Public mobbing: a phenomenon and its features

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Nothing justifies the emotional destruction of a human being
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Mobbing

In workplace studies, mobbing is a recognised phenomenon worldwide (Hoel, Cooper and Faragher, 2001; McKay et al., 2008; Oceguera, Aldrete and Ruíz, 2009; Rayner and Keashly, 2005; Seydl, 2005; and many others). It can be defined as a group systematically attacking a person's reputation for a long period of time, using negative communication as a weapon. The intention is to destroy the target's value as a reliable individual, initially causing them to lose power and prestige, with the long-term goal of achieving their dismissal, resignation or general ostracism. Our aim is to demonstrate that this kind of behaviour can also occur in the public sphere. We use a case study involving two groups with contrary perspectives on vaccination, in which one group has attempted to prevent debate on the issue, instead mobbing those with contrary views, systematically attacking their reputation over a long period of time.

In mobbing, targets are judged "guilty" and condemned. Afterwards, evidence to justify this initial judgement is gathered. Perpetrators make persistent attacks to convince themselves and everybody else about "what type of person the target is", to reinforce the negative views they have about the target and to justify their behaviour by believing or pretending that for these reasons the target deserves the aggression.[1] In these contexts, targets have no escape: anything they are, do, write or say may be used against them. Perpetrators manipulate and hide information, lie, exaggerate a target's minor mistakes, overlook even outstanding achievements, and monitor targets in a continual search for "new evidence" that supposedly proves their allegations.

There is a long history of other types of mob behaviour, not to be confused with the concept of mobbing we are referring to. In the US South following the Civil War, mobs of white citizens — notably the Ku Klux Klan — terrorised the black population, often singling out individuals for beatings, torture and lynching (Gonzalez-Day, 2006).

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[1] In most courts, defendants are considered innocent until found guilty, whereas in mobbing, targets are treated as guilty without an independent trial.

Genocide can be considered a type of mobbing in which extreme physical violence is used. Some genocides involve mobs attacking "the other," for instance, groups of Hutu killers stalking local Tutsi in Rwanda during 1994 (Des Forges, 1999; Hatzfeld, 2005).

In the fields of psychology and organisational studies, the concept of mobbing today refers to more subtle forms of aggression. Combinations of methods may be used, such as exclusion, continual derogatory comments, imposing unpleasant work assignments, and starting rumours about targets' "personalities" and/or performance.[2] The persistence and duration of these actions, with targets feeling they are being hunted, can cause great anxiety and damage their quality of life. They sometimes lose their jobs, with financial consequences, and often their personal relationships are affected.[3] As "collateral damage," mobbing almost always causes serious emotional suffering that can lead to severe physical and psychological health problems (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996), even post traumatic stress disorder (Leymann and Gustafsson 1996; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2004). Among scholars there is consensus in addressing mobbing as a form of emotional abuse (Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott, 2005), with some considering it a form of psychological torture.[4]

Terms

In the English language these behaviours have been related mainly to workplaces and the phenomenon is often called workplace bullying. Each of these features of mobbing can be found in a wide range of cases outside the workplace. We think it is important to move from the workplace to other scenarios involving these forms of aggression, with the same potential negative consequences for targets, organisations and society. We suggest here that mobbing exists in the public sphere too, naming it "public mobbing".

For nearly fifteen years there has been a debate about whether workplace bullying and mobbing are the same phenomenon (Crawshaw, 2009; Einarsen et al., 2003). Rather than repeating the core of that discussion, our position here is that bullying refers to more general harassing behaviours that can be performed sporadically by a single person — the bully — whereas mobbing always involves a group attacking the same target in a sustained way over a relatively long period of time (Leymann,

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[2] Leymann and Tallgren (1989) classified 45 different behaviours grouped in five categories. Another commonly used categorization of mobbing behaviours is the Negative Act Questionnaire (Notelaers, Einarsen, de Witte and Vermunt, 2006).

[3] Targets do not *necessarily* experience adverse consequences: a few are shrewd or lucky enough to evade the attack (often by finding a different job) or find allies to resist or fight back.

