Active and Passive Accomplices:
The Communal Character of Workplace Bullying

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When aggressive organizational members bully others, they rarely do so without accomplices. In the current study, bullied workers (targets) and non-bullied bystanders (witnesses) who observed bullying reported that persistent abuse involved either several harassers or support for solitary harassers. Active accomplices were other aggressors; passive accomplices included upper managers, HR staff, the bullies' peers, and, in some cases, even the targeted persons' peers. Respondents also believed that organizations were complicit in bullying; in over 70% of the cases, upper management took no action or made the situation worse. The study extends bullying research by revealing the involvement of numerous other organizational members, and it bolsters targeted worker accounts by comparing target and witness perceptions and finding extensive convergence regarding others' involvement in bullying.

When aggressive organizational members bully others, they rarely do so without accomplices of one type or another. Despite the implicit focus on single perpetrators and single victims in bullying research, some suggest that bullying interactions may well include multiple bullies (i.e., mobbing) (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Schieman & McMullen, 2008), social support for bullies (Harvey et al., 2007), or both. To date, however, few studies have examined whether organizational members believe that bullies are deliberately working together with others (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002).

Popular accounts typically also frame bullying as a problem solely involving bullies and their victims (referred to as *targets* in bullying research). These accounts often criticize the targets and accuse them of being thin-skinned or feeble. For example, a columnist recently advised a bullied woman,

> . . . the real answer lies within yourself. You've given this woman way too much power over you, so you need to . . . take that power back. I can guarantee that most people would not let this little tyrant dominate their existence so completely. But for some reason, you are allowing her to control you. (McIntyre, 2008, p. H2)

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Such advice paints the targeted woman as psychologically weak — someone who simply "allows" a tyrant to abuse her — and ignores the power of social, collective organizational communication that often contributes to bullying. Unfortunately, the columnist's counsel as well as the beliefs behind it are far too common (e.g., Cuny, 2008) and lead to the perception that workplace bullying is a rather isolated set of interactions between two people. There is reason to believe, however, that bullying and mobbing are communal phenomena, as suggested in Westhues's (2005) work on mobbing in academe and Davenport, Schwartz and Elliott's (2002) claim that targets frequently feel ganged up on by many in the organization.

Thinking of bullying as a matter involving only a bully and target contributes to viewing it as a solely subjective, psychological experience. As such, managers may be less likely to believe target reports and take immediate corrective action. Moreover, when bullying involves others beyond the bully and target, and accomplices are part of the mix, viewing bullying as a private two-person conflict oversimplifies how collective voices magnify bully-target power disparity. Nearly all targets have great difficulty stopping abuse once it has started (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003; Zapf & Gross, 2001), despite considerable effort and a wide variety of approaches (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006). If bullies have accomplices, whether publically involved or privately participating behind the scenes, this might explain part of the reason that targets have such difficulty ending abuse. Accomplices, as opposed to witnessing bystanders, actively participate in abuse or support bullies by siding against targets, making determinations in bullies' favor, ostracizing targets, and so forth. To date, however, the frequency of bullying with accomplices or bullying supporters has received only scant attention (for discussion of these features, see Davenport et al., 2002; Einarsen et al., 2003; Rayner et al., 2002; Westhues, 2006b).

The ways that organizational upper managers respond to reports of bullying is also an aspect of the collective character of the phenomenon. These responses typically set the tone for others. When upper management ignores reports of abuse, this is symbolic in its implications. Organizational members infer from non-response that upper management views workplace bullying as unimportant or trivial (Tehrani, 2001). But inertia supports and encourages bullying (Crawford, 2001). Like a police officer who stands idly by when someone is beaten or robbed, unresponsive upper managers might be considered by others as passive accomplices because of a similar sort of dereliction of duty. Upper management may also be active accomplices in bullying situations by not only siding with bullies but also interacting with targets in a hostile, denigrating manner that blames targets for being abused, casts targets as mentally ill, or accuses targets of being problem employees (Ferris, 2004; Keashly, 2001; Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006).

The current study extends workplace bullying scholarship by examining workers' perspectives regarding how often others serve as accomplices in bullies' campaigns. It also compares the perspectives of two worker groups: targets and witnesses. Specifically, we investigated three variables associated with the communal character of adult bullying at work: a) the frequency of multiple perpetrators or active accomplices; b) the frequency of passive accomplices — others who indirectly support bullies without actively bullying anyone themselves; and c) the frequency of organizational responses to reports of abuse that aggravate or ignore bullying. To determine the prevalence of these features, we queried directly targeted workers and non-targeted bystanders or witnesses. We compared aggregated target and witness accounts from persons in different organizations and found considerable convergence. Although targets

and witnesses were not reporting on the same events in the same organizations, the level of convergence between the two groups' perspectives of bullying processes suggests that target reports are likely quite authentic indicators of bullying and others' involvement.

We organize the article, first by defining adult bullying, discussing the importance of attending to perceptions of abuse, and underscoring the value of examining multiple perspectives. This is followed by a review of the current research as it guides the study's hypothesis and research questions regarding active and passive accomplices. We then outline methods, present key findings, and discuss implications. We end by recapping methodological strengths, exploring limitations, and proposing fruitful areas for future research. Following conventions of current workplace bullying scholarship, we use the following terms: *target* to indicate those bullied by others at work; *witness* to indicate non-bullied bystanders who have seen others being bullied at work; and *bully, perpetrator,* or *harasser* to indicate the aggressive person who perpetrates abuse. We also employ the terms *upper management, upper managers,* and *organizations* to indicate system-level authorities and persons seen to personify the organization. We turn now to defining workplace bullying and outlining its hallmark features.

Understanding Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying[1] is a pattern of hostile messages and abusive behaviors persistently targeted at one or more persons in work settings that can involve work obstruction, public humiliation, verbal abuse, threatening behavior, and multiple forms of intimidation (Namie, 2007a). Typically, in these situations, targets find themselves unable to defend against or stop abuse once it has escalated (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006; Rayner et al., 2002). Rarely is bullying one kind of negative act or message; rather, this phenomenon is comprised of numerous hostile interactions and transactions (e.g., verbal abuse and public humiliation coupled with social ostracism, work obstruction, and destructive gossip). Workplace bullying is also escalatory, starting with occasional subtle, indirect insults or rude remarks and growing to more egregious and frequent types of humiliation, criticism, or verbal abuse (Adams & Crawford, 1992).

Persistence, repetition, and duration are hallmark features of this type of abuse at work. Bullying, as opposed to short-lived conflicts or one-time hostile incidents, occurs frequently (weekly, daily) and extends over long periods of time (typically, more than six months). Persistence makes bullying particularly harmful and corrosive, wearing down targets' defenses, social support, and health. Workplace bullying is also associated with power disparity between perpetrators and targets, whether bullies are peers or supervisors. Power disparity can result from how bullying relentlessly wears down targets (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003) or can be structural in the form of the bullying boss. Although recent research

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[1] The terms *workplace bullying, mobbing, employee emotional abuse, persistent workplace aggression,* and *generalized non-sexual harassment* are synonymous. Closely related terms are *abusive supervision*, *petty tyranny, psychological aggression, perceived victimization, verbal abuse, workplace harassment*, and *social undermining*.

suggests that target and witness resistance is common, and that collective resistance can sometimes stop bullying (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006), individual workers generally say they are unable to end abuse once it has begun (Namie, 2003b; Richman, Rospenda, Flaherty, & Freels, 2001; Zapf & Gross, 2001). When multiple bullies work together or others indirectly support bullies' aggression, the opportunities for resistance weaken and power disparity intensifies.

