

When is a bystander not a bystander? A typology of the roles of bystanders in workplace bullying*

Megan Paull *Murdoch University, Australia*

Maryam Omari *Edith Cowan University, Australia*

Peter Standen *Edith Cowan University, Australia*

The role of the bystander is one which has received only a small portion of the research attention that has been paid to workplace bullying. This paper will argue that bystanders are not just incidental but are an integral part of the context of bullying. Drawing on qualitative data from two separate studies, a typology is presented which outlines thirteen potential roles bystanders can take. This typology can be employed as an awareness-raising tool to encourage individuals to examine their own behaviour in a range of situations, and to acknowledge that their actions, either deliberate or inadvertent, can contribute to outcomes of events which may be classified as bullying. It also provides a foundation for further research into bystanders in workplace bullying.

Keywords: awareness-raising, bystander roles, bystander typology, bystanders, workplace bullying

Key points

- 1 Bystanders influence bullying scenarios.
- 2 Bystander roles can be constructive or destructive, and active or passive.
- 3 Effective prevention and intervention strategies should recognise bystanders' multiple roles.

Bullying is defined in multiple ways. Our preferred definition, 'a set of dysfunctional workplace behaviours ranging from those that adversely impact emotional well-being and stability to physical violence causing injury and harm', is offered by Timo, Fulop and Ruthjersen (2004, 38) and drawn from Bowie's (2002) work. Bullying covers a wide range of behaviours involving aggression directed against a person or their work, including emotional, psychological, sexual or physical acts. It may be overt, as in aggressive or insulting behaviour, or covert as in withholding information or 'the silent treatment'. Rayner and Hoel's (1997) watershed literature review identified five categories of bullying

Correspondence: Dr Megan Paull, Senior Lecturer, Murdoch Business School, Murdoch University, South Street, Murdoch, WA 6150, Australia; e-mail: m.paull@murdoch.edu.au

Accepted for publication 19 August 2011.

that remain well-recognised: threats to personal standing, threats to professional status, destabilisation or undermining, overwork or undue pressure, and isolation.

Research into workplace bullying came into prominence in the 1990s and continues to grow. Most studies focus on the victims of bullying (e.g. Einarsen et al. 2011; Lewis and Sheehan 2003), although recently attention has been turned to the perpetrators (e.g. Hershcovis and Barling 2010; Omari 2007). The act of bullying is still typically seen somewhat simplistically as a dyadic interaction between victim and perpetrator, a perspective that overlooks the substantial role of bystanders, witnesses or observers. Increasingly the evidence suggests bystanders can affect, or be affected by, the interactions between perpetrator and victim (e.g. Namie and Lutgen-Sandvik 2010). To date, however, a comprehensive model of the role of these third parties has not been presented. Below we outline a typology of the multiple roles a bystander can take, ranging from active to passive in involvement, and from positive to negative in impact on the bully and victim. It can be used as an awareness-raising and education tool in efforts to ameliorate workplace bullying and offers opportunities for further research.

Bystanders

For some time social psychological studies of violence have given prominence to the role of bystanders. An example is the well-known 'Genovese effect', first observed when 38 witnesses failed to intervene in the brutal rape and murder of Kitty Genovese in New York in 1964. This effect suggests that the greater the number of bystanders witnessing an act of aggression, the less likely it is that any will intervene (Latane and Nida 1961, 309), unless they perceive it as particularly dangerous (Fischer et al. 2006). Many other variables have been shown to influence the willingness of bystanders to intervene, including 'in-group' and 'out-group' membership, and various characteristics of the victim, bystander and situation.

The role of the bystander has received little attention in workplace bullying research, leading to a call for greater emphasis (Van Heugten 2010). The term bystanders is used to delineate a role which is greater than simply witness or observer, and to imply a choice, or choices, on the part of the individual (Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco 2004). This paper will present a typology of bystanders and demonstrate that they are not just incidental but are integral to workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying research

A search of the workplace literature suggests that there has not often been a focus on bystanders, although there is reference to the adverse outcomes for these people (e.g. Knott et al. 2009, 61). Ólafsson and Jóhannsdóttir (2004, 325) found that of 398 store, office and bank workers surveyed, nearly 30% reported witnessing bullying, and 6.5% had witnessed this 2–3 times per month or more. Rayner, Hoel and Cooper (2002, 58) refer to the 'ripple effect' of bullying, whereby 22% of respondents reported leaving their jobs due to the workplace climate associated with bullying, while 70% reported experiencing stress as witnesses to bullying incidents. This suggests bullying distresses witnesses as well as the parties directly involved.

Salin (2011, 3) identifies costs to an organisation from reduced job satisfaction and health effects on bystanders. Johnson (2009, 38) presents evidence of nurses becoming socialised into a culture of bullying and ultimately leaving the profession. In a study of social workers Van Heugten (2010, 7) found 'professional and social isolation [of the victim] increased as colleagues became bystanders who averted their eyes to avoid being drawn into conflict', and refers to a spiralling effect whereby victims become more generally excluded from social activities, even minor ones such as tea-room conversations. She observed that victims often did not see bystanders as in league with the bully, but were concerned that they did not speak out or support them. Lewis and Orford (2005, 41) report the converse perception of bystanders' inaction as condoning or supporting bullying.

