DRIVERS Journal Club, June 3, 2024

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Harassment as a consequence and cause
of inequality in academia: A narrative review
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Importance for Diversity and Responsible Research & Innovation

- "Research cannot claim to be 'responsible' if it reproduces inequality or causes epistemic injustice" (Koch 2020)

BUT:

- Harassment and inequalities are mutually reinforcing

Diversity (and inclusion) is beneficial for science:

- Diverse groups publish more frequently and are cited more (Swartz 2019)
- Underrepresented groups produce higher rates of scientific novelty (but they are devalued and discounted – diversity-innovation paradox, Hofstra 2019)

BUT

- Harassement/bullying targets disproportionately less-represented populations

- Topics traditionally studied by scholars from marginalized groups are systematically less studied:
    - e.g. public health, gender-based violence, immigrants and minorities, mental health…

DRIVERS: First Session

Two short papers:
- **Responsible Research, Inequality in Science and Epistemic Injustice** (Koch 2020)
- **The Science and Value of Diversity** (Swartz et al. 2019)

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05.02.2024

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Importance for Diversity and Responsible Research & Innovation

- Personality traits such as narcisism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism

  -> survival benefit in the hypercompetitive adacemic field

  -> bullying / harassment

  -> scientific misconduct

Definitions

Harassment:
- "a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm" (Jenner 2019, Oertelt-Prigione 2019)

Workplace bullying:
- „any unwanted, aggressive, discriminatory, coercive, or intimidating behavior directed towards others in the workplace" (Workplace Bullying Institute, 2017)

- includes „more covert behaviors, such as imposing unrealistic deadlines for work assignments, delefating complex and difficult tasks to inexperienced junior employees, (…) removing competent and experienced staff from their job positions without explanation, (…) and continual and excessive criticism and abuse" (Forster & Lund, 2018)

Harassment epidemic in academia

- Higher prevalence of workplace bullying in higher education

  Wellcome Trust survey (>4.000 academics, Abbott 2020):
  61% reported witnessing bullying/harassment
  43% had experienced bullying/harassment

  Reported bullying by employees in US higher education 11.7-67.7%
  compared to 3.7-19.8% in other environments (Lester, 2013)

  Abusive supervision in STEM: 84% experienced and 59% witnessed (Moss & Mahmoudi, 2021)
  International scholars reported significantly more severe behaviors

- No discernable progress (possibly even deterioration) of the situation in the past 30 years

Inequality and harassment are mutually reinforcing

- Inequalities – systematic power disparities between groups of people – enable harassment

- Power based on:
  - material resources
  - social connections/networks
  - knowledge/skills
  - prestige/status/recognition (most impotant in academia)

- Informal and invisible practices benefitting dominant group(s) maintain inequalities
- Particularly difficult to identify and to change through policy interventions (Clavero & Galligan, 2021)

- Organizational **cultures** favoring harassment are characterized by **masculinity, competitiveness and individualism** – typical for academia - reproducing inequalities

- **Intersectionality of inequalities** is particularly important – lack of recognition of this fact may undermine effectiveness of anti-harassement and non-discrimination policies

Focus on the harassers

- Strategies used by harassers:

    - Discrimination
    - Devaluation, humiliation, belittling
    - Sabotaging of careers (~removal of competition), through denial of promotion, exclusion from informal knowledge and networks, greater teaching load, less research time…
    - Retaliation, silencing
    - Favoritism

- Harassers profit from their bullying/harassment („bullying as a career tool")
- Mediocre more hostile

- Personality traits associated with bullying and abusive supervision: Dark Triad (narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism)
- Survival benefit –> likely to be found in senior positions (not only in academia)
- Risk factor for scientific misconduct

- In powerful positions harassers reproduce inequalities that enable harassment
- Produce new harassers („crown princes")

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Harassment as institutional level integrity failures

- Higher education institutions are complicit in harassment and inequality reproduction

- Criteria used to evaluate „excellence"

- Protection of perpetrators (non-disclosure agreements @ UK universities: £1.3m 2016-2020 (BBC))

- Lack of protection of reporters of bullying/harassment (Moss and Mahmoudi, 2021)
    - only 8% considered the process unbiased and fair
    - 41% reported nothing happened after their report
    - 16% reported that the bully was protected
- Contributing to massive underreporting

- Bullying complaints should be treated as whistleblowing with external trajectory and protection

- Inequality and harassment amount to institutional level integrity failures **akin to corruption**
- Failure to effectively implement and enforce anti-harassment policies enables i.a. nepotism, malpractice, clientilism and unfair competition

- „Lens of corruption" might offer new tools for enforcement and sanctions

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Multi-stakeholder approach to enforce anti-harassment policies

- Should be top priority for universities, funders **and** policymakers

- Framework for Coordinated Global Acions To Diminish Academic Bullying (Mahmoudi & Keashly, 2021)

- Examples for funder actions:
  - NIH removed > 70 lab heads from grants (2021)
  - Wellcome Trust vowed to pull grants from universities that fail to comply with their misconduct policy, including failure to report harassment
  - European Commission: Gender Equality Plan required to access Horizon Europe funding

Recommendations

- Take intersectionality into account when designing/evaluating interventions (universities)

- Cite more scholars from underrepresented groups studying intersectional inequality (researchers)

- Include intersectional perspective (researchers from majority groups)

- Make enforcing anti-harassment policies a top priority for universities, funders and policymakers

- Proactively confront resistance among the priviliged and powerful

- Establish processes that bypass individual biases and personality traits associated with harassment

- Hold universities accountable and take measures (e.g. pulling grants; funders)

- Incentivize inclusivity (e.g. mandatory GEP; funders)

Recommendations

- Harassment as whistleblowing – external whistleblowing trajectories including protection and confidentiality to minimize retaliation

- Treat workplace bullying complaints systematically and aim to expose institutional root causes

- Evaluations to determine effectiveness of measures in reducing harassment and increasing equality

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