Power disparity in bullying situations is further exacerbated by upper management's responses or lack thereof to complaints. Similar to whistle-blowing or reporting sexual harassment (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999; Schneider, Fitgerald, & Swan, 1997), when targets speak out, they can be stigmatized, subjected to escalated abuse, or socially ostracized (Keashly, 2001; Namie, 2007a). Alternately, upper managers may take no action, which is often as damaging as punitive responses, since doing nothing is never really doing nothing. When witnessing colleagues see these developments, they may feel preemptively silenced and unwilling to speak out; thus, their voices are muted, along with the power to be found in collective voices (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2003). As such, the power and oppression involved in workplace bullying implicate targets, bullies, witnesses, and upper managers.

Perceptions of Workplace Bullying

In the current study, we measured workers' perceptions of bullying on their jobs. These perceptions are fundamentally important for at least five reasons. First, perceptions of abuse shape workers' sense of emotional and physiological health (Leymann, 1990), public and private conversations, identity work (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2008), and relationships with employers. Perceptions are the stuff of organizing and sensemaking, and bullying interactions are inextricably linked to target perceptions and affective reactions to abusive behavior (Hoel & Beale, 2006). Second, perceptions of bullying, rather than researcher-generated operationalizations, are typically the processes that trigger organizational action, because upper managers most often directly deal with perceived bullying rather than either operationalizations or firsthand observations. When workers report perceptions of bullying, organizational authorities (hopefully) investigate to substantiate or refute initial perceptions. When enough people share the perception that bullying is occurring, organizations may even create formal antibullying policies and procedures.

Third, it is only through perceptions of abuse that either researchers or organizational members can ascertain the features of bullying beyond prevalence (e.g., duration, perpetrators, supporters, responses, etc.). Without reported perceptions, such dynamics are exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to detect without direct observation. Fourth, there is substantial overlap between measures based on perceptions of being bullied and operational methods (Notelaers, Einarsen, Hans, & Vermunt, 2006). Operational methods present respondents with an index of items measuring exposure to negative acts, regardless of whether persons feel bullied. Self-labeling asks respondents to identify with a global definition of bullying and thus measures perceptions of abuse. In studies using both methods, the majority of persons who self-label as bullied are also operationally classified as bullied (e.g., Lutgen–Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007; Notelaers et al., 2006; Salin, 2001).

Finally, the emotional responses to perceptions of abuse are important signaling devices for organizations (Waldron, 2000). When workers perceive that they or others are being bullied and feel hurt, fearful, or angry as a result, these emotions can serve as warning signals pointing to potentially more widespread problems. Negative emotions typically symbolize the tip of the workplace aggression iceberg, indicating that more widespread hostile, abusive communication is submerged beneath the surface of organizational processes (Baron & Neuman, 1998). For these reasons, workers' perceptions, both targets and witnesses, are of vital importance.

The Importance of Both Target and Witness Perceptions

A commonly voiced criticism of bullying research is that it tends to focus solely on target perspectives (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003; Namie, 2003a; Tracy, Lutgen–Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006). There is a small but steadily growing body of work, however, focusing on witnessing coworkers. There is little doubt that watching one's peers being bullied at work is harmful (Rayner et al., 2002; Vartia, 2001). Witnesses report higher levels of stress and workplace negativity and lower levels of job satisfaction and overall liking of their jobs than do non-exposed workers (Jennifer, Cowie, & Anaiadou, 2003; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007). These experiences are also extremely draining and damaging for witnesses, reducing their productivity and increasing their incidence of health problems (Crawford, 2001). Importantly, for the communal character of bullying, is that witnesses also wait and see how organizational authorities respond to others' reports of bullying. Managerial responses — whether effective, absent, or ineffective — encourage witnesses to speak out or stay silent, engender support for or withhold support from targeted workers, and increase or decrease intentions to leave (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2003; Rayner et al., 2002). These issues underscore the ways that bullying is shared, even by workers who are not directly targeted.

To some extent, past research has explored target and witness perspectives of bullying situations; specific to our purposes are studies that compared target and witness perspectives. Some research has examined workers in the same groups, while other studies have analyzed aggregate data from people in various workplaces. Coyne's work, for example, explored target-witness perspectives in teams. His research found areas of convergence in that targets "were nominated as preferred people to work with" (Coyne, Craig, & Smith-Lee Chong, 2004, p. 301) and divergence, as targets felt bullied at higher rates than peers recognized (Coyne, Chong, Seigne, & Randall, 2003). Rayner and colleagues (2002) suggested both similarities and differences in target and witness perspectives. Disagreement typically concerned the degree of harm rather than the presence or termination of bullying. That is, targets perceived the situation as more harmful than did witnesses, although both recognized its occurrence and cessation. Ashforth (1994) noted that many subordinates reported the same supervisors as abusive, although employees often had unique experiences with these supervisors. S.E. Lewis and colleagues (2006; S. E. Lewis & Orford, 2005) also observed a number of target-witness similarities regarding the more general features of bullying. They suggested that similarities were likely a result of

intersubjective sensemaking: Coworkers talked with one another to make sense of abusive interactions, which may have moved individual viewpoints toward convergence.

Other scholarship has examined aggregated target and witness accounts from persons in different organizations, as did ours. From aggregated target-witness data, researchers have found both agreement and disagreement in these perspectives. In Jennifer et al.'s (2003) extensive UK study, both targets and witnesses (what she called bullied/non-victims) reported work overload, workplace negativity, and unwanted physical contact more often than did unaffected workers. Other research has found that workers in both groups typically expected organizational authorities to stop abuse after someone reported it (D. Lewis, 2003) and even to recognize the evidence of abuse (e.g., turnover) and proactively intervene when unreported (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006). Tehrani (2001) noted, however, that targets and witnesses have somewhat different expectations regarding the outcomes of interventions. Targets often sought an apology from the bully or visible punishment, while witnesses simply wanted the bullying to end, usually by having the bully removed.

Although these studies suggested areas of both convergence and divergence between target and witness perspectives, they did not examine the presence of bullies' accomplices or bullying supporters. Nor did they compare whether those directly bullied and those who witness bullying came to similar conclusions regarding these issues. To examine the presence of accomplices and make subsequent between group comparisons, we first assessed the prevalence of being a witness or target of bullying at work. We then explored and compared the perceptions of these two groups regarding others' complicity in bullying situations.

Support for Perpetrators: Active and Passive

Whether bullying is the act of one or a number of persons from whom (or if) bullies find support, and whether bully position in relation to that of targets involves different sources of support are understudied aspects of bullying. However, scholars have noted the need for such research and even suggested that, in bullying processes, the cases with multiple perpetrators are likely to be as frequent as those with sole perpetrators (Rayner et al., 2002). Certainly, there is evidence that, in some situations, multiple bullies work in concert. Researchers examining gender, for example, reported that pairs of male and female supervisors (one man, one woman) bullied subordinates (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2003). This type of accomplice is active and indicative of mobbing (Leymann, 1990).