Lewis and Orford examined social relationships among professional women subject to bullying. Noting the moderating effect of social support widely reported in the organisational behaviour literature, they observed that 'colleagues at best gave covert and passive support' (2005, 38). This reluctance to openly support victims was seen as an indication of vulnerability. As well, however, withdrawing from the victim and passing on confidences were acknowledged to effectively facilitate the bully's actions and to further isolate the victim. Avoidance is not a simple answer to the bystander's dilemma.

Studies of bullying in schools

The workplace bullying literature often draws on research on bullying in schools, recognising overlaps between these phenomena. Rigby (2001, 5) argues that:

as in the school yard, we see people struggling against the odds: avoiding or escaping when they can; asserting themselves when they dare; pretending they don't care, when they do; looking for help where it is hard to find; or pathetically trying to distract the bully when all else fails.

While there are important differences between school and workplace bullying, these commonalities suggest organisational bystander research can benefit from school studies. As Rigby (2001, 8) notes: 'workplace management would do well to keep an eye on what some of the more progressive schools are doing'.

The school bullying literature presents a number of typologies of bystander roles. Commonly cited are Salmivalli's (1999) categories of assistants, reinforcers, outsiders and defenders, and Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco's (2004) seven roles: bully bystander, puppet-master, victim bystander, avoidant bystander, abdicating bystander, sham bystander and helpful bystander.

This literature outlines significant mental health outcomes for those who observe bullying, including anxiety and paranoia. School children asked to recall a time when they witnessed repeated abuse were found to share psychological arousal, repression of empathy, desensitisation to negative behaviours, and feelings of isolation, hopelessness and ineffectiveness (Janson et al. 2009). Their level of distress was found to be higher than that of police officers and fire fighters. Rivers et al. (2009, 220) suggest that witnesses may assume that they too will be bullied and experience increased interpersonal sensitivity, and that they may also experience cognitive dissonance when they cannot bring themselves to act.

This broadening perspective on bullying prompted Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2004, 220) to consider it not as a dyadic interaction but in 'triadic terms, as an interactive effect between bully, victim and bystander, in which the responses of each directly affect the harmfulness of the outcome'. The school literature reports that bullying often occurs in the context of such group phenomena as social contagion, diffusion of responsibility, and lowering of inhibitions, meaning peer-group settings can contribute to bullying interactions (e.g. Salmivalli and Voeten 2004). This extension beyond the dyadic leads to a wider social context in which bystanders can be both influencer and recipients of bullying.

Salmivalli et al. (1996) identified six roles taken on by children in bullying events, four describing bystanders, witnesses or observers: reinforcer, assistant, defender and outsider. Oh and Hazler (2009) observe that bystanders, often the majority of actors in a bullying situation, can take on a variety of roles which may include changing the power dynamics. Relationships between bystander and bully or victim affected this response, such that 'bystanders' closeness to the bully predicted negative behaviour such as assisting or reinforcing bullying' (306). These effects, found in the research on children, are likely to occur in workplace bullying.

A typology of bystander roles

The typology below draws on earlier typologies from the school literature (e.g. Salmivalli 1999; Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco 2004) and other sources. Bystanders are not always detached third parties, but are often involved on the side of bully or victim, either actively or passively. We describe these behaviours on a continuum, from active involvement, for example, encouraging or influencing the bully's actions, to passive involvement, where the bystander comes to feel or act as a fellow victim. At the two extremes, the bystander is identified with the bully or victim; in between lie varying degrees of identification with either position. As well, these roles may be undertaken actively or passively – for example, through the avoidance of speaking out. The labels applied to each 'type' are seen as an aid not only to researchers but also to organisational training and education programs. We anticipate that educating organisational members on the nature of bystanders – along with other aspects of the bullying event – will help reduce or minimise bullying, as discussed later.

Table 1 identifies these bystander roles and equates them to the types identified by Salmivalli (1999) and by Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2004).

The continuum in Table 1 varies between what appear to be the weakest and strongest positions in a bullying event; a summary that hides variations between active and passive bystanders, and between positive or negative influences on them. It is important to note that bystanders may move between categories as their understanding of the situation increases: the categories describe roles or behaviours not fixed personality types.

