their insights were incorporated into the final narratives. I used journaling and interview memoranda to create self-awareness of my personal biases, conflicts and emotional responses to the participants' narratives. In an effort to triangulate my data through the use of multiple sources, I had, with the consent of my participants, enlightening conversations with two of their colleagues – people they have known for more than 20 years and trust implicitly.

To tap the insights of the bullying principal and/or his friends would have been unethical. Within the tradition of narrative research the aim is not to determine whether the participants' stories did in fact take place as reported, but to understand how and why individuals report their experiences the way they do. In the narrative tradition, distinction is made between "lives as lived" (what actually happened), "lives as told" (what is remembered and reported selectively) and "lives as experienced" (what is remembered and valued) (Samuel & Van Wyk, 2008:144).

While the narratives of researchers such as MacMath (2000) and Samuel and Van Wyk (2009) constitute a synthesis of data gathered from various participants' interviews into generic central stories, Bryant (2009) wrote four different narratives to illustrate the diverse ways in which different women negotiated an evangelical student organisation on a university campus in the USA. In this study I followed Bryant's example. I present two different narratives to illustrate, as noted earlier, not only the similarities but also the differences in the lived experiences of the two victims of workplace bullying.

The following two narratives are "a chosen qualitative representational strategy (narrative analysis)", inviting readers to interpret the narratives before I offer an analysis of the two narratives (cf. Samuel & Van Wyk, 2009:145). The two narratives constitute a "factionalised" synthesis (Samuel & Van Wyk, 2009:145) of the data gathered from the two interviews conducted with Charles and Margaret during the first phase of the study, as well as the informal conversations with them and their colleagues during the second phase of the study.

Margaret's story

For Margaret teaching is not simply a job; it is her life calling. Edumela Secondary School is also not simply another school – it is the school where she started her teaching career with enthusiasm, and is still teaching after 30 years. At this school, her hard work and the successes achieved by her learners were initially recognised by her principal, colleagues and learners. However, this all changed in 1993. Currently, every day is a struggle for emotional survival for Margaret:

> *I have reached saturation point ... I am tired of begin downed every time; I am tired of it, I am tired of always being belittled; I simply never get a 'thank you'. When I leave here in the mornings I wonder what I have done wrong again, for what am I now going to be disparaged at school. When he mentions my name, I cringe – what has Margaret done wrong this time?*

In Margaret's reflection on her professional life, she speaks with nostalgia about her first years as a teacher. Her principal, Mr James, mentored her. He gradually started to increase her responsibilities. Before long, she became a subject head and "I had to take decisions by myself in my subject; I had to plan and do things for all the grades". She thrived under his leadership. Her learners participated in provincial and national subject-related competitions – and won. She was also the chief examiner for her subject for many years.

However, Margaret's life as a teacher changed after the appointment of a new principal, Mr Foster. According to her, relations between them were tense right from the start: *"I was always blamed for everything that went wrong. He never liked me"*. She said that the reason for his negative attitude towards her was jealousy. The situation became worse when she returned from a year's study leave. Since then,

he has done everything in his power to humiliate her, to bring her into discredit with the parents and colleagues and to break her spirit.

With Margaret's return to the school after her study leave she was shocked to learn that Lydia, whom she had taken pains to mentor in order to take over her classes while she was on study leave, suddenly was her subject head. In spite of better qualifications and many years' experience, her status as subject head had been taken away from her. Nevertheless, she had to endure the principal's wrath when parents came and complained about Lydia's examination papers, which were riddled with grammatical mistakes. After Lydia's resignation he once again appointed a less qualified, less experienced teacher as her subject head. After this, the already tense relations between Margaret and Foster reached a new low. According to Margaret, Foster had found an ally in Irma, the young teacher: *"She went to him about everything I did and gave a twist to the tale"*. Margaret called to mind an incident when she had pointed out a myriad of spelling and factual mistakes on Irma's examination papers for grades which they taught jointly:

> I was called in and told that I was not allowed to do anything anymore; I did not show respect towards my subject head. I told him: "Do I have to respect someone who cannot even spell and cannot even do her work?"

> "Yes," he replied, "I shall lay a disciplinary charge against you if you do not show respect towards her." I now refuse to have my name appear on the papers.

Margaret is convinced of the fact that Foster wants her to fail as a teacher:

> Prior to 1993, my pupils had never performed below the provincial average. They received national and provincial awards. Then he came up with the issue that my subject had to be discontinued, because then nobody would be able to praise my work.

