

Swiss Journal of Psychology

Helping Behaviors from Bystanders in response to Workplace Bullying.

--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	SJP-D-15-00029R3
Full Title:	Helping Behaviors from Bystanders in response to Workplace Bullying.
Short Title:	BYSTANDERS BEHAVIORS AND WORKPLACE BULLYING
Article Type:	Regular Article
Keywords:	Psychological harassment; work; witness; self-efficacy; colleague; management
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Manuscript Region of Origin:	BELGIUM
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Helping Behaviors from Bystanders in Response to Workplace Bullying

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This article does not exactly replicate the final version published in the journal Swiss Journal of Psychology. It is not a copy of the original published article and is not suitable for citation.

Abstract

This research examines the role of colleagues in workplace bullying. While colleagues could often intervene to support the victim or stop the situation, passive behaviors and non-intervention are more frequent. The bystander effect highlighted by Latané and Darley (1970) has been studied in the context of school bullying and sexual harassment, but only rarely in the context of workplace bullying. We tested the impact of the belief in a just world for others, self-efficacy, perceived severity, and causal attribution as determinants of three types of bystander helping behaviors. We used a vignette describing a vertically descending workplace bullying case in an online questionnaire survey, completed by 194 workers. The results showed that low self-efficacy was associated with non-intervention, perceived severity mainly determined public helping behaviors, and both internal and external causal attributions contributed to explain both emotional and public support for the harassed colleague. The results highlight the importance of training to increase awareness and recognition of bullying phenomena among colleagues.

Keywords: Psychological harassment, work, colleague, intervention, severity, management

Workplace bullying

Workplace bullying remains a major problem in the labor market. Its incidence is frequent (Niedhammer et al., 2013) and its consequences for the victim are often serious, even tragic (Hogh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2011). While colleagues could often intervene to support the victim or stop the situation, passive behaviors and non-intervention seem more frequent (Desrumaux, 2011).

Seminal research about witnesses' role by Latané and Darley (1970) has recently been adapted to explain the behaviors of bystanders witnessing bullying at school (Thornberg et al., 2012), and sexual harassment at work (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). Little—and mainly qualitative—research has been carried out in contrast to investigate the issue of bystanders witnessing bullying at work (Bloch, 2010; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011). Mulder, Pouwelse, Lodewijckx, and Bolman (2013) have for example shown that bystanders have the potential power to change the dynamics of bullying at work and to decrease it. Some scholars have speculated about the role of witnesses in case of workplace bullying (Bilheran, 2009; Desrumaux, 2011; Grebot, 2007; Leymann, 1996). Others conducted studies aiming to understand various determinants of witnesses' helping behaviors (Desrumaux & De Chacus, 2007; Desrumaux, Ntsame Sima, & Leroy, 2012; Desrumaux, Machado, Przygodzki-Lionet, & Lourel, 2015). However, taking into account different kinds of witnesses' helping behaviors has not been achieved in research yet. As Paull and colleagues said (Paull, Omari, & Standen, 2012), the role of the bystanders has received only a small part of the research attention that has been paid to workplace bullying.

Hence, this contribution aims to study some determinants of helping or intervention behaviors from bystanders in case of workplace bullying. We focus on bystanders' beliefs and their causal explanations of the situation to predict intervention behaviors characterized by different levels of public involvement.

Bystanders Behaviors and Bullying

Studies about bystanders' behaviors specifically in cases of school bullying are common (Oh & Hazler, 2009; Rigby & Slee, 1991; Salmivalli, 2010; Sharp & Cowie, 2002; Thornberg et al., 2012). They are less common in cases of sexual harassment at work (Benavides-Espinoza & Cunningham, 2010; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009), and an exception in the domain of workplace bullying. Moreover, a majority of them are theoretical or qualitative contributions (Bloch, 2010; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011; Hellemans & Devos, 2011; Paull et al., 2012).