Below, each role is discussed using evidence from two recent studies. The first was an extensive mixed method study. Stories were collected as part of surveys and interviews conducted with victims, alleged perpetrators and third parties including bystanders in a

Table 1 Typology of bystanders

Label	Description	Salmivalli (1999)	Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco (2004)
Instigating Bystander	Sets up actions of bully; initiator, creates situation		Bully (aggressive) bystander; Puppet-master
Manipulating Bystander	Seeks to influence actions of bully, takes advantage of existing situation		Bully (aggressive) bystander; Puppet-master
Collaborating Bystander	Actively joins in, assists bully	Assistant	Bully (aggressive) bystander
Facilitating Bystander	Provides audience (fine line to joining in), can be inadvertent	Reinforce	Bully (aggressive) bystander
Abdicating Bystander	Silently allows bullying to continue by doing nothing despite being in position to do so		Abdicating bystander
Avoiding Bystander	Walks away	Outsider	Avoidant bystander; Abdicating bystander
Intervening Bystander	Takes action to halt bullying or prevent retaliation		
Defusing Bystander	Involves themselves in preventing escalation of the situation		
Defending Bystander	Stands up for victim	Defender	Helpful (altruistic) bystander
Empathising Bystander	Identifies with the victim – says/does nothing		Avoidant bystander
Sympathising Bystander	Identifies with the victim – remains silent for fear of becoming target, offers comfort and support in private		Helpful (altruistic) bystander
Succumbing Bystander	Becomes fellow victim		Victim (passive) bystander
Submitting Bystander	Substitute victim		

sample of eleven Australian public service organisations (Omari 2007). The importance of the bystander role was identified as part of a range of findings. The second study collected stories in a survey of members of a professional association. The data collected for this study has, to date, only been published in the technical report prepared for the industry partner

(Omari 2010). Further valuable evidence of the role of bystanders emerged during analysis. The qualitative data used for this paper was drawn from the stories collected for both studies.

The types

The **Instigating Bystander** helps establish the situation and sets up the bully's actions. This type is not a 'bystander' in the literal sense, but rather does not appear to observers as the primary or most visible source of aggression as his/her involvement is largely covert. The Instigator has been called a 'puppet-master' (Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco 2004), one who feeds a more overtly aggressive colleague with information or advice and directs their behaviour towards the victim. An example is the person who advises an angry but passive colleague how to 'take a stance' against a third person in future meetings to put the target 'in their place': 'Don't forget to remind her that last time her presentation to that company was a failure because she left the brochures in the car'. Other forms of Instigating Bystander include the colleague who deliberately misinforms a target *or* bully, or the one who spreads rumours or malicious gossip about either, to cause the bully to act aggressively (Crothers, Lipinski and Minutolo 2009). One victim specifically recounted being 'gossiped about in public' with the intent of provoking the bully (Omari 2010).

The **Manipulating Bystander** is less overt in siding with the bully. Rather than suggesting the latter use particular actions or words, the Manipulating Bystander creates situations in which the bully and the victim come into conflict, perhaps unknowingly. A manipulator may see a victim or bully enter a room and then suggest the other party, unaware of this, follow. A manipulator may supply, withhold or distort information about the victim to incite the bully. An example of this is where one worker drew another into his actions:

One man [alleged bully] would 'cc' me in emails to some he was struggling to threaten or deal with. So instead [of handling the situation himself] he would include me in the problem to try to get the outcome he wanted [because he knew there were already tensions between me and the managers in the area]. (Omari 2010)

The Instigating Bystander is distinct from the Manipulating Bystander in that the former creates the situation, but the latter takes advantage of one which already exists.

The **Collaborating Bystander** is more overt, expressing derision or aggression publicly or through e-mails to back up the bully's position. A Collaborating Bystander might fall silent, with the bully, when the victim walks by, or laugh with the bully at the latter's aggressive remarks. The collaborator may be motivated by a number of things: to look good in the bully's eyes; to avoid becoming a victim him or herself; or out of shared dislike for the victim or his or her position, values and friends. One of Omari's (2007, 119) respondents reported:

The female officer made an aggressive general comment that the officer initiated part-timers [sic] only work Sundays [implying not at all]. Another female asked me when I was going full-time as my children were now old enough. Shows how little she understands, my middle child with a disability needs appointments or therapy.

In this situation the respondent was reporting being victimised over her family situation, and the need for family-friendly work shifts.

The **Facilitating Bystander** also joins in the event, but to a lesser degree than the collaborator. Facilitators may appear less aware of how their behaviour constitutes bullying, for example justifying it as joining in ‘normal’ office banter or gossip and being unaware of its real impact on the victim.

Facilitators may also work by inaction, passively accepting the bully’s hostility or lack of support towards a victim (Coynes, Craig and Smith-Lee Chong 2004). In Omari’s (2007, 98) data a temporary, more junior member of an executive group, after waiting anxiously to speak in a meeting, was spoken over by another member. The respondent reported the groups’ inaction as worse than the bullying itself:

I was left sitting open-mouthed, feeling embarrassed and angry – angry that I had been spoken over and (probably) more angry that not one of the other executives in the room acknowledged the incident and afforded me the opportunity to say what I wanted to. In a way, although it was only one person that was responsible for the incident I felt that the other executives in the room were guilty by association because not one of them seemed prepared to come to my rescue or even to acknowledge the incident.

The **Abdicating Bystander** facilitates bullying behaviour by ignoring it. This is most serious when the abdicator has a managerial responsibility to take action. An abdicator may rationalise this stance, for example, as not pushing the bullying behaviour underground. This type of bystander may feel inadequate to the task of managing the bully or supporting the victim, possibly as a result of the fear of loss of personal or referent power. One respondent stated: ‘In my experience the managers ... are generally primarily concerned with keeping the senior staff happy and new junior staff as largely expendable’ (Omari 2010), implying that they do not intervene even when they could.