The term *mobbing* is more evocative of group-level involvement, although key researchers have defined bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003) and mobbing (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005) with exactly the same definitions. Westhues's (2002) mobbing research has explicitly pointed to multiple coworkers who imitate bullies' hostile communication when interacting with targets. Passive accomplices are also a constitutive aspect of how bullying is collective. As important as recognizing the frequency of multiple active bullies is recognizing how often bullying includes passive, or at least covert, accomplices. Different from witnessing bystanders, passive accomplices support bullies in less direct ways by, for example, siding with bullies,

laughing at the jokes made at targets' expense, or ostracizing targets. Despite past scholarship pointing to these communal features, research has yet to specifically investigate whether organizational members believe bullies are deliberately working together or have indirect support from others. Thus, we posed the questions:

> RQ1a: Are bullies perceived to act alone or in concert with others?
> RQ1b: Do target and witness perceptions differ?
> RQ2a: Whom are bullies' supporters perceived to be?
> RQ2b: Do target and witness perceptions differ?

Westhues (2002) has also argued that bullying has a contagion effect, especially when someone with power or influence has spearheaded hostility. Hierarchical position likely affects sources and degrees of support, although past research has not explored this directly. Past research has found, however, that supervisor aggression has a stronger negative effect on targeted workers than does aggression from coworkers or outsiders (Hershcovis & Barling, 2009). The stronger negative effect from supervisory aggression might, at least in part, be due to the support others lend to persons in positions of authority. Perceptions of such support can exacerbate the feeling of powerlessness, both for those targeted and witnessing bystanders. As types of aggression and harm from aggression differ by perpetrator position (Hershcovis & Barling, 2009), sources of support likely also differ. Additionally, bully sex may affect sources of support. We do not know whether male or female bullies have different sources of support, if support is present. Given these issues, we posed the following questions:

> RQ3a: Do perceived sources of support differ by bully position and sex?
> RQ3b: Do target and witness perceptions differ?

Organizational Responses to Reported Abuse

Of central importance to ending employee abuse are organizational responses and interventions when workers report bullying. Without such interventions, workers must confront bullies alone or search for other individual-level solutions, such as quitting their jobs (Hoel & Beale, 2006). In the majority of studies, targets have typically reported that organizational authorities took no action to stop abuse, ignored their complaints, or sided with the bullies (Beale, 2001; Keashly, 2001; Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006; Quine, 1999). In other words, targets believed that after reporting abuse, upper managers paid little heed to their reports, or that the actions that upper managers took made things worse. We know less about witnessing bystanders' perceptions of organizational responses, but their perceptions should not be taken lightly, as onlookers are less likely to speak out if they perceive inertia or penalizing actions toward others who make reports (S. E. Lewis & Orford, 2005). Even when management is concerned, but appears to remain silent, worker audiences may read this silence as acquiescence, support for bullies, disregard for targets, or some combination of these (Lutgen–Sandvik & McDermott, 2008). Thus, we posed a hypothesis and related research question:

H1:   As opposed to improving the situation, employees will perceive that the most common organizational responses to reports of abuse will be to do nothing or exacerbate the situation.

RQ5:   Do target and witness perceptions differ with respect to the character of organizational responding?

Methods

Zogby Survey and Sampling

Determining if target and witness perceptions converge or diverge regarding communal features of bullying requires a large enough sample of workers to detect even small differences. Additionally, to assess the national prevalence of being bullied or witnessing others' abuse, calls for a representative sample of U.S. workers. To access such a sample, the Workplace Bullying Institute contracted with Zogby International,[2] a polling and public opinion research center. The population from which the study's sample was drawn included more than 350,000 participants who represented every state in the United States. (Consequently, the study's findings may have limited generalizability to work settings in other nations.) Respondents agreed to participate in online surveys. Zogby drew a random sample of persons from this panel, who were then invited to participate in an online survey and asked to follow a link to a secure server hosting the survey. Results were weighted to reflect the target population; in this case, working adults nationwide over the age of 18.

Sample

The sample included 7,740 adults. Respondents were screened for age, and only adults (18+) were included. The Appendix outlines sample demographics, which closely reflect current U.S. census data (http://www.census.gov/main/www/access.html). The margin of error was +/– 1.1%. In subgroups, margins of error were slightly higher, so slight weights were added to more accurately reflect the U.S. working population. After screening for age, two other screens were used. The first was for employment; those employed full or part time, currently unemployed, or retired were allowed to continue. No other information about work history was gathered. This screen eliminated three categories — self-employed (–855), student not working (–293), and other/not sure (–329) — and resulted in 6,263 respondents completing the first part of the survey. The second screen was for persons who had experienced or witnessed bullying, which we globally defined. This ended the survey for those saying they had never

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[2] **"**Zogby International is constantly searching, testing and measuring hypotheses and principles on polling and public opinion research. Working with a panel of psychologists, sociologists, computer experts, linguists, political scientists, economists, and mathematicians, we explore every nuance in language and test new methods in public opinion research. It is this investment in time and money for research and development that makes us a leader in the public opinion field." Retrieved March 31, 2008, from http://www.zogby.com/about/index.cfm

witnessed or experienced bullying (–2,802). The second screen left 3,461 persons to complete the remainder of the survey questions about bullying.

Measures

The online survey ran from August 10 through August 13, 2007. Its completion took approximately 13 minutes. In addition to demographic information, the survey inquired about bullying experiences. Although we asked a number of other questions, in the current study, we analyzed the following: whether one had witnessed, experienced, or perpetrated bullying; primary harassers' position and sex; whether harassers acted alone or with others; harassers' supporters; and organizational responses to reported bullying. Survey responses resulted in categorical data for all questions. We adapted the questions from the Workplace Bullying Institute's (WBI) past research with more than 3,000 targeted workers, as this organization has extensive experience with bullying in the United States (Namie, 2000, 2003a), and past studies of bullying, mobbing, and harassment (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003; Keashly, 1998; Rayner et al., 2002; Salin, 2001).

Prevalence. As noted, research typically employs two methods of measuring bullying prevalence: counting negative acts over a period of time with behavioral checklists and self-labeling as a target (e.g., Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Salin, 2001). As we were interested in perceptions, we used the latter and asked, "At work, have you experienced or witnessed any or all of the following types of repeated, persistent mistreatment: sabotage by others that prevented work from getting done, verbal abuse, threatening conduct, intimidation, or humiliation?" Choices for self-labeling were: (a) "Yes, I am experiencing it now or have in the last year"; (b) "Yes, it has happened to me in my work life, but not now or in the last year"; (c) "I've only witnessed it"; (d) "I've been the perpetrator myself"; and (e) "I've never had it happen to me and never witnessed it." In concert with past research, we omitted the term *workplace bullying* from the definition because employees may not have interpreted mistreatment as bullying, may have avoided self-labeling that connotes weakness or childishness, and so forth (Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Zapf et al., 2003). Also, in line with past research, the definition underscored hallmark qualities of bullying, including repetition, persistence, verbal and non/verbal acts, hostility, humiliation, intimidation, and mistreatment (Einarsen et al., 2003; Hershcovis, 2010; Keashly, 1998, 2001; Rayner et al., 2002; Rospenda, 2002; Salin, 2001).