Workplace bullying bystanders play a potentially important role. Paull et al. (2012) distinguish constructive and destructive bystander roles, each subdivided in different passive and active roles. Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly (2005) proposed a very simple and structured typology of bystanders' intervention behaviors in the context of sexual harassment at work. It is based on two levels of two dimensions crossed: high/low immediacy of behavior and high/low level of public involvement. The authors distinguish four types of bystander intervention behavior, from a behavior with a low immediacy and a low involvement as privately advising the victim to avoid the harasser, to an immediate and highly socially involved behavior such as spontaneously telling the harasser to stop the current harassing conduct. Hellemans (2014) developed a scale of bystander helping behaviors based on a content analysis following focus group interviews with

workplace bullying prevention practitioners. Her scale takes into account the contextual and legal aspects of workplace bullying, distinguishing structured interventions (in relation to law or hierarchical system) from informal and less visible helping behaviors as emotional support or also not intervene at all. Although neither the absence of intervention nor emotional support are given as examples in the Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly's typology, they can be considered as behaviors with low immediacy and low public involvement for emotional support and "extremely" low immediacy and low public involvement for no intervention.

Process and Antecedents of Helping Behaviors

According to Latané and Darley (1970), the first step to understand bystander behaviors is to analyze the extent to which people perceive or notice the event itself. Bystanders will intervene if they notice the situation and define it as requiring action (because of its emergency), decide it is their responsibility to act, and decide which action can be taken to help. Research on school bullying (Thornberg et al., 2012) and sexual harassment (Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly, 2005) reveals others factors such as: moral intensity of the incident, harm, self-efficacy, emotional reactions, and social and moral evaluation as main forces driving intervention.

These potential antecedents of intervention behaviors do not have the same conceptual status: some are general resources or general beliefs and others are specific attitudes developed towards the bullying situation. Ajzen (1991) proposed to differentiate general or a-contextual determinants (distal variables) from proximal ones such as attitude towards the behavior to explain a planned behavior. For them a-contextual determinants have poorer explanatory power than proximal ones. We therefore propose to distinguish distal and proximal antecedents of helping behaviors in the context of workplace bullying.

Distal Variables: Bystanders' General Resources and Beliefs

The role of general resources such as empathy, social ability, and emotional ability is often highlighted in research on bystanders' behaviors (Gini, Albeiro, Benelli, & Aloè, 2008; Pozzoli & Gini, 2013; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). However, Pozzoli and Gini (2013) explained that, for school bullying, having good social-cognitive and emotional skills *per se* does not necessarily mean that children will use them to intervene in favor of a bullied mate. The same argument can be assumed for employees. Some authors argue that the high moral sensibility can explain helping behaviors better than other factors. Actually, passive bystanders show comparable levels of moral competence and moral disengagement. Self-efficacy, in contrast, seems to play a central role: bystanders with high levels of self-efficacy are more able to actively help or defend their school peers while those with lower self-efficacy tend to be passive bystanders (Gini et al., 2008; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Pozzoli & Gini, 2013). We expect to observe the same phenomenon among workers.

The link between the belief in a just world (BJW) and bullying has been tested for the first time by Correia and Dalbert (2008). Their results showed that adolescents high in personal BJW were less likely to engage in bullying behavior and this association persisted when controlling for emotional empathy. However defending the victim was unrelated to BJW. Starting from the distinction between belief in a just world for self (BJW-S) versus belief in a just world for others (BJW-O; Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996), Bègue and Bastounis (2003) showed that people high in BJW-O have much more severe attitudes toward criminals and offenders: the high BJW-O resulted in quite discriminant explanations of others' situations because everyone has what he/she deserves. Nevertheless, Correia and

Dalbert (2008) added that without information about a victim's responsibility, there is no reason to expect that observers with a high BJW will react differently to bullying from those with a low BJW. In an ambiguous situation, as is most often the case for bullying at work (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005), we expect that BJW should not be a major determinant of bystanders' intervention behaviors.

Proximal Variables: Perception and Attribution of Responsibility

Perception of the situation and attribution of responsibility are considered as proximal variables to explain behaviors because they are directly linked to the situation. Perceiving and evaluating a threatening situation as requiring action or intervention can vary widely from one observer to another as a function of their perceptions of the situation's severity and the causal explanations associated with it (Phares & Wilson, 1972; Shaver, 1970). Attribution of causality or responsibility has significant repercussion on attitude and behavior towards the judged person; for example, people are more likely to feel sympathetic to a person in an unfortunate situation compared to a person who is not responsible for his or her own situation (Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004). As Kouabenan and colleagues (Kouabenan, 2009; Kouabenan, Medina, Gilibert, & Bouzon, 2001) showed, even if these perceptions and explanations are biased, they will guide bystanders' behaviors.