The **Avoiding Bystander** sees the impact on the victim but avoids taking action. Avoiders, for example, avoid conversations where they might feel others expect them to speak out; absent themselves from situations where the bully and the victim may interact; or attempt to avoid escalation of a beginning conflict. Avoidance is an attempt to protect the bystander at the expense of the victim. The avoider, like the abdicator, ignores the event but differs in not having organisational authority to intervene. One respondent reported avoidance in these words: ‘The other team members are sheep – too scared to speak up and keep a low profile in case they are targeted’ (Omari 2007, 95).

Unlike the abdicator and the avoider, the **Intervening Bystander** steps in to halt the event or to prevent further conflict. A manager may warn the bully or counsel the victim, or a colleague may alert a manager or use his or her personal or referent power.

Among Omari’s (2010) professionals, one victim’s manager acted as an Intervening Bystander:

I complained to HR about his [the bully’s] behaviour and I also approached my [boss] who handled the situation excellently ... [my boss] also follows up with me on a regular basis to ensure no other incidents have happened.

The **Defusing Bystander** lacks positional authority or chooses not to use it, seeking to resolve the conflict with skilful negotiation and communication. A trusted colleague having the ear of both parties, or someone with strong self-esteem and relationship skills, may take this path. A colleague may alert the bully that the behaviour might be seen as offensive, or counsel a victim to either take the issue less seriously, or change their reaction to the bully.

A perceived bully in Omari's (2007, 132) public service data reported:

There was this single, unattractive woman with a shocking personality who prior to my arrival was competitive at the manager level ... She was furious and took her grievances [about my management of her poor performance] to the manager and said I was bullying her. The [manager] promptly came to me and asked me to cut [the officer] some slack because (and I quote) 'you have a husband, a personality and a life – poor xxx has nothing and never will have'.

Note that the alleged perpetrator may not have changed her opinion of the other party, but did change her behaviour based on the manager's counsel. Defusing a potential situation is a skilled act. In the above example, this counsel has merely taken some of the heat out of the situation, rather than resolving it by proactive intervention.

Defending Bystanders speak up, defending the victim against the bully by challenging the latter's behaviour, commenting in meetings or when corridor humour goes too far. Unlike the Defusing Bystander, the defender takes sides with the victim. Examples include the colleague who says 'hey guys that's enough' when a noisy lunch-room crowd taunts a new junior over a mistake. One of Omari's (2007, 127) perceived bullies reported receiving defending feedback from bystanders:

I pressured that person to change the place they work ... to come and work in my section ... I was putting a lot of pressure on her. And I was causing her a lot of distress ... she told me ... other people told me.

The advice of the 'other people' had an impact on the manager's thinking and behaviour.

Empathising Bystanders also take the victim's side emotionally but avoid intervening. They listen empathically to the victim's complaints or concerns without offering assistance, and will not intervene against the bully or alert a manager. The empathiser may report their feelings for the victim to family members or to staff who are also unlikely to take any action. Such action may be an attempt to alleviate guilt at not intervening. Alternatively, the empathiser may avoid expressing empathy to others or the victim. In keeping their feelings private, the empathiser may continue to be affected long after the victim has moved on, as one of Omari's (2007, 184) respondents observed: 'others witnessed the assault and are still affected by it years later'. Empathising Bystanders may need to be counselled with respect to their feelings about bullying situations.

The **Sympathising Bystander** goes a step beyond the empathiser in offering sympathy and practical support to the victim, to reduce the trauma or avoid its repetition. While victims can rely on Sympathising Bystanders only insofar as they trust them, such support is usually highly valued:

I had some very, very supportive people around me who were a tower of strength really and just were wonderful. If I hadn't had those people I don't know how at the end of two years I might have come out feeling. (Omari 2007, 148)

Empathisers and sympathisers, however, try to avoid being drawn into the conflict, perhaps fearing becoming a victim. They may even feel gratitude at not being a target, covering up guilt at not intervening.

The **Succumbing Bystander** becomes a fellow victim, for example as a result of unsuccessfully publicly defending or sympathising with the victim. This bystander becomes grouped with the victim. For example, in a meeting, aggression towards the proponent of a new idea may become directed at supporters of the idea. These supporters may eventually display the same symptoms as the victim, such as feeling stressed or withdrawing. One professional reported such a 'ripple' effect: 'because everyone is chronically depressed. 5 of the 8 [employees] are on antidepressants solely due to the work environment ... both my psychiatrist and psychologist described the work environment as "extremely toxic"' (Omari 2010, 20). This emotional contagion (Harvey, Treadway and Heames 2007) can affect the entire workplace.