Active and passive accomplices. To determine if employees believed that bullying was solely or collectively perpetrated, we asked, "Did the harasser work alone or were there several people involved in the mistreatment?" Answer choices were:
    1) Solo harasser
    2) Several harassers
    3) Not sure

To determine direct or indirect support for bullying, we asked, "Who supported the harasser, if anyone?" Answer choices included:
    1) One or more senior managers, executives, or owners
    2) Harassers' peers

3) Human resources (HR)

4) Targets' peers

5) No one

6) Not sure

Respondents chose all that applied. We adapted these choices from WBI's past surveys (Namie, 2000, 2003a) and qualitative U.S. studies (Keashly, 2001; Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006). To determine the position of perceived bullies in relation to accomplices, we asked, "What was the principal harasser's rank?" Answer choices included:

1) Harasser ranked higher (Boss)

2) Target and harasser same rank (Peer)

3) Harasser ranked lower (Subordinate)

To explore bullies' sex in relation to accomplices, we asked, "What is the gender of the person primarily responsible for the mistreatment?"

Organizational responses and complicity. We focused primarily on responses to reported bullying, as upper managers rarely observe bullying behavior. To determine workers' perceptions of organizational responses when targets brought the problem to authorities, we asked, "When the mistreatment was reported, what did the employer do?" Choices included:

1) Completely or partially resolved the problem in a way that helped the target

2) Did nothing

3) Worsened the problem for the target

4) Not sure

We framed these responses in terms of overall perceptions, as workers — both targets and witnesses — typically know little about the specifics of behind-the-scenes employment investigations (Namie & Namie, 2004).

Findings

Prevalence

Of those who completed the survey after the first screen (n = 6,263), 791 or 12.6% reported being bullied during the last year, and 24.2% (n = 1,515) reported being bullied at other times in their career (U.S. workers bullied: 36.8%). Men and women reported being targeted at approximately equal rates (x^2 [1] = 0.65, p > .50). An additional 12.3% (n = 773) witnessed bullying, but were not directly targeted. As such, 49.1% (n = 3,079) of adults working in the United States reported direct or indirect exposure to bullying. The questionnaire also included this choice: I've been the perpetrator myself. We excluded this category from analysis due to questionable reliability and validity, as less than one half of one percent (n = 22, 0.35%) selected this response. (We explore this response in the discussion.)

Although men and women reported being bullied at approximately equal rates, males were more often reported as bullies than were females (males 1,862 [60.05%]; females 1,239 [39.95%]; x^2 [1] = 125.16, p < .005). This pattern held for both targets and witnesses. Additionally, bullying was primarily top down; in 72.5% of the cases, respondents reported bullies as someone ranked higher than targets. Peer-to-peer bullying represented 17.4% of cases, and bullying by someone with a lower organizational rank ("bullying up") occurred in 8.5% of cases. This differed significantly from and equalized distribution (x^2 [2] = 72.2, p > .5). Witness and target reports did not differ significantly regarding bully position. The following outlines the key findings regarding support for bullies. For all questions, we compared target and witness reports.

Active and Passive Accomplices

Research Question 1 asked if bullies worked alone or in concert with others. Respondents collectively reported, in order of frequency*: solo harassers, multiple harassers*, and *not sure.* Targets and witnesses reports converged, and the majority believed bullies worked alone. Chi-square tests revealed no significant differences between target and witness reports (see Table 1).

Table 1. Solo or Multiple Harassers.

	Targets (n = 2,306)		Witness (n = 773)		Total (n = 3,079)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Solo harasser	1,515	65.7	588	76.1	2,103$_a$	68.3
Several harassers	684	29.7	143	18.5	827$_{a,b}$	26.9
Not sure	107	4.6	42	5.4	149$_{a,b}$	4.8

Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly from equality at p < .05, x^2.

Research Question 2 asked who supported the bullies. Respondents chose all supporter categories that applied, and in 23.7 % of the cases, they reported multiple sources of support for bullies. Collective reports identified bullies' supporters in order of frequency as senior manager/owners, harassers' peers, HR, and targets' peers. In nearly a third of the cases, respondents said no one supported the bully. That is, unsupported bullies were not one type of actor (i.e., boss, peer, subordinate) more than they were another; they were equally distributed for higher-, same-, and lower-level bullies. When comparing target-witness reports, the only significant difference we found was that witnesses, more often than targets, reported that no one supported bullies (effect size: ø = 0.18). In all other categories, witness and target accounts did not differ significantly (see Table 2).

Table 2. Harassers' Supporters.

	Targets (n =2,689)		Witness (n =740)		Total (n = 3,429)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Senior managers	908	33.8	169	22.8	1,077	31.4
Harassers' peers	669	24.9	153	20.7	822	24.0
HR	286	10.6	62	8.4	348	10.1
Target's peers	187	7.0	67	7.1	254	7.4
No one	639$_a$	23.8	289$_a$	39.1	928	27.1

Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly from equality at $p < .05$, x^2.

　　　　We examined cross-tabulated data regarding the two previous research questions (solo harassers and harassers' supporters) to determine whether respondents believed solo harassers had others' support (see Table 3). Of those reporting a solo harasser, 59.7% said the harasser received support. In these cases, respondents thought support for bullies came from the following, in order of frequency: senior manager/owners, harassers' peers, HR, and targets' peers. No significant differences were found between target and witness reports. Thus, even in the cases reportedly perpetrated by solo harassers, the vast majority of respondents assumed others enabled bullies in some way. And it appeared that employees distinguished between active co-bullies and passive accomplices that enabled bullies.

Table 3. Solo Harassers' Supporters.

	Targets (878)		Witness (377)		Total (1,255)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Senior managers	421	47.9	157	46.1	578	46.1
Harassers' peers	261	29.7	117	31.0	378	30.1
HR	125	14.2	52	13.8	177	14.1
Targets' peers	71	8.1	51	13.5	122	9.7

Note: 2,103 solo harassers

　　　　To answer Research Question 3 that asked if perceived sources of support differed by bully position or sex, we cross-tabulated bully position with source of support and found that support varied based on bully position. Bullies in higher level positions than targets had significantly higher rates of perceived support from higher-level others (i.e., managers, executives, owners) and HR than did bullies in peer or subordinate positions. When bullies were subordinate to targets, their support most often came from the subordinates' peers. For persons targeted by peers, bullies gained support from other peer-level persons and senior managers at approximately equal rates. As such, the pattern appeared to be gaining support from others at similar levels in the organization, except for peer bullies, who also found support from higher-level persons. To determine if sources of perceived support differed by sex, we examined

cross-tabulated data for these two variables. No significant differences were found between males' and females' sources of support. Additionally, males and females were equally likely to be reported as receiving no support. We found no significant differences between target and witness perceptions of support in relation to position or sex. Table 4 illustrates cumulative respondent data.