[4] Psychological terror was the first name Leymann (1990) gave to the phenomenon.

1990). Thus, we use the term mobbing in this paper, which builds on the work of Leymann (1990), Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts (2007) and Westhues (2006[a]), among others.

Studies of mobbing

Previous studies of mobbing have examined "profiles" of attackers and targets (Babiak and Hare, 2006; Glaso, Matthiesen, Nielsen and Einarsen, 2007), methods used to devalue targets (Leymann and Tallgren, 1989; Notelaers, Einarsen, de Witte and Vermunt, 2006), impacts on targets (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Zapf & Leymann, 1996), workplace performance (Himachali, no date), and how to deal with attacks (Elbing and Elbing, 1994; Piñuel, 2003). Most studies have restricted their attention to mobbing in workplaces, with a few exceptions. Mobbing has been reported to occur in neighbourhoods (*mobbing inmobiliario*: Gutiérrez, 2008; Peña and Quiroz, 2009; Ramos and Peña, in press), unions, citizens' organisations (Peña, 2009), and among graduate students (Peña, 2010; Peña and López, in press).

Mass media sometimes gang up against targets by publishing false and/or damaging claims, using sensationalism and lacking balance, a phenomenon that has been called "media mobbing" (*acoso mediático*: Maciá and Herrera, 2009). One example occurred during the 2006 presidential campaign in Mexico: the Entrepreneurial Coordinator Council (*Consejo Coordinador Empresrial*) funded radio and television spots that repeatedly attacked the left candidate, making claims that "López Obrador is a danger for Mexico" (*López Obrador es un pleigro para México*), among other things. This phrase was created by Antonio Sola, a political consultant hired specifically to tailor the media mobbing campaign.

Media mobbing is mainly instigated by those with vested interests, such as political opponents or police officials, and may involve other modes of attack, such as formal inquiries. An example is the methods used to pursue US President Bill Clinton over the Whitewater and the Monica Lewinsky affairs. Another is the repeated investigations of Brian Mulroney, former Prime Minister of Canada (Mathias, 2008).

Features of mobbing

Given the extensive existing research on workplace mobbing, it seems sensible to see whether the same sorts of frameworks can be applied to mobbing in the public sphere.

Breaking mobbing into component parts gives the following characteristic features (based on Westhues, 2006[b]):

1. Groups with shared interests.

2. Individuals (possible targets) who threaten those groups in some way.

3. The group with shared interests ganging up against that person. The group thus becomes the mobbing perpetrator team.

4. Usually a main instigator or a small group of instigators among the perpetrator team

5. A shift of focus from what targets said or did that threaten the group, to devaluing targets as persons as a strategy to suppress them, taking away their power

6. An aim to discredit and/or destroy the target's reputation, often persistently monitoring them to find ever more information for this purpose

7. Coordination of the group's activities against targets

8. Persistent attacks by the perpetrator team against targets to continually devalue them

In most organisations, there are groups with shared interests (feature 1), which in themselves are not harmful. When these groups are threatened (feature 2), this does not necessarily lead to problematical behaviour. Open discussions, disagreements and confrontations between groups that adhere to the issues being debated are legitimate. However, when these groups transform themselves into mobbing perpetrator teams (feature 3), they change the focus from the issues to the people expressing contrary views, transforming routine interpersonal interactions into damaging forms of attack. Involvement of a group against a target (feature 3) distinguishes mobbing from bullying, stalking and other individual forms of harassment. Groups usually have prime instigators (feature 4).

The exercise of power to take away the target's reputation and power to act (feature 5) is necessary for mobbing to have any effect. In the workplace, the perpetrator team commonly uses resources — such as control over information or organisational processes — to interfere with the target's work. Perpetrator teams often have open support from bosses, who can control work assignments and various other aspects of a target's tasks. However, in what is called upwards mobbing (from employees to authorities), mobbing can be used to remove rank-based power from a target.