Going further, the **Submitting Bystander** offers him or herself as a target, an alternative victim for the bully's attention. In Omari's (2010) study, one respondent decided not to engage in the bullying activities of colleagues, drawing the bullies' attention away from their previous target, a personal assistant (PA): 'their actions included hiding mail belonging to my [work], the silent treatment, inviting everyone out except me and the new PA'. The respondent reported feeling he or she was now a substitute victim, receiving 'nasty comments and trying to make me look stupid, "talking down" to me etc.' The Succumbing Bystander, through their own emotional response, and the Submitting Bystander, through actually becoming a victim, as well as – to a lesser extent – the Empathising and the Sympathising Bystander, may experience negative consequences similar to those of a direct victim.

Other studies have described bystanders in terms related to the categories above. Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco's (2004) 'sham bystander' is not responding authentically to a dispute, but taking sides for personal or political reasons. This person might be an instigator, setting up the actions of the bully while pretending not to be involved, or an empathiser avoiding full expression of feelings that might lead to intervention. Exploring these underlying motives is beyond the focus of this paper on the behaviours of bystanders.

The roles outlined in this typology do not stand alone. Individual bystanders can: take on more than one role at a time; take on different roles in different circumstances; and move between roles as the course of a series of bullying events or issues evolves. An example of this might be the bystander who feels empathy for the victim, reaches a point where he/she intervenes or defends, and then moves into the Submitting Bystander role, becoming a new victim. Similarly, the Intervening Bystander may also be simultaneously intervener, defender and sympathiser, offering help and support in more than one way to the victim.

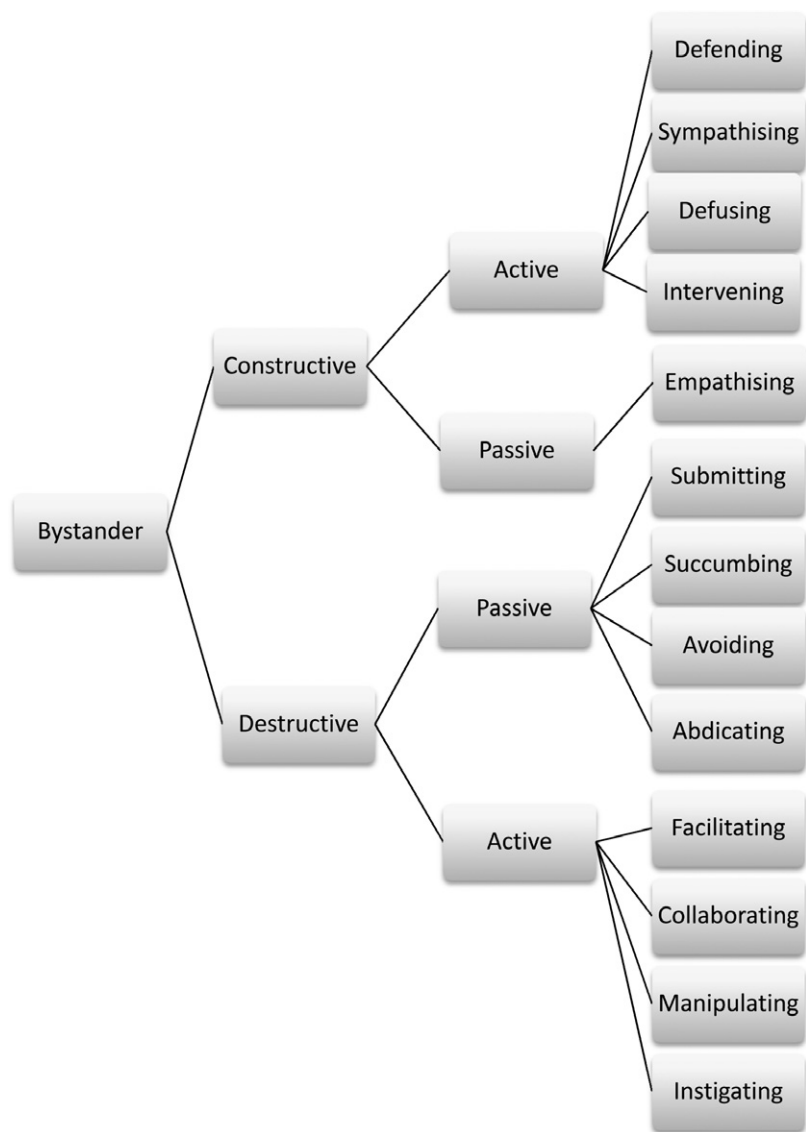


Figure 1 Categorisation of bystander types

Categorising bystander roles

Figure 1 clusters the bystander roles described according to whether they are *active* or *passive*, and *constructive* or *destructive*.

Some roles have positive outcomes for the victim and may therefore help reduce bullying or its impacts in organisations, while others are negative. Whether the role is active or passive contributes to the extent to which the role may lead to positive outcomes.

Just as victims have been shown to invite, escalate or deflect bullying behaviours (e.g. Omari 2007; Zapf and Einarsen 2011), a bully's motivation and mental state has been shown to contribute to his or her propensity to engage in bullying (e.g. Hoel and Cooper 2001; Zapf and Einarsen 2011). The roles and actions or inactions of bystanders, whether active or inactive, will contribute to the escalation or diminution of bullying. From this perspective, bystanders are not *just* bystanders but participants. Organisations should be encouraged to see bullying as more than an interaction between bully and target. Those who witness the event, and even those who merely hear about it later, may consciously or unconsciously take sides, or may encourage future bullying by passively ignoring it. Education of employees on their power and responsibilities as bystanders would therefore be one aspect of creating a culture or climate that diminishes bullying.