She recalls how he phased out her subject, because *"he had thought that I would resign. He had thought that I would leave the school. But then I did not leave"*. During the same period, outcomes-based education (OBE) was introduced in South Africa. According to Margaret, Foster grabbed the opportunity to assign learning areas to her of which she had little or no knowledge, in the hope that she would fail. As part of her survival strategy and her perseverance, Margaret thoroughly familiarised herself with the new educational approach. She attended every possible course and holiday workshop, read widely and sought advice from experts. However, this did not put an end to his criticism. On the contrary, she was criticised for her assessment methods. He *"criticised my way of marking"* and *"I had to appear on the carpet in order to explain why I had re-assessed my pupils. But this is part of the OBE assessment policy. He kicked up a lot of fuss about my work"*. She concedes that he gave recognition to her once:

> One day he said in the staffroom that he had to confess and apologise that day, because "Margaret was right about OBE and I was wrong". That was the first and the last time.

She recalls that she often went to him unsuccessfully with the request that he should use her in learning areas in which she was trained. *"He tried to move me in everywhere, probably thinking that I would not make a success of it"*. Margaret not only had to familiarise herself with a new learning area every few years, but also move from classroom to classroom. She had hardly painted her new classroom at her own cost, when she had to learn that she had to move once again.

The prestige that Margaret enjoyed among her colleagues was a thorn in Foster's side. For example, she learned that he had tampered with the results of the School Governing Body's (SGB) election. One of her colleagues who had assisted in the voting was dumbfounded when he heard that she was not a member of the SGB. He also endeavoured to damage her image among the parents and children. For instance, the extramural programme timetables were regularly changed to the detriment of the activities in which she was involved:

> He did not give a damn for certain people's extramural timetables. And then you ended up with a red face with the parents, seemingly being unable to organise something. He takes nobody into consideration.

Margaret spent a lot of energy on her professional development. She makes no secret of the fact that she strives towards promotion. Foster created false expectations with her a lot of the time. She recounted one specific incident in detail:

> *Then he called me in and told me that it had been decided at the managerial team meeting that I had to act as a head of department, and once the position was advertised, he and I would talk about how the post should be advertised so that only I qualified for it. That remained talk – nothing happened.*

Even before the applications closed, Margaret had realised that she would not be appointed to the post. Not only did it came to her ears that he asked one of her colleagues to apply for the post at the last minute, but she also experienced her interview as a staged farce. *"The members of the SGB whom he knew he could manipulate formed part of the panel of interviewers"*. Margaret based the latter conclusion on her experiences of SGB interviews of which she had previously been part. During one of these interviews, for example, he declared before the start of an interview: *"This man is my candidate"*. Margaret's colleague got the post. While other humiliating experiences made Margaret only more determined to achieve success, it appears as if this last experience destroyed her fighting spirit to some extent: *"At this stage, I would have left my post for any other post, even equal in status to my current post"*.

Over time, Margaret realised that it would be a waste of time to take a stand against her principal: *"I cannot confront him. He tells you to your face that you are lying, while he is the one who is lying. He has that type of personality"*. Regardless of this realisation, at times she still attempted to discuss with him situations that made her unhappy. Consequently, she has repeatedly been threatened with disciplinary action. Even though her work conditions might drain her emotionally, she still has the greatest respect for the teaching profession. She attends workshops, reads widely in order to keep up to date with her constantly changing learning areas, and she is regarded as a true teacher by her colleagues and learners.

Charles's story

Charles taught at Edumela Secondary School for 35 years. His career thrived. Within a few years, he was promoted to a head of department and also appointed as examiner for provincial Grade 12 examinations. He was an exceptionally successful athletics coach; his athletes received medals at provincial and national meetings. The learners had immense respect for him as a teacher and a person. Charles nostalgically recalls his particular relationship with his learners: *"It was a privilege to teach them. I walked the road with them, both on the sports field and in the classroom"*. According to him, he was part of *"a slowly dying generation of teachers"*.

The new political dispensation in South Africa, and the subsequent changes in the education system, had a major impact on Charles's professional life. The once self-assured teacher now had to teach learning areas in which he was not academically an expert, after his subject had been phased out. He had to master new teaching and assessment approaches and create a milieu in which teaching and learning for post-modern, culturally diverse young people could flourish.

