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SPARKing a Discussion About Academic Bullying



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Panelists: Pooja Agarwal Berklee College of Music
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Moderator: Ayanna Thomas Tufts University

The Spark Society

Mission: establish a society of Cognitive Scientists & Psychologists of color that improves the visibility of its membership, create mentorship opportunities for junior cognitive psychologists of color, and provide a venue for allies to help us achieve these goals.

We have a specific focus on supporting Black, Latinx, and Indigenous scholars.

Objectives

- **Foster** an environment that welcomes and nurtures junior scholars of color
- **Contribute** to the professional development of scholars throughout their career.
- **Create** a network that will provide contacts and connections to other scholars of color in Cognitive Science.
- **Implement** an innovative model of mentorship whereby faculty members of the society will invite and mentor students who attend institutions located in the vicinity of conference

The Spark Society is Expanding – Become a Member!

- Free registration for [SPARK Society Annual Meeting](#)
- Eligibility to serve on SPARK Society General Board and respective subcommittees
- Eligibility to participate in the annual election process by nominating and voting for candidates
- Inclusion into the online Member Directory
- <https://www.sparkociety.org/membership>

Support



Special Thanks to Betty Tuller



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SPARKing a Discussion on Academic Bullying

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What is Academic Bullying?

- Sustained hostile behavior from one's academic superior (Moss & Mahmoudi, 2021)
 - Any repetitive harmful action that causes a psychological power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target (Inspiredelearning.com)
 - *Vicarious bullying* occurs when one person (e.g., leader/supervisor) empowers another to wield power and that individual executes bullying (Hollis, 2012)
- All of these are acts of workplace aggression (Neuman & Baron, 2005)



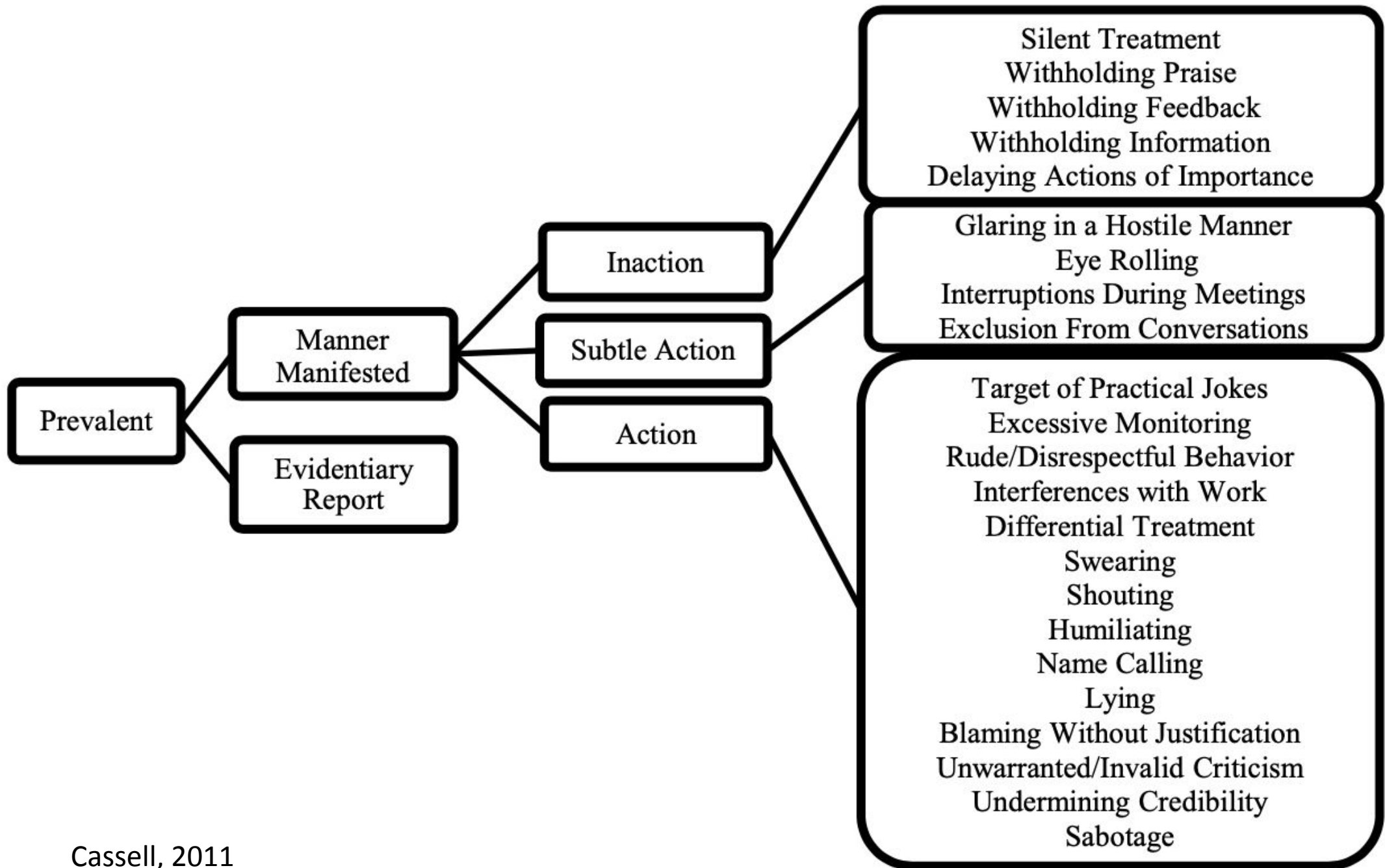
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Examples of Academic Bullying