Making bystander responses effective: the educational value of a typology

Almost everyone has witnessed difficult interactions in the workplace; some have walked away with a sigh of relief rather than tackle an uncomfortable situation with potential to escalate into dysfunctional conflict. There are many underlying reasons: a deliberate choice not to get involved in others' business, a conflict-avoidant style, an inability to see the potential harm, and limited emotional intelligence and hence ability to respond to conflict, are some. What *should* bystanders do? Some broad possibilities are described in the literature. For Rayner, Hoel and Cooper (2002) 'it is imperative that witnesses understand and undertake their responsibility to let others know what is going on, partly because it will be difficult for targets to do so' (141) but caution that 'supporters will be of little help to the target if they also become a target' (157). Lewis and Sheehan (2003, 6–7) caution that 'we must not forget other component elements in the bullying experience, namely bystanders ... including consideration of the role they play in the construction of different realities of bullying'. Thus potential responses include intervening on behalf of targets, keeping safe from and not assisting the bully, informing others, and remaining sensitive to how stories lead to the construction of organisational realities.

The possibilities for reducing bullying through bystander education can be seen in studies of bullying in schools. Oh and Hazler (2009, 304) observe that bystanders' 'roles may range from assisting bullies to defending victims ... [and] have the potential to change power dynamics in bullying and therefore may be able to decrease school bullying'. Gini et al. (2008) found that adolescent bystanders with high levels of self-efficacy are more able to actively help or defend others where those with lower self-efficacy tend to be passive bystanders. Gini et al. (2008, 102) suggest that training observers to 'take action against bullying in effective ways, while ensuring their own safety, may help passive bystanders to "become" active defenders'. Such programs teach students to become assertive, resist pressure to join in group bullying, and to take on a peer-helper role to assist. School programs can be adapted for workplaces. The typology above may be an important tool for understanding bystanders' possible responses, and inviting consideration of the consequences as

active or passive and positive or negative. Awareness-raising would aim to help bystanders make conscious choices about their responses.

How can awareness-raising help?

There is evidence of witnesses to bullying who appear unaware of their potential role in influencing the outcome. One reported that bullying 'is unpleasant to watch and listen to and very much ignored by [senior management] who just don't want to know and let the staff sort it out for themselves' (Omari 2010). Sometimes witnesses recognise their potential role but see themselves as lacking effective strategies in the face of broader forces:

As a senior [staff member] I had opportunities to intervene and did so in individual cases. Rarely however did this make a difference in the long term due to management behaviour and organisational culture due, I believe, to the entrenched power differential between management and staff.

What can be done to address the organisational issues that limit bystanders' willingness to become involved?

Awareness-raising and education programs are common strategies in this context. Studies of training in the equal opportunity and discrimination area show positive effects on awareness. Hirsh and Kmec (2009) found hospitals that trained managers received fewer lawsuits over manager actions, because managers were better informed about the implications of their actions, and therefore exercised better judgment. In addition, those training employees received more complaints due to increased awareness among staff about their rights.

Research has led to programs in schools to educate third parties, including parents, teachers and friends/peers who are not present when bullying events take place (e.g. Bullying. No way! 2011). The cyber-bullying literature similarly shows such evidence, albeit preliminary, that education and awareness-raising can help with empowering victims although this area of research may be at an earlier stage of development (Brown, Jackson and Cassidy 2006; Campbell 2005).

Looking beyond training and awareness programs, the nursing literature describes organisational culture and climate as big influences on bystanders. This literature suggests managers and leaders set appropriate cultural values to stop nurses becoming accustomed to a climate of bullying and developing norms which perpetuate it. Cleary et al. (2009) advocate a 'zero tolerance approach' where leaders set the tone for a respectful work environment. Hutchinson (2009, 153) advocates a 'restorative' organisational culture that 'seeks to foster active responsibility for addressing bullying behaviours'.

Training, awareness and culture change programs should be adapted to organisational needs, and a typology of bystander behaviours could be used in conjunction with other tools, including discussions of the Genovese effect as part of a broader campaign. Positive roles such as intervening and defusing could be highlighted, along with training in relevant skills and discussion of the dangers of negative roles.

Some caveats should be placed on this use of our typology. First, classifying a behaviour as bullying when the target does not may create difficulty for that person, requiring further intervention (e.g. counselling) to unravel the conflicting evaluations. Second, it is useful to acknowledge that low levels of workplace aggression – as seen in competition and rivalry – have a role in creating social relationships. Team-building, for example, may include an ‘us vs. them’ perspective. The line between acceptable and unacceptable uses of aggression is a contested and socially constructed one, needing careful exploration to avoid simplistic use of the term ‘bullying’. Third, as Ferris (2004, 393) notes, ‘not every organisational representative response is helpful when employees request help for bullying experiences’ and cautioned that those trained and charged with responsibility need to be cautious in their advice to employees. The mere publication of a policy and promulgation of an awareness-raising program is insufficient. Organisations and individuals must cultivate responsibility and caution in bystanders who will have varying degrees of understanding of, and respect for, the subtleties of human relationships and psychological well-being.