When Mr Foster was appointed as the deputy principal at the school at the beginning of the nineties, Charles and some of his colleagues, according to the words of one of Charles's colleagues, *"did not really take any notice of him"*. According to this colleague, Foster *"always held it against us and treated us unnecessarily badly"*. Relations between Charles and Foster went into a downward spiral after Foster's appointment as principal. According to Charles, his principal is a *"hard man"*, who is known for his poor human relations.

Charles acknowledged that the new educational dispensation makes huge demands on him and that sometimes he has to *"study as hard as his Grade 12 pupils"*. His questioning of an extremely complicated assessment rubric, compiled by a young colleague, for example, brought the wrath of the principal down on him. He was summoned to Foster's office and presented with an ultimatum. He had to assess according to the rubric, or *"I had to go"*. Charles was very upset:

> *I found it unacceptable that a man who had been at the school for more than 30 years, and had contributed to the school in many areas, was insulted in this way.*

Charles regarded the more humane approach to maintaining discipline, in particular the abolition of corporal punishment, as problematic. According to him, he and other teachers did not get adequate support from the principal in addressing disciplinary problems in their classrooms. In order to illustrate how disciplinary problems gave rise to conflict with his principal, Charles recounts:

> *I was in trouble, because I chased two boys out of the class. I told them they had to sit outside the classroom, but then they went to the toilet and smoked cannabis. Now I am the villain in the story. I was taken to task.*

Charles's health gradually deteriorated and he was diagnosed with depression. The principal's unsympathetic attitude during his illness remains with him:

> *My doctor was furious. I presume I could have taken him [Foster] to the labour court, but I am not that kind of person. He told me that if I were not yet ready at the beginning of the term and if I could not yet teach fulltime I, as he had stated it, would not be the first person to resign on account of depression, but I had to start thinking of leaving teaching. He said that if I could not cope, I had to go. It was a sword over my head. I had been teaching for 33 years; he could have given me a fair chance to get onto my feet again.*

The next term, Charles resumed his duties at the school, despite the fact that he was still officially on sick leave, and *"fortunately, I am now fine again, but I am dependent on medication"*. After this incident, the relations between Charles and his principal deteriorated further and he was regularly *"on the carpet"* for apparent trivialities. All career satisfaction was gone. Charles taught because he had to, not because he wanted to.

Two years after my initial interview with Charles, he retired at the age of 60. The once beloved, dedicated teacher concedes that he is entirely apathetic towards the school where he had worked his entire professional career:

> *When I pass the school, I feel nothing. I shall go and teach again; but never again at the Secondary School Edumela.*

Currently, Charles is creating a new life for himself away from the school. There is no longer an unsympathetic principal peering over his shoulder, intimidating him into early retirement, or insinuating that he was an incompetent teacher. Charles is taking control of his life again and in this new life, he does not want to break ties with that which he found good at the school: colleagues with whom he came a long way ("the dying generation") and former learners.

Discussion

Narrative analysis provides valuable insight into the way these two teachers made meaning of their professional lives, their identities and their relationships and future. The narratives give insight into how the dreams, accomplishments and enthusiasm of two successful teachers were trampled on by the relentless emotional abuse by their principal. Although both victims gave up on their dreams and original career plans, they are still loyal towards the teaching profession. Charles's narration suggests feelings of frustration, alienation and disappointment. Changes in disciplinary practices and teaching approaches made Charles the target of an unsympathetic principal. After his retirement he broke almost all contact with the school as such. Yet, he still professes loyalty toward the alumni and some of his colleagues. Being an excellent teacher was important to Margaret. Whereas her professional dreams should have been applauded by her principal, he tried to crush them. Although he killed her dreams for promotion, he could not kill her love for her profession. Despite her public humiliation she still seizes every opportunity to better herself professionally.

Charles and Margaret's narratives are mirror images of Salin (2003:1214) and Einarsen's (1999:17) definitions of workplace bullying. They have been repeatedly and relentlessly humiliated and disempowered by their principal for more than 15 years. Because of the bureaucratic and rule-oriented character of educational institutions (cf. Duffy & Sperry, 2007:400), as well as the autocratic, patriarchal management style of the principal, neither Charles nor Margaret were able to stand up against their abusive boss,

which inevitably placed them in a subservient position. While both narratives highlighted the persistency and duration of the bullying, Charles's narrative also focused on the escalation and intensification of his victimisation; the perpetrator was merciless in his efforts to humiliate a person who was suffering from depression and could not cope with the changes in the South African education dispensation. This trend is in line with findings by Hoel and Beale (2006:240), namely that there is often an escalation of emotional abuse of victims who are unable to defend themselves.