Table 4. Bully Position and Perceived Sources of Support.

| Bullies' supporters[*] | Bully Position in Relation to Target | | | Bully Sex-Gender | |
	Higher	Peer	Subordinate	Male	Female
Senior managers	$31.1_{a,b,d}$	$21.3_{a,e}$	$17.7_{b,g,h}$	34.4	36.1
Harasser peers	$19.8_{c,d}$	24.6_f	$30.7_{c,g,i,j}$	28.3	24.1
Human resources	9.9_d	$5.9_{e,f}$	$7.9_{h,i}$	10	12.9
Target peers	6.1	6.2	9.2_j	7.1	8.6
No one	29.1	35.3	28.5	30.3	29.9

[*]Percentage reported in each category

Note: Means with different subscripts differ significantly from equality at $p < .05$, x^2. Read subscripts across, then down.

Organizational Responses and Complicity

Hypothesis 1 proposed that inertia or making the situation worse would be the two most common responses to reported abuse. Those who responded to this question said, in order of frequency, that when workers reported bullying, organizational authorities did nothing, completely or partially resolved bullying in a way that helped targets, or worsened the situation for targets. Thus, we found only partial support for H_1. Encouragingly, the second most commonly reported outcome, as opposed to worsening the situation, was completely or partially resolving the problem (see Table 5). Witnesses and targets did not differ in their perceptions of organizational responding.

Table 5. Organizational Responses When Reports Made.

Organizational Response	Targets	%	Witnesses	%	Total	%
Did nothing	540	45.5	114	35.3	664	43.6
Resolved situation	368	31.0	116	35.9	486	31.9
Worsened situation	214	18.0	66	20.4	280	18.4
Not sure	66	5.6	27	8.4	93	6.1
Total responses	1,188		323		1,523	

Note: Percentage represents proportion of responses by group.

Discussion and Implications for Organizational Communication

This study extends workplace bullying scholarship by exploring the collective character of adult bullying from the perspectives of those directly targeted and those who see others being bullied. From both perspectives, employees paint a complex picture of bullying that involves bullies, bullies' active accomplices, bullies' passive enablers and supporters, and employing organizations. Taken together, the converging accounts from a representative sample of U.S. workers provide convincing evidence that the majority of these cases involve many workers beyond the target and bully. Specifically, the cases of multiple perpetrators, combined with cases in which perpetrators who had others' support, represents nearly 70% of the bullying situations. As such, widespread metaphorical depictions of the lone-wolf bully and one bad apple fit less than a third of bullying cases. In most cases, workplace bullying is a social process embedded in workgroup and organizational communication networks. In what follows, we further examine the study's central findings regarding these communal features and discuss possible implications.

To determine targeting and witnessing, we used a global definition of bullying that underscored the key features (persistent, frequent) taken from past scholarship (Einarsen et al., 2003; Hershcovis, 2010; Keashly, 1998, 2001; Rayner et al., 2002; Rospenda, 2002; Salin, 2001). The definition also included terms associated with properties of bullying communication such as humiliating, intimidating, and threatening. Like other global definitions, it included a sample of associated negative acts (e.g., mistreatment, verbal abuse, work sabotage), but did not list all possible bullying interactions (e.g., social ostracism, gossip and rumors, teasing and sarcasm). As our definition did present the common features and properties of bullying definitions, we have considerable confidence in drawing comparisons between the current study and past prevalence of perceived bullying based on identification with a global definition (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Rospenda,2002; Salin, 2001). For the respondents who identified with this global definition, we then explored their perspectives of bullies, supporters, and organizational responses.

Prevalence

From both target and witness perspectives, we can conclude that while not all bosses are bullies, nearly three-quarters of the perceived bullies are supervisors. This is similar to a number of prior U.S. studies (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2009; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Namie, 2000, 2003a) and British studies (e.g., Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Rayner, 1997) in which respondents are asked to identify the primary abuser, demonstrating that the bullying-boss stereotype is very real. This is somewhat inconsistent with a U.S. study of the Department of Veterans Affairs (Keashley & Neuman, 2005) in which workers more often reported coworkers as aggressors (47%) than they did supervisors (40%) and with an earlier Michigan study that found bosses and coworkers at equal rates (Keashly & Jagatic, 2000). However, this study's findings parallel four other U.S. studies reporting that supervisors are the most frequently reported bullies (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2009; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Namie, 2000; Namie, 2003a). Given the similar pattern in target and witness reports and the study's sample size and representativeness, we believe these findings are generalizable to the U.S. workforce. However, we comment here on potential reasons for the difference, which we believe are linked to sample variations and measurement differences.

The current study included workers in various organizational types (of which government is only one), whereas the VA study (Keashly & Neuman, 2005) predominantly examined the experiences of government employees (although working in a wide variety of functional VA areas). It appears, then, the two studies are querying fundamentally different populations: public employees in a large U.S. government division and employees in a broad range of different organizations (see Appendix). Measurement tools also differed. We asked about perceptions of the "principal harasser's rank" — wording that asks respondents to identify the person whom they believed predominantly perpetrated persistent abuse. In the VA study, researchers used an operationalization approach by identifying primary sources of aggression and from that determining the actor who perpetrated 75% or more of that aggression (Keashly & Neuman, 2005). As different data analysis and dissimilar populations can produce highly variable results, we assume some of the difference regarding primary bullies' positions is attributed to these two issues.

Perceived impact and the leading power of hierarchical position may also push targets to identify supervisors more often as primary abusers. Targets suffer more negative effects from supervisory abuse than they do abuse from other sources (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hershcovis & Barling, 2009). As such, supervisory bullying likely feels worse (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2008) and has more far-reaching negative ramifications than peer-to-peer aggression, even though it may occur less frequently. Additionally, targets may perceive supervisors as leading the attack, so to speak, so they more often identify supervisors as the primarily responsible perpetrator. Certainly, Westhues's (2006a) research suggests that senior faculty members instigate mobbing and then junior members join in. Such cases implicate all workgroup members, but targets likely view senior persons as primary harassers and those who follow suit as secondary harassers.

There is also some question as to whether the elapsed time since bullying occurred alters targets' identification of the primary perpetrator(s). At least one U.S. study found that persons recently bullied (i.e., in the past year) and those bullied in the past (i.e., over work history) report different perpetrators (Keashly & Jagatic, 2000). In Keashly and Jagatic's study, respondents bullied in the past year identified bosses and coworkers at equal rates, while those bullied further in the past most often identified bosses. Since supervisory abuse is more damaging than peer-to-peer abuse, it is probably more memorable, which may account for some difference. However, we did not find this elapsed-time difference in our data. Both recent- and past-bullied groups, examined separately and collectively, most often reported higher-ranking persons as principle harassers.

Men were also reported most often as primary harassers, a finding similar to past UK and EU research (reviewed in, Zapf et al., 2003) as well as similar to a number of U.S. studies (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2009; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Namie, 2000, 2003a). Researchers have proposed that this bully-gender pattern is due to men enacting overt (and thus more obvious) aggression because of social norms accepting male aggression and men being over-represented in supervisory positions (Zapf et al., 2003). We did find support for the latter; a significantly larger proportion of higher-level bullies were male (60.6%) than female (39.4%). It is possible that males are simply in a position to bully more often than are females.