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An aim to discredit and/or destroy the target's reputation (feature 6) distinguishes mobbing from ad hoc attacks. A worker might come under an ad-hoc attack for supporting a particular policy, but then be ignored afterwards in relation to other issues.

Coordination of the group's activities (feature 7) distinguishes mobbing actions from random negative actions of different individuals. The existence of persistent attacks over long periods (feature 8) distinguishes mobbing from brief or erratic attacks. Mobbing is an ongoing process rather than a single event.

In a workplace, there might be a campaign to improve performance, reduce absenteeism or any number of other goals. The behaviour of a worker might come under scrutiny, but this is different from attacking the person. For example, a worker might speak out about corruption. If other workers vigorously openly dispute the allegations and focus on the issue, this is legitimate. But if other workers join together to discredit the one who spoke out as a person, this is an abusive process that can end up in mobbing.

A case study from the Australian vaccination debate

To illustrate the phenomenon of public mobbing, we present as a case study an attack on members of an Australian group critical of vaccination. Following this case study we comment on the similarities and differences between workplace and public mobbing. In conclusion, we point to a number of lessons that can be learned through the study of public mobbing.

The case study was chosen because it illustrates the typical shift that takes place when negative behaviours are involved in a controversy. The mobbers shifted the focus of discussion from the evidence and/or reasons raised, to the persons who sustain them, attacking continually (often daily) and for a lengthy period (several years).

Background

Vaccination is a medical procedure designed to prime a person's immune system to be resistant to diseases. There are vaccines for numerous diseases, such as polio, measles and whooping cough. Medical authorities throughout the world endorse vaccination as a highly effective measure for reducing the death and disability from serious diseases (Andre et al., 2008; Offit and Bell, 2003). In the face of medical authority, a number of citizen groups and a small number of doctors raise various criticisms of vaccination

(Habakus and Holland, 2011; Halvorsen, 2007). Vaccine-critical groups doubt that the benefits of vaccination are as great as claimed, point to risks from vaccination, and support parental informed choice in the vaccination of children.

The Australian Vaccination Network (AVN) is a vaccine-critical group, similar to like-minded groups in other countries (Hobson-West, 2007). Set up in 1994, it publishes a magazine, runs a website and promotes its ideas through talks and email. The AVN's key figure, its driving force, is Meryl Dorey.

The AVN (http://www.avn.org.au/, 21 November 2011) presents itself in these terms:

> We believe it is a parent's right to choose what's best for their child... some would say that this is one of the most basic rules of any civilised society. Yet governments all over the world have abridged or denied the right to free choice when it comes to vaccinations, vaccines and immunisations. The Australian Vaccination Network is working to help parents take back that right to free and informed choice by allowing them to see the less publicised side of this important issue before making a decision.

In 2009, a pro-vaccination group was established called Stop the Australian Vaccination Network (SAVN) with the explicit aim of closing down the AVN. SAVN presents itself in these terms (http://stopavn.com/contact.html, 4 March 2012):

> The "Stop the Australian Vaccination Network" (SAVN) was formed in mid 2009 following the death of baby Dana McCaffery of Pertussis, a preventable illness. We believe that the anti-vaccination propaganda issued by the AVN and its President, Meryl Dorey, is a menace to public health. **Stop The AVN** comprises over 2000 scientists, doctors, nurses, paramedics, and laymen. You can join us on Facebook here.

SAVN's primary public presence is its Facebook page, with thousands of friends, on which there are attacks on the AVN, but especially on Dorey as a person, continually devaluing her. In addition, SAVN participants have made numerous complaints to government bodies, such as the Health Care Complaints Commission and the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, aiming to restrict or shut down the AVN's activities. SAVN also monitors Dorey and tries to stop her activities, such as lectures, and undermine her support structures, including supporters and sources of money. This is why we called this scenario public mobbing and not cyber mobbing (Patchin and Hinduja, 2012), which is restricted to attacks on the Internet.