The development of an awareness-raising program based on a bystander typology is by itself not sufficient: the organisational context, including its climate and culture, also need to be addressed. Culture sets norms for behaviour, as do formal and informal group memberships. Role modelling by organisational leaders sets and reinforces these norms. As Hoel, Faragher and Cooper (2004, 384) suggest, values inherent in culture and social networks can reinforce negative behaviours, and increase employees’ acceptance of them through socialisation and self-selection. Thus, different standards for what constitutes bullying spread within different units, organisations, industries, and national cultures. These differences must be acknowledged as leaders and employees may move between such units.

Conclusion

Bullying usually involves not just a bully and a target but a range of third-party bystanders. Effective intervention and prevention strategies should recognise bystanders’ multiple roles. Development and promotion of anti-bullying policies recognising the role of bystanders would be a first step. Education about bystanders’ rights, responsibilities and roles could then follow. A clear understanding of the varying nature of bystander roles would help individuals in responding to emotionally difficult and often cognitively complex situations. Awareness-raising is central to this understanding.

Programs in schools and hospitals provide precedents from which to create organisational interventions to enhance employees’ confidence and efficacy in responding appropriately to bullying. The typology described above reflects the many roles bystanders take, actively or passively, with both positive and negative consequences. This typology presents a step forward for researchers’ and managers’ understanding of the little-discussed role of bystanders in the workplace. As a framework for educating employees about the effects of their response, or non-response, it offers a useful step towards the development of more comprehensive awareness-raising programs in business organisations. With respect to

research, this typology offers a solid foundation for exploration and refinement. Awareness-raising and research should be developed simultaneously as a reciprocal and iterative process.

Note

* The 2010 study referred to in this paper was supported by a joint industry collaborative project funded by a professional association in Western Australia and the Faculty of Business & Law at Edith Cowan University. The authors would like to thank the two reviewers who provided constructive comments on the draft.

Megan Paull (PhD, Edith Cowan Univ., WA) is a senior lecturer with eighteen years experience in universities, teaching and researching in areas of human resource management, organisational behaviour and the not-for-profit sector. She is currently associate dean learning and teaching at Murdoch Business School, where she has been since 2009.

Maryam Omari (PhD, Edith Cowan Univ., WA) is an associate professor and program director MBA and graduate studies in the Faculty of Business & Law at Edith Cowan University (ECU). Prior to this role, she was the associate dean international, director of undergraduate studies and HRM course coordinator at ECU. Her research interests lie in workplace bullying, quality of work–life issues, flexible work practices and international HRM.

Peter Standen (PhD, Univ. of WA) is an associate professor in the School of Management at Edith Cowan University. He has a diverse background in applied and theoretical research in psychology and management and teaches research methods and leadership. His current research interests include authentic leadership, leadership development and workplace bullying.

References

- Bowie V (2002) Defining violence at work: A new typology. In M Gill, B Fisher and V Bowie (eds) *Violence at work: Causes, patterns and prevention*, 1–20. Willan Publishing, Cullompton, UK.
- Brown K, M Jackson and W Cassidy (2006) Cyber-bullying: Developing policy to direct responses that are equitable and effective in addressing this special form of bullying. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* 57, 1–35. http://umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/pdf_files/brown.jackson.cassidy.pdf
- Bullying. No way! (2011) [on-line campaign]. <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au>
- Campbell M (2005) Cyber bullying: An old problem in a new guise? *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 15(1), 68–76.
- Cleary M, GE Hunt, G Walter and M Robertson (2009) Dealing with bullying in the workplace: Toward zero tolerance. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing* 47(12), 34–41.
- Coyne I, J Craig and P Smith-Lee Chong (2004) Workplace bullying in a group context. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 32(3), 301–317.
- Crothers L, J Lipinski and MC Minutolo (2009) Cliques, rumours, and gossip by the water cooler: Female bullying in the workplace. *Psychologist-Manager Journal* 12(2), 97–110.

