

RACE AND ETHNICITY AS FACTORS IN WORKPLACE BULLYING

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One of the difficulties in defining workplace bullying, and consequently in designing workplace anti-bullying policy and training, is distinguishing bullying from specific and blatant forms of harassment and discrimination that are already covered by statute and policy. Whereas landmark Court decisions and the work of the EEOC, HR, legal professionals, and academics have resulted in a degree of consensus regarding delineations of sexual harassment and racial/ethnic discrimination affecting terms of employment, there remains a murky but ubiquitous area of concern in everyday work – that of bullying, uncivil, and marginalizing behavior, which may in fact be today’s “acceptable” form of out-group isolation and discrimination.

The results of the individual studies we have conducted concerning bullying, race, and ethnicity, and the comparisons across them, will be discussed in terms of the complexities that must be addressed in understanding workplace bullying as experienced by racial and ethnic minorities. This is essential in our initial task of defining bullying and delineating it as a separate (though related) issue than harassment and discriminatory behaviors already covered by statute and policy. We are now at the stage in our anti-bullying work of moving from merely describing the extent and consequences of workplace bullying, to actively participating in the development of organizational policy and training (as well as participating in public policy debates concerning Healthy Workplace legislation). If, as our research suggests, bullying is differently perceived by different racial/ethnic groups, the implications are that even more finely-tuned research is needed to consider cross-national as well as racial/ethnic cultural diversity in today’s workgroups.

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