There is a discrepancy between what AVN claims as its goal ("… help parents take back that right to free and informed choice …") and what SAVN says the AVN's goal is ("… telling parents they should not vaccinate their children …"). According to SAVN:

The Australian Vaccination Network propagates misinformation, *telling parents they should not vaccinate their children* against such killer diseases as measles, mumps, rubella, whooping cough and polio [emphasis added].

They believe that vaccines are part of a global conspiracy to implant mind control chips into every man, woman and child and that the "illuminati" plan a mass cull of humans.

They use the line that "vaccines cause injury" as a cover for their conspiracy theory.

They lie to their members and the general public and after the death of a 4 week old child from whooping cough their members sent a barrage of hate mail to the child's grieving parents. The NSW Health Care Complaints Commission has formally reported that Ms Dorey and the AVN "provides misleading and inaccurate information on the subject of vaccination," to promote their anti-vaccination agenda.

The dangerous rhetoric and lies of the AVN must be stopped. They must be held responsible for their campaign of misinformation (http://www.stopavn.com/, 4 March 2012).

Findings

We inspected contributions on the wall of SAVN's Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/stopavn) on 36 different days selected arbitrarily from a period of 18 months. The key finding is that a significant proportion of this material is devoted to attacking Dorey as a person. We list a number of their tactics.

1. A common tactic is to take a screen shot of some commentary by Dorey on the AVN's blog, post it on SAVN's page and make fun of it and her, without discussing the issue seriously. Some SAVN participants tick that they "like" each other's comments, despite their derogatory tone.

Message: Dorey is not to be treated seriously.

2. A regular SAVN theme is accusing Dorey of being a liar. For instance, SAVN figure Ken McLeod has produced a large document whose contents and style of attack are indicated by its title: "Meryl Dorey's trouble with the truth, part 1: how Meryl Dorey lies, obfuscates, prevaricates, exaggerates, confabulates and confuses in promoting her anti-vaccination agenda." (McLeod, 2010).

Message: she is a liar.

3. When Dorey was scheduled to give a public talk, a SAVN contributor posted on Facebook details of the host for the talk, encouraging others to send messages telling about Dorey's alleged "lies" and other transgressions.

Message: she is a liar and should not be granted a venue to speak.

4. Occasionally commentary on SAVN's Facebook page is especially abusive of Dorey. Here is a particularly egregious example from the SAVN wall:

Carol Calderwood: Meryl now claims that Smallpox has not been eradicated…
Peter Tierney: Oh crap she's finally gone and broken that medical qualification of hers
Rhianna Miles: I may be drunk — but Meryl is a belligerent fool

> **Rhianna Miles**: And a cunt
> **Rhianna Miles**: "Did I say that? I don't believe I did..."
> **Amy Ives**: Do I see? Yes, I see she's a fucking idiot.
> **Scott Lewis**: One thing that is becoming even more apparent is that the views of Meryl and Greg will never be changed and will never be able to be argued with. The responses have been to make claims (AKA make shit up) that we can't disprove, despite […].
> **Simon Vincent**: Two for 'Cunt'. I had to promote her from 'Thief'.
> **Simon Vincent**: Pardon the language, apologies etc... but seriously... I'm having trouble finding another word. 'Disgraceful mealymouthed nonsensical science-bastardizing dangerous deceitful behaviour' is too long to type each time. She should hang her head in shame.[5]

Message: she is a disgusting, horrible person.

5. Some SAVN contributors produce graphics making open fun of Dorey. One graphic, with the general title "The Bangalow nutfarm,"[6] has a photo of some nuts growing: an arrow points to them with the caption "Nuts." Also in the graphic is a photo of Dorey: an arrow points to her with the caption "Even more nuts!"[7]

Message: she is crazy.