- Spreading lies or rumors about an individual
- Purposeful exclusion or isolation
- Withholding of information or providing false information
- Gaslighting
- Interfering with an individual's belongings
- Public humiliation



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How Does Bullying Differ from Harassment?

- Bullying is currently legal (or tolerated) in some states, whereas harassment is against federal law (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964)
- Harassment: targets are from protected class (gender, race, religion, national origin, or disability)
- Bullying: targets are not necessarily from a protected class



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What are the Effects of Bullying?

- Stress and its associated costs
- Decreased morale
- Decreased motivation/productivity
- Absenteeism
- Employee turnover/resignations
- Negative impact on image/reputation of workplace
- Emotional labor of maintaining professional composure while withstanding emotional distress (Hollis, 2012)



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Significant

Impact on Professor:

stress
depression
suicidal thoughts
reduced self-esteem
self blame
phobias
sleep disturbances
digestive problems
musculoskeletal problems
social isolation
family problems
post traumatic stress disorder

Impact on Department/University:

inability to attract new hires
dysfunctional work environment
medical and workers' comp. claims
decreased productivity
decreased employee morale
decreased loyalty
acts of sabotage/revenge
absenteeism
lawsuits

How Often does Bullying Occur?

- Namie and Namie (Workplace Bullying Institute) survey of 7,740 adults nationally in 2007: 37% faced bullying
- In an academic setting, Keashly and Neuman (2010):

