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## *What Is She Up to Now? How to Deal With a Workplace “Saboteur”*

*Editor’s note: this article is part 2 of our series on workplace bullying.*

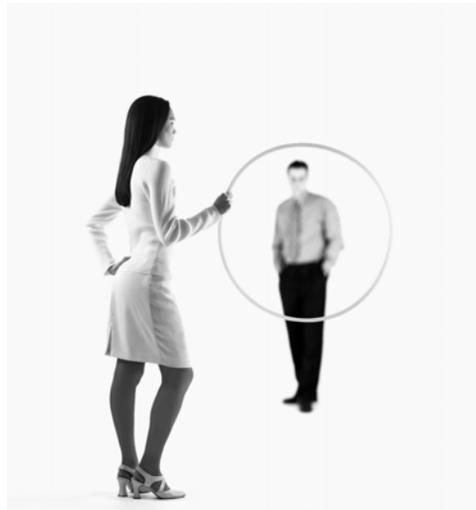
Repeated mistreatment. Sabotage that prevents work from getting done. Verbal abuse, threatening conduct, intimidation and humiliation. All are part of the definition of workplace bullying used by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) in its August 2010 survey of American adults.

The survey found that 35% of workers have experienced bullying firsthand, and that bullying is four times more prevalent than illegal harassment. While harassment is illegal, bullying in the workplace is not.

The WBI survey also looked at bullying behavior by gender, and found that 62% of bullies are men and 58% percent of targets are women. The majority (68%) of bullying is same-gender harassment. And when women bully, they pick other women as their targets 80% of the time.

### **A Closer Look at Woman-on-Woman Bullying**

“The fact that women bully other women is not



controversial,” says organizational effectiveness consultant Rick Brenner, founder of Chaco Canyon Consulting. “There is a great deal of research that suggests females are more empathic than males. They understand the emotional state of another person. This can make female bullies more capable of creating in their targets a sense of humiliation or other emotional distress. What that often means for those who work with a female bully is that the bullying can be subtle, with fewer overt acts that can be detected from afar.”

Bullying can take place without any type of physical violence, or even the threat of it. Among faculty work

groups, for example, a bully might deliberately withhold information from a colleague that undermines her ability to complete a project. A bully may choose to manipulate one or more individuals to accomplish a personal goal, which distracts

them from work related to students, curriculum, or other matters within the college. The bullying may also show up as disruptive or provocative behavior that delays or sabotages a group effort entirely.

### **Complicated Dynamics**

In any bullying situation, Brenner notes, there are three gender factors to consider:

- The gender of the bully
- The gender of the target
- The gender mix of the bully’s support group

The “support group” refers to the group of people around the bully,

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Sabotage of others in the workplace that prevents work from getting done is a form of bullying, reports the Workplace Bullying Institute.

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## The Saboteur Bully

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says Brenner. “Usually they are aware of the bullying, but for a variety of reasons, they don’t intervene to obstruct the bullying.”

The support group might even abet the bully, though sometimes passively and motivated by fear. For instance, in a peer-peer bullying situation, the members of the support group might be other peers, and they might even include the supervisor. In a supervisor-subordinate situation, they are usually other subordinates.”

Those targeted may fail to report the incidents out of fear for their jobs or status.

### What You Can Do

Brenner deliberately uses the word “target” rather than “victim.”

“When you use the word ‘target,’ you open up your mind to believe there is something you can do about it,” he says.

So what can you do to prove the bullying and put a stop to it? “Track the metrics,” Brenner advises.

That means documenting every instance of bullying behavior. Keep a diary detailing the nature of the bullying, including dates, times, places, what was said or done and who was present. Keep copies of any written or emailed bullying and keep any documents

that may contradict a bully’s story. Enlist the support of bystanders and observers—their reports can make a difference. When their reports of overt, observable behavior are combined with the target’s report, the truth becomes evident.”

“Borrow the slogan used by the Department of Homeland Security: If you see something, say something,” Brenner suggests. (At USF Health, one resource is your free and confidential Faculty Assistance Program. You may also find helpful resources through USF’s Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention, <http://www.sa.usf.edu/advocacy>)

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-Rick Brenner  
Organizational Effectiveness  
Consultant  
Chaco Canyon Consulting



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### Resources:

- *Take the Bully by the Horns*, by Sam Horn, St. Martin’s Press, NY (2002).
- *A Survival Guide for Working with Bad Bosses*, by Gini Graham Scott, Ph.D., AMACOM, NY (2006).
- *Bullies, Tyrants and Impossible People: How to Beat Them Without Joining Them*, by Ronald M. Shapiro and Mark A. Jankowski Crown Publishing Group, NY (2005).
- Chaco Canyon Consulting <http://www.ChacoCanyon.com>
- **Office Politics, Workplace Politics and Organizational Politics**, LinkedIn discussion group created and moderated by Rick Brenner

## The Narcissist and the Bully Share Some Similar Behaviors

Are you dealing with a bully or a narcissist? Narcissists are disarming, manipulative, and mesmerizing by nature, writes Rokelle Lerner, psychotherapist, international consultant and lecturer on relationships, women’s issues and family systems. Her book *The Object of My Affection is in My Reflection* helps readers understand the complexities of this disorder and develop coping mechanisms.

MedlinePlus<sup>1</sup> offers this list of behaviors typical of the narcissist:

- Reacts to criticism with rage, shame, or humiliation
- Takes advantage of other people to achieve his or her own goals
- Has feelings of self-importance
- Exaggerates achievements and talents
- Is preoccupied with fantasies of success, power, beauty,

intelligence, or ideal love

- Has unreasonable expectations of favorable treatment
- Requires constant attention and admiration
- Disregards the feelings of others, lacks empathy
- Has obsessive self-interest
- Pursues mainly selfish goals

<sup>1</sup>U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health