Because Dorey is the most visible and active person in the AVN, SAVN's activities have focused on attacking her. But SAVN sometimes targets others. One example is Mina Hunt, who in November 2011 made a post on the AVN's page. SAVN member Peter Tierney took a screenshot of Hunt's comment and posted it on SAVN's page, adding his own commentary:

> Here is the repugnant Mina Hunt blaming parents whose babies die of VPD [vaccine-preventable disease], citing the villain Scheibner. This is one of the reasons I fight so hard against the vileness and cruelty which is the cult of anti-vaccination." [Various SAVN contributors added comments, such as]:
> **Ken McLeod**: 10/10 crank, and here's me thinking she was a nice girl. I'm such a sucker for a pretty face. […].
> **Ilijas Milisic**: I agree, a vicious, callout and contemptible individual who has earned the disrespect of the public.
> **Daniel Raffaele**: Four letter word. Starts with C. That's right, she's a cram.[8]

Message: Mina Hunt should be held in contempt.[9]

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[5] This commentary is no longer available on the SAVN Facebook page. Dorey reproduced it in her blog of 6/7 November 2011, http://avn.org.au/nocompulsoryvaccination/?p=1193.

[6] Dorey lives in Bangalow and her husband is a macadamia nut farmer.

[7] This image, from 2011, is no longer publicly available online. The authors hold a copy.

[8] http://www.facebook.com/stopavn, 30 November 2011. This exchange is apparently no longer available on the SAVN page. The authors hold a copy.
   Note that when mentioning a four-letter term of abuse beginning with c, English speakers expect the word cunt. Raffaele is trying to be funny by then giving an irrelevant four-letter word also beginning with the letter c, namely cram. The special taboo attached to the word cunt in English is discussed by Maley (2012).

[9] Hunt says that SAVN, after misinterpreting her comment and attacking her, blocked her from commenting on SAVN's page (personal communication, 5 March 2012).

A different anti-AVN organisation, the Vaccination Awareness and Information Service (VAIS), hosts a "Hall of Shame" giving names and contact details of various alternative health practitioners that have advertised in the AVN's magazine, potentially opening them to harassment. Following Hunt's encounter on SAVN's Facebook page, she was listed on the top of its "Hall of Shame," with an editor's note saying "Mina Hunt earns a special place in the hall for insinuating that a very young baby that died from pertussis actually died because of its parents."[10]

Message: Mina Hunt is a shameful person.

On SAVN's Facebook page, many more examples can be found of these sorts of derogatory comments directed at Dorey, the AVN and other of its members.

Discussion

Using the points that characterise mobbing, listed earlier, it is possible to conclude that the AVN and Dorey have been mobbed by SAVN for several years. Those involved with the AVN and SAVN share interests in vaccination, but have contrary views. This is legitimate. Members of the AVN are critical of the orthodox medical promotion of vaccination and have organised to promote parents' informed choice. On the other hand, SAVN opposed the AVN's position and organised against it. This is legitimate too. However, from the very beginning SAVN chose to attempt to muzzle and obstruct the AVN, rather than focusing on debating the issue of vaccination.

Of the two groups involved in the struggle, SAVN ganged up against the AVN, Dorey and occasionally some other members. Those involved with SAVN are organised, share information and plan actions, especially against Dorey. They coordinate the attacks, track her to find out exactly where she is physically and online, in order to plan attacks wherever she comments about vaccination. They attempt to find out information about her personal life, using it to discredit her too. They abuse her emotionally through contemptuous remarks and hostile humour, openly showing their disrespect for her. Many of them show their support for these tactics by registering that they "like" each other's derogatory comments on SAVN's Facebook page. Hence, it is reasonable to say that Dorey has been mobbed by SAVN.

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[10] VAIS, http://www.antivaxxers.com/?p=3792, 4 March 2012.

Public mobbing vs mobbing within organizations

The case study from the Australian vaccination debate is useful for highlighting features of public mobbing. It is important because, with the technological means now available, it can be expected to increase. Here, we note some similarities and differences between mobbing inside and outside organisations.

Similarities

Mobbing has a purpose. Inside organisations, it is commonly to expel employees who are different or perceived as a threat, for example rate-busters, competitors, critics or whistleblowers. Mobbing can build solidarity among the perpetrator teams through opposition to a common enemy. The same applies in public mobbing. The AVN is a threat to vaccination orthodoxy; mobbing of the AVN and Dorey is a way of dealing with the threat while building a sense of common identity within SAVN.