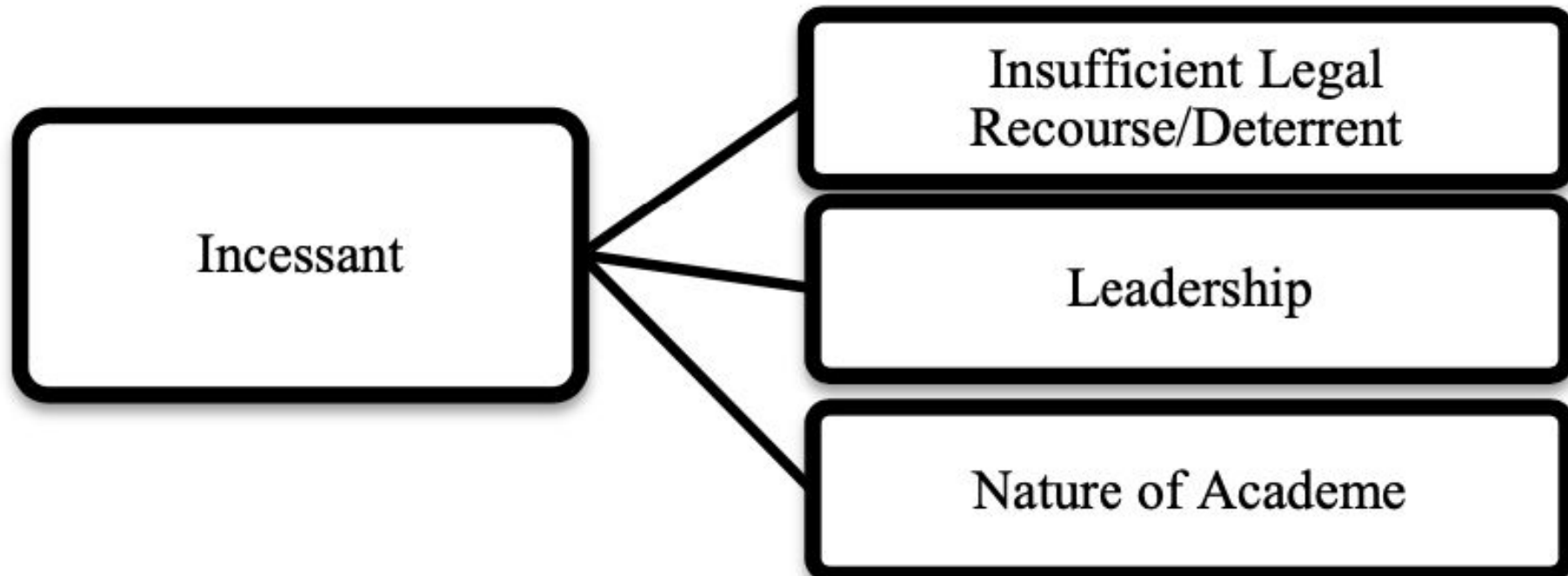
Study	Sample	Time frame	Rates	Keashly & Neuman, 2010 Actors
Fox, 2009 United States	Faculty, convenience sample; <i>N</i> = 228	Prior 5 years	Experienced: 36.6%	Superior: 22.1% Peer: 23.9%
Keashly & Neuman, 2008 United States	Employees at one university; <i>N</i> = 1185 (34.3% response rate)	Prior 12 months	Experienced: 32% Witnessed: 41%	Superior: 43% Peer: 42.2% Subordinate: 4%

- Colleagues are most often the source of bullying for faculty; supervisors are most often the source for staff members

Possible Causes of Academic Bullying

- Anger/aggression due to perceptions of unfair treatment (Keashly & Neuman, 2010)
 - Subjective criteria used in evaluation
 - Competition for scarce resources
 - Frustration and stress lead to aggression
- Two broad causes (Harvey et al., 2007)
 - Personal (fear, lack of self-regulation, narcissism)
 - Situational (negative role models, life stressors, competitive pressures)

Why is Bullying so Incessant in the Academe?



Cassell, 2011

What Can be Done to Stop Bullying?

- Some institutions have policies and associated procedures in place that directly address bullying (e.g., UC Berkeley, U Western Michigan, Westfield State U, Chicago State, U Colorado)
- Ombudsperson, direct supervisor (or supervisor above if that person is the perpetrator)
- Mediation
- BUT there is often fear of retaliation, or fear that the process will not be fair/unbiased, or that the institution will work to protect itself/certain academics



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What Can be Done to Prevent Bullying?

- Clear policies/standards re: tenure/promotion
- Transparent decision making re: resource allocation
- Weed out bullies from the start (i.e., during the hiring process--360 degree evaluation)
- Develop policies/procedures for internal complaints accompanied by an expected behavior document



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Academic Bullying

- **Authorship:** senior authors abusing their power to either insert themselves as author in your work or to kick you from projects you helped develop.
- **Status:** reminding you that you were a diversity hire and/or comments about the second-rate nature of diversity hires (“like you” being implied).
- **Appearance:** funny or not so funny comments about your looks, the way you dress, the color of your skin, your hair or hairdo that alienate you
- **Scientific Value:** They know better than you that your research is just not that important.

Disclaimer

- **These are true stories.** At the request of the survivors, the names have been changed. Out of respect for the field, the rest will be told exactly as it occurred.

Adapted from Cohen, J., & Cohen, E. (1996). *Fargo*

The Authorship Bullies

- The Faculty Mentor
- The Mercurial Advisor

The Status Bullies

- “Assistant Professors are dumb”
- “Diversity hires are second rate”
- Outgroup as default
(Patricia Matthew, author of *Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure*)

The Appearance Bullies

- Hair Discrimination (Garrin, 2016)
- The Outfit Police

The Scientific Value Bullies

- Grant Review Panelist/Reviewer
- Tenure committee



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