Overall prevalence, however, is quite similar to past studies. Given the representativeness of the current sample and the similarity of findings to past research, we have considerable confidence regarding the prevalence of experiencing and witnessing workplace bullying in the United States. Lutgen–Sandvik et al. (2007), for example, found that 9.4% of workers reported feeling bullied in the past six months, and the current study found that 12.6% of workers felt bullied over the past 12 months. As such, we can be fairly confident that, in the United States at least, roughly one in 10 workers has recently experienced persistent psychological, emotional abuse at work. The finding that 37% of workers have been bullied sometime during their careers falls within past estimates that range from 30% (Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007) to 42% (Keashly & Jagatic, 2000) over work histories. Lutgen–Sandvik et al. (2007) also reported that 11% of workers had witnessed, but were not directly targeted; in the current study; 12% of non-targeted workers witnessed bullying.

The number of workers these figures represent is staggering. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (USDOL, 2007), 146 million persons were employed in the United States in July 2007. The work-history exposure rate of 37% suggests that an estimated 54 million U.S. workers have been bullied at work. Witnessing the humiliation and degradation of others is also traumatizing and exposes an additional 18 million employees as they work to make a living. As such, bullying affects nearly half of U.S. working adults — an estimated 71.5 million workers — epidemic proportions by any indicator. And the frequent presence of direct and indirect accomplices to bullying points to reasons the phenomenon is so difficult to root out.

Active and Passive Accomplices

In nearly a third of the cases, bullying included multiple harassers. This draws attention to at least one of the communal features of bullying: It can occur as mobbing-type communicative behavior involving many active aggressors. Multiple-aggressor bullying underscores others' active and public collusion with bullies. Thus, our findings are consistent with Westhues's (2005) case study research of North American academics, pointing to bullying as concerted efforts to drive out targeted persons. What is equally important, but can make bullying even harder to describe, is the passive or less public support for bullies that both groups perceived.

While a third of cases included multiple aggressors, in nearly 70% of cases, bullies were solo actors, which seems to provide evidence for the notion that bullies are lone wolves or bad apples. However, looking a little deeper into employee accounts, we find that in nearly 60% of the solo-bully cases, respondents believed the bullies received support from many corners of the organization, most often from upper managers, but also from HR staff, bullies' peers, and even targets' peers. By combining multiple harassers and solo harassers who received support, we find that nearly three quarters of bullying cases were concerted and collective to some degree. It does seem that "bullying will only take place if a bully feels he or she has the blessing, support, at least, the implicit permission of superiors and other coworkers to behave in this manner" (Harvey et al., 2007, p. 119).

Both groups also reported different sources of bullies' support in relation to bullies' hierarchical position, a pattern one might expect, given power allegiances and social dynamics of in- and out-groups in

the workplace (Gomez & Rosen, 2001; Lee, 2001). For the most part, support came from same-level others. Those in higher positions than targets had more support from their peers (also highly placed persons) and senior-level organizational members. Similarly, lower-level bullies were perceived to be working with the support of their (subordinate bullies') peers. Peer bullies also found support from same-level others, but equally received support from upper management. Overall, the pattern of support suggests that persons may side with "their own," so to speak. Bullies found little support from targets' peers, regardless of bullies' position. However, subordinate bullies — those bullying up — most often worked together and garnered a small edge with targets' peers. These patterns lends support to the notion that when workers bully up, they do so with groups comprised of other subordinates (Rayner et al., 2002).

The degree of convergence in target and witness accounts is striking regarding these communal or collective features. The critique of target-focus research insinuates that the target perspective is limited or narrow, potentially even skewed. Because targets suffer most acutely in bullying situations and as a result can be highly emotional when giving accounts, discounting their perceptions of others' complicity might be easy (Tracy et al., 2006). Management and workers alike disbelieve highly emotionalized stories of organizational interactions, as this kind of emotional display breaks with implicit display rules and expectations of rationality at work (Fineman, 2006). As such, organizational members (and some scholars) tend to minimize these perspectives. Agreement between these two groups lends considerable credence to targets' perspectives of bullying situations and could increase confidence in not only this study's findings but other workplace bullying research based on target-report data. Given such convergence, upper managers and peers might err on the side of believing targets unless there are compelling reasons for not doing so.

We found a target-witness difference on one aspect that bears discussion. Witnesses perceived similar sources of organizational support for bullies as targets. In equal proportions both groups believed that upper managers, HR, bullies', and even targets' peers were involved. However, witnesses said there was "no support" for bullies more frequently than did targets. This difference might be due to a number of considerations, three of which we address here. First, targets are closer to the situation and may simply know more about the involved parties. The experience often eclipses all other aspects of targets' work lives, and targets spend considerable time trying to alleviate persistent bullying and its effects. Second, targets may less often report that bullies received "no support" because they may interpret witnesses' silence as assent (Lutgen–Sandvik & McDermott, 2008). When targets suffer at the hands of bullies and their coworkers seem to look on silently, targets can feel like this silence is betrayal or even complicity (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007). Witnesses in bullying situations might be less likely to perceive others' silence as a type of support. Finally, "no support" could also mean that others have responded in ways outside of the view of the target that indicate a lack of support for the bully's behaviors. In such cases, witnesses might have more access to these conversations than do targets.

Both groups did point to upper managers' involvement, however. That perceived support came from upper managers is disturbing, although two general management styles are associated with a tendency toward employee bullying (Brodsky, 1976; Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007; Lutgen–Sandvik & McDermott, 2008; Salin, 2003). A coercive-authoritarian style encourages bullying supervisors and

demeans workers who become disadvantaged in peer-to-peer bullying. Laissez-faire managers, on the other hand, are unlikely to respond at all, and by failing to respond, inadvertently support bullying (Di Martino, 2008). Although we were unable to discern these different styles from our data, it is possible that a laissez-faire leadership style may underlie what we did find. Leadership theory generally characterizes laissez-faire leadership as either benign or simply ineffective; however, it can be particularly damaging in situations where action is needed (Hauge et al., 2007). If upper management fails to intervene when employees are abused, such failure makes them complicit in employee bullying.

Organizational (Upper Management) Responses and Complicity

Both targets and witnesses had similar perspectives of organizational responses, and in equal proportions, reported organizational inertia, situation improvement, or condition deterioration. In nearly a third of the cases, respondents believed organizational actions made a positive difference — somewhat better than intimated by past research (Lutgen–Sandvik, Alberts, & Tracy, 2008; Namie, 2003a; Zapf & Gross, 2001). This is good news and could be a function of having a representative sample versus a self-selected sample. It could also mean that upper managers' efforts are becoming more evident to organizational members as these members' awareness of the phenomenon increases. Increased awareness of the bullying phenomenon is likely fueled by academic research, press coverage, consulting firms, and Internet sites dedicated to the subject (e.g., http://www.workplacebullying.org/, http://www.iawbh.com/, http://www.kickbully.com/). Regrettably, however, in over 70% of the cases, respondents thought that authorities either made the situations worse or did nothing, perceptions that indict organizations' involvement or impotence. Unfortunately, when employees speak out about bullying and upper managers do nothing (that is visible at least), organizational climates develop in which bullies can abuse others with impunity (Rayner et al., 2002).