- Einarsen S, H Hoel, D Zapf and CL Cooper (2011) The concept of bullying and harassment at work: The European tradition. In S Einarsen, H Hoel, D Zapf and CL Cooper (eds) *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research and practice*, 2nd edn, 3–40. CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group, Boca Raton, FL.
- Ferris P (2004) A preliminary typology of organisational response to allegations of workplace bullying: See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 32(3), 389–395.
- Fischer P, T Greitemeyer, F Pollozek and D Frey (2006) The unresponsive bystander: Are bystanders more responsive in dangerous emergencies? *European Journal of Social Psychology* 36, 267–278.
- Gini G, P Albeiro, B Benelli and G Altoe (2008) Determinants of adolescents active defending and passive bystanding behaviour in bullying. *Journal of Adolescence* 31, 93–105.
- Harvey M, DC Treadway and JT Heames (2007) The occurrence of bullying in global organisations: A model and issues associated with social/emotional contagion. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 37(11), 2576–2599.
- Hershcovis MS and J Barling (2010) Towards a multi-foci approach to workplace aggression: A meta-analytic review of outcomes from different perpetrators. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 31, 24–44.
- Hirsh E and J Kmec (2009) Human resource structures: Reducing discrimination or raising rights awareness? *Industrial Relations* 48(3), 512–532.
- Hoel H and CL Cooper (2001) Origins of bullying: Theoretical frameworks for explaining workplace bullying. In N Tehrani (ed) *Building a culture of respect: Managing bullying at work*, 3–20. Taylor and Francis, London.
- Hoel H, B Faragher and CL Cooper (2004) Bullying is detrimental to health, but all bullying behaviours are not necessarily equally damaging. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 32(3), 367–387.
- Hutchinson M (2009) Restorative approaches to workplace bullying: Educating nurses towards shared responsibility. *Contemporary Nurse* 32(1–2), 147–155.
- Janson GR, JV Carney, RJ Hazler and I Oh (2009) Bystanders' reactions to witnessing repetitive abuse experiences. *Journal of Counselling and Development* 87(3), 319–326.
- Johnson SL (2009) International perspectives on workplace bullying among nurses: A review. *International Nursing Review* 56(1), 34–40.
- Knott V, T Mellington, M Dollard and A Winfield (2009) The experience of workplace bullying by Australian correctional service officers. *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety – Australia and New Zealand* 25(1), 51–65.
- Latane B and S Nida (1981) Ten years of research on group size and helping. *Psychological Bulletin* 89, 308–324.
- Lewis D and M Sheehan (2003) Introduction: Workplace bullying: Theoretical and practical approaches to a management challenge. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making* 4(1), 1–10.
- Lewis SE and J Orford (2005) Women's experiences of workplace bullying: Changes in social relationships. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 15, 29–47.
- Namie G and P Lutgen-Sandvik (2010) Active and passive accomplices: The communal character of workplace bullying. *International Journal of Communication* 4, 343–373.
- Oh I and RJ Hazler (2009) Contributions of personal and situational factors to bystanders' reactions to school bullying. *School Psychology International* 30(3), 291–310.

- Ólafsson R and HL Jóhannsdóttir (2004) Coping with bullying in the workplace: The effect of gender, age and type of bullying. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 32(3), 319–333.
- Omari M (2007) Towards dignity and respect: An exploration of the nature, causes and consequences of workplace bullying. VDM Verlag Dr Müller.
- Omari M (2010) Towards dignity and respect at work: An exploration of work behaviours in a professional environment. Technical report prepared for the industry partner, a professional association in Western Australia.
- Rayner C and H Hoel (1997) A summary review of literature relating to workplace bullying. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 7(3), 181–192.
- Rayner C, H Hoel and C Cooper (2002) *Workplace bullying. What we know, who is to blame, and what can we do?* Taylor and Francis, London.
- Rigby K (2001) Bullying in schools and in the workplace. In P McCarthy, J Rylance, R Bennett and H Zimmermann (eds) *Bullying from backyard to boardroom*, 2nd edn, 1–22 (ch. 1). The Federation Press, Sydney.
- Rivers I, VP Poteat, N Noret and N Ashurst (2009) Observing bullying at school: The mental health implications of witness status. *School Psychology Quarterly* 24(4), 211–223.
- Salin D (2011) The significance of gender for third parties' perceptions of negative interpersonal behaviour: Labelling and explaining negative acts. *Gender, Work and Organization* 18(6), 571–591. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2009.00465.x
- Salmivalli C (1999) Participant role approach to school bullying: Implications for intervention. *Journal of Adolescence* 22, 453–459.
- Salmivalli C, K Lagerspetz, K Bjorkvist, K Osterman and A Kaukianien (1996) Bullying as a group process: Participant roles and their relations to social status within a group. *Aggressive Behaviour* 22, 1–15.
- Salmivalli C and M Voeten (2004) Connections between attitudes, group norms and behaviours associated with bullying in schools. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 28, 246–258.
- Timo N, L Fulop and A Ruthjersen (2004) Crisis? What crisis? Management practices and internal violence and workplace bullying in aged care in Australia. *Research and practice in Human Resource Management* 12(2), 35–53.
- Twemlow SW, P Fonagy and FC Sacco (2004) The role of the bystander in the social architecture of bullying and violence in schools and communities. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1036, 215–232.
- Van Heugten K (2010) Bullying of social workers: Outcomes of a grounded study into impacts and interventions. *British Journal of Social Work* 40(2), 638–655.
- Zapf D and S Einarsen (2011) Individual antecedents of bullying: Victims and perpetrators. In S Einarsen, H Hoel, D Zapf and CL Cooper (eds) *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research and practice*, 2nd edn, 177–200. CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group, Boca Raton, FL.