Mobbing involves an attack on individuals rather than solely on the issues they raise, for example when mobbing perpetrator teams subject a whistleblower to reprisals rather than deal with the issue raised (commonly called "shooting the messenger"). SAVN has focused heavily on attacking Dorey and the AVN rather than sticking with the arguments they raise. The aim and usually a result of mobbing is a degradation of the target's image among relevant audiences.

Mobbing perpetrator teams typically justify their behaviour by blaming the target. In what can be called "paradoxical language," mobbing perpetrator teams accuse targets of being bullies, of being a danger, and of doing the very things they do. In psychology, this is called projection (Lichtenberg, 1994). This phenomenon is striking in the attack on Dorey. Those who attack the AVN, like mobbing perpetrator teams inside organisations, justify what they do by blaming their target, Dorey, and attributing their own methods to her. This strategy has the effect of diverting the attention away from their aggressive actions, placing it in Dorey's "faults".

SAVN contributors have repeatedly accused her of censorship (for blocking their disrespectful or disruptive comments on the AVN's webpage), when SAVN's stated purpose is to shut down the AVN, which can be interpreted as the ultimate form of censorship. When SAVN participants write to organisations hosting talks by Dorey trying to stop her, some of them say this is not censorship but just informing these organisations about "the facts" about Dorey (namely that she is a liar, crazy and all the other negative labels they have used against her).

In summary, the public mobbing of Dorey shares several features with intra-organisational mobbing: a collective attack focusing on an individual rather than the issues in debate, a purpose in destroying a challenger by devaluing her, an attempt to degrade the image of the target and to discourage contrary voices that could take her side, and self-justification through blaming the target.

In workplace mobbing, the informal stage of tarnishing the target's reputation is often followed by some type of official indictment, typically involving formal procedures and penalties that serve as a degradation ritual.[11] Dorey has not been subject to formal charges and penalties, but the AVN has, for example through investigations by the Health Care Complaints Commission and the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, and the warnings and restrictions these agencies have imposed. Given Dorey's close identification with the AVN, the formal investigations into the AVN can be interpreted as serving as official sanctions on Dorey by proxy.

Differences

There are also some important differences between mobbing inside and outside organisations. Public mobbing is, by necessity, open: it is carried out in public sphere. Intra-organisational mobbing is often unknown to outsiders and thus hard to document or explain to wider audiences. Public mobbing cannot be so easily hidden. Many of SAVN's activities — for example, their abusive language — occur on a public Facebook page. They are traceable and recordable.

A second difference in public mobbing is the absence of an over-arching institutional authority system. Inside organisations, the lines of authority are fairly well defined: bosses and senior management provide mechanisms for adjudicating disputes or, as in many cases, tolerating, endorsing or participating in mobbing. In public mobbing, in contrast, there is no formal line of command. In the case of SAVN and the AVN, there is no boss or senior management officially in charge of the public sphere. SAVN has used complaints to encourage interventions by the Health Care Complaints Commission and other government bodies, but their relationship to the AVN is quite different than manager-subordinate relations in a workplace: these agencies are more like auditors than managers. The absence of a formal authority structure means that public mobbing is less contained: each side can try to enrol various parties in support.

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[11] We thank Ken Westhues for this point.

Public mobbing occurs in public spaces where, in many cases, people are considered to have free speech. The AVN, to defend its ability to express viewpoints, can refer to the value of free speech. Interestingly, quite a few SAVN contributors give rhetorical support for free speech, thus affirming the symbolic role of free speech in the public sphere. Inside organisations, in contrast, speech is commonly constrained, with no expectation for civil liberties (Barry, 2007; Ewing, 1977). In places where speech is nominally free, targets of public mobbing can use the language of free speech as a defence in a way seldom available to mobbing targets inside organisations.