We can speculate, based on organization research and theory, why upper managers might fail to act, or why workers perceive a failure to act. First, negative sanctions against or investigations of aggressive workers are veiled to ensure employee privacy while providing for alleged bullies' due process; employment laws often mandate privacy in such matters (Namie, 2007a). Second, upper management may hold firmly to a classical chain-of-command idea about communication direction in which interfering with line supervisors' decisions or actions can seem practically heretical (Lutgen–Sandvik & McDermott, 2008). And line supervisors trained and socialized with similar values and beliefs will likely cry foul if upper management does interfere.

Third, some inertia might be due to lack of knowledge about the bullying phenomenon: what it looks like, how to assess it, and what to do about it (Namie & Namie, 2004). Although U.S. organizations provide training on sexual harassment and protected-group discrimination, adult bullying is not as well understood and lacks statutory regulation. Bullying is also in a state of denotative hesitancy (Clair, 1993) in the country as a whole (Tracy et al., 2006). Although not the case in other parts of the world, the U.S. has yet to agree upon a common term to label persistent emotional and psychological abuse at work. Fourth, lack of intervention could result from the aversion to conflict. Most supervisors dislike and avoid even the most pedestrian employee evaluations, including negative feedback (K. W. Thomas, 1976; S. L.

Thomas & Bretz, 1994), and thus, dealing with aggressive workers could feel overwhelming. In fact, many upper managers report being as afraid of bullies as are the bullies' targets (Crawshaw, 2007).

Finally, upper management is unlikely to witness employee abuse. Especially in highly complex organizations (e.g., government divisions/departments, universities, multinational corporations), many interactions among employees and between supervisors and subordinates are, for the most part, out of upper management's view and may even strategically be concealed from upper management. As such, the workgroup space can be a place where formally disapproved practices nonetheless occur (Giddens, 1987). Thus, even in situations where organization's upper echelons frown on or forbid employee abuse, their direct observation of such behavior is improbable. Upper managers then must weigh accounts from the involved parties, a process that often favors hierarchical position: The bullying boss has a voice, whereas the bullied target's voice is minimized or muted (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2003). In accounts of what occurred, targets typically believe bullies are outstanding at managing up, misleading upper management, and concealing their bullying behavior (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007).

Implications for Bullying Theory

Our findings enhance the viability of targeted workers' perspectives that have framed much of bullying research to date. Despite critiques of target-only standpoints, targets and witnesses report similar perceptions of bullying involvement and complicity. The current findings come from a representative sample that was large enough so we were able to detect even small differences between these two groups. For the one variable that differed significantly, effect size was small. Perception convergence underscores the patterned and shared nature of bullying in the United States and gives rise to a number of theoretical implications. First, convergence suggests that target perspectives of workplace bullying are reliable, valid indicators of the phenomenon and its features. Despite the stigmatization of victimizing experiences, such as workplace bullying, sexual assault, or domestic violence, the abused person likely has the best understanding of the phenomenon (what is happening and whom is involved).

Second, the notions that workplace bullying is an individual, psychological issue or a set of interactions solely between the bully and target are myths. As illustrated in the columnist's remarks in our introduction, the language of individualism and the discourse informing this language is deeply rooted and as deeply flawed. Individualism as a lens through which we perceive the world focuses our conclusions about much of social life. Work — how we talk about work and interactions among people at work — is no exception. Viewing bullying dynamics through an individualistic lens encourages blaming the victim and expecting the victim to single-handedly resolve what is clearly a collectively communicative problem manifested by multiple harassers, support for harassers, organizational inaction, or upper managers' exacerbation of the abuse. These features explain why individual efforts rarely end workplace bullying (Lutgen–Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009; Richman et al., 2001). Undoubtedly, multiple perpetrators makes resistance, reporting, and responding far more difficult and risky.

Third, one of the features of workplace bullying is power disparity, typically represented as uncomplicated differentials between bully and target (for a critique, see Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006). However,

power disparity appears far more complex and involves numerous strata of discursive power beyond, although implicative of, hierarchical position or referent power. We are able to see from the findings that this disparity is not simply a bully-versus-target dynamic but is multifaceted and layered. One stratum is the interpersonal level. Our study and a number of others have found that bullies often hold higher organizational positions than targets (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2007; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Namie, 2003a, 2007b), and managers can quite easily justify their actions as necessary supervision or surveillance (Brodsky, 1976). Targets on the other hand, face a number of biases around the notions of victimization that stigmatize and cast their accounts as suspect (Lutgen–Sandvik, 2008). And peer bullies with informal, charismatic power often attract into the aggressive cliques, those very coworkers who would otherwise support targets.

Another layer of power disparity is within the workgroup. Workgroup members' responses to bullying, such as fear-induced silence, victim blaming, or siding with abusers, forecloses the potential for collective resistance and engenders feelings of being mobbed. Targets explain that allegiances easily shift, and someone who had supported them in the past suddenly sides with what may look like a dominant actor or group (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007). A third stratum is organizational, as inferred from upper managers' responses. Organizational responses compound power disparity because when those with fiduciary responsibility fail to intervene or even support bullies, workers' legitimate avenues of redress are closed off. Of course, this also exacerbates the feeling of being abused and increases not only perceptions of, but very real, impotence. The stratified character of power disparity intensifies the feelings that bullying comes from all sides, which from our study appears to be the case.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

A central strength of the current study is the representative nature of the sample. It is large enough to comfortably state there is great similarity in how targets and witnesses see the bullying phenomenon. Although sampling for an online survey is not random, we argue, based on the sample demographics (see Appendix), that it is one of the most representative U.S. samples to date in the study of this topic (see also Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006). Despite the representativeness and size of the sample, our findings are limited to U.S. workers' experiences and have only limited generalizability to settings in other nations. Research does suggest that U.S. workplaces are similar to UK workplaces since these countries have a number of similar cultural features (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). UK studies generally find the majority of bullies are bosses, which was also the case in our study surveying a representative sample of U.S. workers. However, generalizability of the findings to Scandinavian workers, for example, is problematic because these cultures are quite different (for discussion of national differences see Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001).

Another issue is that data come from witness and target aggregates rather than from witnesses and targets reporting on the same situation. The findings do little to flesh out the shared perspectives of workers when colleagues talk with one another and move toward perspective convergence (or divergence). Potentially, when there is an opportunity for intersubjective sensemaking, target-witness perspectives converge even more than what we found. As Schaller noted (2001, p. 80), "It is not difficult

to perceive a narrative discourse between employees . . . where labeling of deviants and the moralising of bullying in the face of inadequate voice and representation becomes a norm." On the other hand, the perspectives of these two groups were remarkably similar, even without intersubjective sensemaking, and go far to reduce marginalizing and minimizing targets' reports. Future studies of targets and witnesses in the same workgroups might be compared to this study to determine these groups' convergence or divergence in perceptions.