Charles and Margaret were exposed to virtually all the types of bulling that were identified in the literature (Blase & Blase, 2002:680; Duffy & Sperry, 2007:401; Hadikin & O'Driscoll, 2002:17; Hall, 2005:46; Hoel & Beale, 2006:243; Pietersen, 2007:60; Salin, 2003:1215; Tracy *et al*., 2006:152). The bullying principal used, for example, official structures (official warnings) to intimidate both participants. Foster's intimidation strategies included the setting of an unrealistic, inhumane demand by telling Charles that he should resign if he could not cope with the changes, or resume his teaching responsibilities, even when he was still on sick leave. Both participants' professional competencies were questioned and their work was excessively monitored and criticised by the principal, as well as by younger, inexperienced and less qualified colleagues, which may be seen as public humiliation. Whereas Margaret's hard work to adapt to the changing education dispensation were undervalued, Charles's efforts were often scorned and ridiculed. Both participants were repeatedly set up to fail by a principal who negated their expertise and redeployed them to new learning areas. The bullying principal went out of his way to foil Margaret's dreams for promotion; her hard work and studies to improve herself professionally were not acknowledged. On the contrary, it instigated more criticism, moved the goal posts and deprived her of responsibilities. Reasonable requests, such as Margaret's appeal to teach in her area of specialisation, were often refused.

The foregoing discussion illustrates that a combination of tactics were used to create a hostile working environment for Charles and Margaret. Because the victims' inability to stand up to their principal caused the intensity of hostility to escalate, Charles was forced to capitulate and Margaret to seek new dreams to keep afloat emotionally.

Intertwined with Charles and Margaret's stories are their perceived reasons as to why they were targeted by Foster for more than 15 years, namely the tension between their success and Foster's jealousy thereof, as well as their tormentor's personality. Einarsen's (1999:17) finding of jealously being the main reason for bullying is confirmed by the two stories. Both participants' careers soared while they were relatively young (in their thirties). They may therefore be seen as overachievers who were proud of what they had accomplished. Einarsen (1999:21) rightly argues that overachievers may be experienced by others as patronising and may consequently provoke aggressive behaviour in others. Einarsen's (1999:17) assertion that the strong expression of self-confidence may be a factor in workplace bullying is in line with Hall's (2005:47) view, namely that "adult bullies victimize the most self-confident, conscientious, skilled-at-their-job and helpful employees". This is echoed by the current study. Margaret talked at length how she improved her qualifications, attended workshops and studied OBE, and both participants recalled the fact that their learners received provincial and national recognition. Both participants are held in high esteem by the school's alumni and colleagues.

Very few studies have been conducted on how perpetrators of workplace bullying perceive their workplace and justify their actions. Therefore, researchers' characterisations of perpetrators and the underlying reasons for their negative actions are based on the responses, descriptions and/or narratives of victims (cf. Einarsen, 1999:20). This view resonates well with the current study. Charles and Margaret's stories tell of a tormentor who was dishonest (rigged SGB results), lacked management skills and was devoid of empathy (cf. Einarsen, 1999:20; Hall, 2005:46). Kirsten *et al*. (2005:1) is of the opinion that bullying principals may suffer from narcissistic personality disorder. While I acknowledge that it is not possible to do a complex psychological diagnosis based only on the victims' stories, the data suggests that their bullying principal has a grandiose sense of self-importance and acts as if he has unlimited power. If the participants dared to disagree with him or those he put in a position of power, they were severely reprimanded. Members of the SGB were further seen as pawns in a chess game he controlled.

The fact that the bullying of Charles and Margaret commenced after the promotion of Mr Foster to principal, is in line with research findings by O'Moore *et al*. (1998, in Salin, 2003:1225), stating that almost two-thirds of the victims claimed that the bullying started after the promotion of the perpetrator or the arrival of the new manager. Charles's story illustrate that changes, for example, the introduction of OBE, new disciplinary strategies and the rise of a generation of post-modern, culturally diverse young people, often expose vulnerable people's inability to adapt. This makes them easy targets for abuse. Both participants intentionally talked about the different phases in their working lives. Before the appointment of the bullying principal, they were what may be perceived to be near or at the pinnacles of their careers. After 1993 they were pulled into a vortex, subsequently becoming the targets of a bully who negated all their accomplishments.