In the public sphere, key roles are played by the media, both mass media and social media. Both mobbing perpetrator teams and their opponents can use the media; sometimes media provide the means to attack, as with SAVN's Facebook page. Most organisations have no equivalent to an independent media. Public mobbing thus involves a greater number of possibilities for alignment between different players, with different components of the media supporting one or both sides.

Many targets of workplace mobbing can escape by leaving their jobs and finding work somewhere else (though sometimes this is impossible due to blacklisting). In a different, more supportive environment, many such workers can begin afresh without carrying stigma from their former persecution, and may fashion successful careers. However, targets of public mobbing may find it far more difficult to escape to a safe haven, precisely because the attacks are public.[12]

In summary, public mobbing involves some significant differences from workplace mobbing: the attack is open, there is no over-arching authority system, targets can appeal to the value of free speech, various forms of media are available as players or commentators, and targets cannot easily escape to a safer place. These features of public mobbing mean that public struggles are often more fluid and less predictable than typical mobbing scenarios inside organisations, in part because targets have more potential resources for resistance.

Conclusion

The concept of mobbing should be expanded from its usual context of workplaces to include public arenas. Mobbing, conceptualised as a collective, coordinated exercise of power to discredit or destroy an individual, can occur in politics, the media and

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[12] We thank Ken Westhues for this point.

scientific controversies, among other circumstances. A key feature of mobbing is attack on a person rather than only addressing the issues raised by the person. Public mobbing is different from workplace mobbing in several ways, notably that the attack is open, there is no comprehensive institutional authority system, targets can appeal to the principle of free speech (at least in liberal democracies) and media often play a significant role. It may also be worthwhile expanding the concept of mobbing to include organisations as targets, as well as individuals.

Those who research workplace mobbing can gain insights by studying public mobbing. By seeing processes in a different domain, the usual implicit assumptions in workplace mobbing research are made visible. For example, the role of organisational hierarchies is crucial in workplace mobbing. By looking at the role of various agencies in public mobbing, such as courts, media, government regulatory bodies and professional organisations, the presence or absence of these functions within workplaces can be noted.

Researchers on workplace mobbing very seldom look into strategies for resistance. Most attention is put into formal processes for dealing with complaints. Options for targets are usually seen as surviving, finding support from bosses or human resources staff, or leaving. Looking at instances of public mobbing offers additional ideas for resistance. One is making the mobbing known to wider audiences. In public mobbing, attacks are open and various media may report them. Within workplaces, targets and their allies have the option of creating their own sorts of openness and media, for example by documenting attacks (through documents and recordings) and publicising them through email, websites and social media. This might be seen as violating implicit or formal prohibitions on speech within organisations, in which case appeals can be made to the value of whistleblowing and free speech. Alternatively, publicising of attacks can be done anonymously, for example using emails sent through anonymous remailers or by making anonymous online posts, in the manner of dissident communication under repressive regimes.

Going in the other direction, the considerable research on workplace mobbing can be used to provide insights for the study of public mobbing. In many circumstances, public mobbing is not treated as a serious problem — attacks on politicians may be seen as politics as usual. Workplace mobbing researchers have documented the serious psychological, health, financial and career impacts of mobbing on targets, as well as

damage to the organisation itself through misdirection of effort. Public mobbing almost certainly has similar dysfunctional consequences that deserve attention.

SAVN's attack on Dorey has all the features of mobbing. The attack is a coordinated group operation: SAVN's Facebook wall provides plenty of information about efforts to coordinate complaints, as well as friends "liking" (supporting) each other's adverse comments about Dorey and commenting favourably on such comments. The attack on Dorey has been persistent: it has occurred nearly every day and has continued for several years. It involves the exercise of power, primarily the power of numbers of energetic individuals to make adverse comments and to make formal complaints. SAVN has also leveraged the power of agencies, such as the Health Care Complaints Commission, against the AVN.

The most distinctive feature of SAVN's operations is the focus on individuals, especially Dorey. There is discussion on SAVN's page about vaccination, but the preoccupation is with destroying the AVN, as SAVN's name indicates, and it seems that many connected with SAVN explicitly want to do this to Dorey as well.

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