Additionally, survey responses to the bullying definition did not permit identification of those who had witnessed and were also bullied. Rather, if targeted workers also witnessed the abuse of others, this was subsumed in the target-only category. Future research might provide for more extensive categories to include target only, witness only, witness-target, and neither target nor witness. Differences between those who witness only and those who are witness-targets are possible in terms of how they perceive bully supporters, targeted worker actions, or organizational responses.

Although we inquired about the most commonly perceived sources of support for bullies, we did not ask about bullies' or targets' subordinates. We omitted this due to the rarity of bullying up (Zapf et al., 2003); however, there is evidence from this study that when subordinates are identified as bullies, they find support from other subordinates. However, given Westhues's (2006b) work that suggests lower-ranked colleagues might join in the mobbing process of more senior faculty members, we likely missed part of the communal character of bullying through this omission. Future research should include subordinates as potential collaborators in communal bullying (mobbing) or even act as bullies themselves. Understanding how the bullying-up process might be intertwined with peer-to-peer or supervisory bullying is a crucial step toward gaining a full picture of the communal character of adult bullying at work. (See Rospenda, Richman, & Nawyn, 1998, for discussion of contrapower harassment.)

We did not inquire about the actions of non-bullied witnesses to bullying situations, an important avenue for future study of the bullying phenomenon as a collective experience. To date, research on witness to bullying is somewhat limited, although there are notable exceptions. From this work, we know that witness responses vary — from being so terrified they remain silent to working collectively with targets toward organizational change (Jennifer et al., 2003; Lutgen–Sandvik, 2006; Vartia, 2001). Despite such important pieces, the bullying literature on witness actions or motivations to act is a bit sparse. However, recent work drawing on the bystander literature is a promising area of research that considers the motives and actions of witnesses in response to hostile behavior (Ashburn–Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008; LaRoche & Scully, 2008). It is likely that both witness actions and motivations are reciprocally affected by organizational cultures and workgroup norms, especially past responses to bullying. Certainly, examining witnesses' experiences to include their responses to seeing their peers abused is a crucial area for future research.

We used a somewhat different definition of bullying than did past research to determine self-labeling, but believe that it included the key features and properties of bullying definitions from past research, which supports comparisons with other studies. In fact, the self-perceived prevalence data in this study is comparable to other prevalence rates using global definitions (e.g., Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Lutgen–Sandvik et al., 2007; Salin, 2001). We also used the term *harasser* when asking if the

perpetrators worked alone or with others because this is a commonly understood term that lacks the childish connotation of *bully*. It is possible that using this term may have resulted in respondents associating abuse with illegal forms of workplace harassment (i.e., sexual) rather than with workplace bullying. However, given the similarity in the prevalence rates of the current study and past research, we believe this problem, if present, was minimal. Future research might explore the extent of differences in prevalence for different definitions and terms describing the phenomenon.

A final concern is that getting input from the bullies' perspective is exceedingly difficult. In the current study, less than one percent of respondents reported abusing others, a highly questionable figure (12 men, 10 women; 13 peers, 8 bosses, 1 subordinate). As Rayner and Cooper (2003, p. 47) have imaginatively explained, "finding and studying the bully is like trying to study black holes — we are often chasing scattered debris of complex data and shadows of the past." Some scholars and practitioners claim that managers are unaware of how often others perceive their interactions as aggressive and harmful (Crawshaw, 2005; Rayner & Cooper, 2003). Despite the difficulty of getting to the bully perspective, new research is beginning to shed some light on the issue. Fast and Chen's (2009) recent study, for example, found that organizational members with formal power most often revert to aggression when they feel incompetent. Additionally, creatively designed research could get to the bully perspective. For example, one might interview professionals called in to resolve or mediate bullying to access bullies' accounts. Alternatively, researchers could interview persons that others identified as bullies and talk with them about their working or management styles and philosophies.

The study points to a few other areas for future research. In a third of the cases, organizational responses completely or partially resolved the problem in a way that helped the target. How did this transpire? We are unsure what organizations did to stop abuse. Knowing how organizations work out these problems would be particularly useful, especially for replicating successes. We also do not know from the data what organizations did to make the situation worse for targets. What communicative processes lead to exacerbating these situations? Knowing why organizations fail to intervene is important. We extrapolate reasons why organizations seem ineffective at dealing with workplace bullying, but more research is needed. Potentially, there are organizational or legal barriers to taking action in these situations. Surveying or interviewing upper managers and HR professionals who deal with bullying could provide important insight. There is some promising new research on HR (Cowan, 2009).

Finally, in the category of responses where targets and witnesses differed (no support), more examination is needed to understand what this might mean. Witnesses may be unaware of support for bullies when they know bullying occurs, but are uninvolved in conversations about bullying. No support might also signal that witnesses more often believe that workgroup or organizational climates or cultures simply do not support abusive treatment of organizational members. We have drawn a number of conclusions, but more empirical evidence is needed to differentiate among meanings of "no support," before we can understand why targets and witnesses might see things differently.

Conclusion

This study extends current research by explicitly considering the frequency of bullying accomplices. Findings underscore the communal character of bullying (implicating perpetrators, targets, witnesses, and upper managers) and emphasize the importance of viewing the phenomenon as collective patterns of communication. As important, we looked beyond target reports, queried those who witnessed bullying, but were not directly targeted, and found striking convergence between these two groups' perspectives. The study underscores the importance of upper management's responses to bullying. In one–third of the reported cases, organizations took action that improved the situation, which is very promising. However, in the majority of cases, workers perceived no or ineffective action. Inertia and ineffectiveness at dealing with bullying are fundamental problems, whatever the reasons. Doing nothing is not a neutral act when workers ask for help; when nothing is done, organizations inadvertently becomes bullies' accomplices. When left unattended, bullying can spread like a contagion, becoming the accepted, albeit painful, norm for interactions.

Appendix: Sample Demographics

Variable		Frequency	Percent*
Age	18–29	1,543	20
	30–49	3,087	40
	50–64	1,775	23
	65+	1,312	17
	No response	22	—
Race/ethnicity	White	5,728	75
	Hispanic	764	10
	African American	840	11
	Asian/Pacific	153	2
	Other/mixed	153	2
	No response	103	—
Marital status	Married	4,615	61
	Single, never married	1,642	22
	Divorced/widowed/separated	1,052	14
	Civil union/domestic partnership	284	4
	No response	147	—
Income	Less than $25,000	468	7
	$25,000–$34,999	604	9
	$35,000–$49,999	967	14
	$50,000–$74,999	1,612	24
	$75,000–$99,999	1,208	18
	$100,000 or more	1,848	28
	No response	1,034	—
Gender	Male	3,664	48
	Female	3,938	52
	No response	138	—
Employment status	Works full time	3,925	51
	Part-time	483	6
	Self-employed	855	11
	Unemployed	360	5
	Retired	1,496	19
	Student not working	293	4
	Other employment/Not sure	329	4
Organization type	(where mistreatment took place)		
	Small for-profit	719	23.2
	Large for-profit	1,016	32.8
	Not for profit	350	11.3
	Government	540	17.4
	Education	412	13.3
	Other/not sure	63	2.0

* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent and might not total 100%.

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