As a result of the relentless bullying both victims lost self-confidence: Charles questioned his own ability to understand a rubric and Margaret went to school every day with trepidation of what she may have unknowingly done "wrong". This loss of self-confidence impacted on both victims' professional lives. Charles retired at an earlier age than he had originally envisaged. The once brilliant, beloved teacher changed into a mediocre teacher struggling to adapt to changes. After his retirement he indicated that, if he were to ever return to teaching, it would not be at Edumela Secondary School, while Margaret said farewell to her dreams of career advancement. The participants are still loyal to their profession, not the school. This is in line with Cemaloğlu's (2007:21) and Hall's (2005:46) view, namely that the majority of those exposed to bullying may leave the organisation, but not their chosen professions. Duffy and Sperry's (2007:401) warning that victims become preoccupied with what has happened to them holds true for the current study. Margaret told, for example, that while driving to school in the mornings she is worried about what the day might bring. Findings by Hall (2005:48), Hauge *et al*. (2007:237), Quine (1999:231) and Vartia (2001:67) that workers who experienced bullying reported lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of job-induced stress than non-victims is confirmed by the narratives. Both participants acknowledged that they felt extremely stressed. Findings by the aforementioned researchers, namely that victims of workplace bullying were more likely to be clinically anxious and depressed, is confirmed by Charles's narrative. He was diagnosed with depression. Quine (1999:231) notes that a person who is depressed, stressed or anxious may be bullied by

> *... unscrupulous workers who choose weaker people as their victims. Anxiety and depression may also weaken a person's ability to cope with stressors such as bullying or make them more likely to perceive other people's behaviour as hostile and critical.*

Both Margaret and Charles's stories resonate well with what the literature defines as the core elements of workplace bullying. The narratives described how and why they were bullied, as well as the impact of the bullying on their professional lives. The juxtaposition of their stories with the literature shows multiple similarities between their lived experiences and those of other victims of workplace bullying. The retelling Charles and Margaret's stories create understanding and respect for exceptional teachers who try to survive emotionally and professionally in an autocratic working environment.

Conclusion

Framed by a narrative lens, the core of this article was the lived experiences of two teachers who were exposed to relentless bullying by their principal for more than 15 years. Their stories synthesised the innumerable humiliating experiences they had to endure, and how they tried to make sense of their victimisation in order to survive emotionally and professionally. Even though there are numerous similarities between the findings from this study and other research findings on the topic, the different way of presenting the data give a coherent, holistic voice rather than fragmented, categorised snapshots or statistical results to capture the plight of victims of workplace bullying. The stories of the two victims of workplace bullying provide important examples to researchers regarding the value of moving beyond an analysis of narratives or reducing human beings to numbers.

The two coherent stories will hopefully contribute to the limited research literature on workplace bullying in the South African context. The narrative analysis further sheds light on the impact of the ever-changing South African socio-political and education dispensation, as well as the hierarchal school management structure and the autocratic, patriarchal management style of school principals. The narrative analysis reveals the different types of bullying the victims were exposed to, the reasons why they were targeted, and the ways in which they responded to the bullying. These findings are supported by the literature, and have implications for practice and theory.

The bullying of teachers (and other workers) by their superiors is a reality in South Africa despite the country's liberal constitution entrenching human rights (cf. Rutherford 2009:41). Fear, intimidation and the seemingly unlimited power of principals often result in a culture of silence surrounding workplace bullying. Narrative analysis is but one way of giving a voice to the victims. Education management at national, provincial and local level, trade unions, victims as well as perpetrators should know what workplace bullying entails, and the implications thereof for the profession, as well as the phenomenon of the bullying principal as a "quasi-employer" and representative of the Department of Education (cf. Rutherford 2009:41).

While I grant that the aim of this study, as is typical of all qualitative research, is not to generalise, future researchers should explore the possible impact of gender, age and victims' adaptability to the ever-changing socio-political and educational landscape on the tenacity or lack thereof, in the way victims of workplace bullying try to make sense and survive in an aggressive working milieu. The connectedness between individual, organisational and societal factors, which emerged in the narrative analysis, stresses the significance of contextualising research on workplace bullying.

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