Some authors focused specifically on determinants of helping behaviors in response to workplace bullying, without any distinction about the nature of helping behaviors (Desrumaux & De Chacus, 2007; Desrumaux et al., 2012; Desrumaux et al., 2015; Mulder et al., 2013). They selected the determinants in relation to Weiner's (Rudolph et al., 2004) attributional perspective. Mulder and colleagues tested victims' perceived responsibility and bystanders' anticipated risk of being victimized themselves as determinants of their helping behaviors towards a victim of workplace

bullying, and the mediating role of sympathy and anger. They found that bystanders who perceived the victim as responsible for the bullying situation appeared to express less helping intention toward this victim. Desrumaux and colleagues (2007, 2012, 2015) tested the effect of situation severity, attribution of responsibility to the harasser, to the harassed, using different scenarios. Their results confirm that the more an act is considered as serious, the more the responsibility of the harasser is high, the more the responsibility of the harassed decreases, and the more helping intention increases. We will test some of these links in our study, distinguishing the nature of intervention behaviors.

Organizational Context: Options, Choice, and Intervention

Sometimes witnesses recognize their potential roles but see themselves as lacking effective strategies when facing broader forces like management attitudes or organizational culture (Paull et al., 2012; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011). Indeed, workplaces are characterized by stress, social norms, and power games (Salin, 2003). Employees have to handle these constraints, standards, and rules knowing that it is a priority for workers to keep their jobs in a strained socio-economic context (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989). Furthermore, Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall (2002) showed in their meta-analysis that job insecurity has detrimental consequences on employees' attitudes. Thus, if bystanders have to determine the most appropriate strategies for reacting to bullying (Pozzoli & Gini, 2013), they may be uncertain about their actions or they may prefer distancing themselves from the bullying situation and decide not to intervene despite their sense of responsibility or personal attitudes. For Pozzoli and Gini, people's social skills and self-efficacy beliefs are crucial in such a case.

To sum up, our hypotheses concern distal and proximal determinants of

intended helping behaviors from bystanders in response to workplace bullying. We further distinguish three forms of bystander intervention in reference to their level of involvement (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005), namely fear of intervention, emotional support, and public support. We suggest that the same antecedents have different weights according to the nature of the intervention behavior. Based on our literature analysis, our hypotheses are:

H1: Fear of intervention is predicted by low self-efficacy, but neither by belief in a just world for others nor by proximal variables (i.e., perceived severity or causal attribution).

H2: Emotional support is predicted by proximal variables in relation to the situation—i.e., by low internal causal attribution (in reference to the victim) and by a high external causal attribution (in reference to the victim)—but also, as a distal variable, by a low level of belief in a just world for others. No relation is expected between emotional support and either perceived severity or self-efficacy.

H3: Public support is predicted by proximal antecedents—i.e., a high level of perceived severity, low internal causal attribution (in reference to the victim) and a high external causal attribution (in reference to the victim)—and also by distal antecedents such as a high level of self-efficacy and a low level of belief in a just world for others.

Method

Participants

The respondents were 194 workers employed in organizations of different size from the tertiary sector in Belgium. 41.8% worked in the private sector and 58.2% in the public sector. Their characteristics were as follows: 43.8% were women

and 56.2% were men; their average age was 40.6 years old. More precisely, 22.7% were less than 30 years old, 20.1% were between 30 and 39 years old, 34.5% between 40 and 49 years old and 22.7% were 50 years old and more. 29.4% had less than five years tenure, 30.4% had between 5 and 15 years tenure, and 40.2% had worked for more than 15 years in their organization. Considering hierarchical levels, 55.7% said they were a member of a team, 24.2% said they were the head of a team, 9.3% said they were the superior of another team leader, and 10.8% said they were out of the hierarchical process (for instance, experts). Finally, 37.1% of the respondents reported that they had been a victim of harassment, 71.1% that someone close to them had been harassed, and 52.6% considered that they had been a bystander of harassment at work.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were contacted via professional and social networks. They gave their written informed consent to participate in the survey before starting to complete the online questionnaire. Data were obtained through self-reported, Likert-type questionnaires containing various scales and a situational vignette that can be interpreted as workplace bullying. The first two scales were presented before the vignette, then the vignette, and finally the scales for evaluating the situation described in the vignette.

Belief in a just world for others (BJW-O) – a distal independent variable. We used the questionnaire of Lipkus et al. (1996). The questionnaire included eight items for evaluation on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Two items examples are “I feel that a person’s efforts are noticed and rewarded” and “I feel that people get what they deserve.” The scale obtains a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$).

Self-efficacy – a distal independent variable. We used the New General Self-Efficacy scale (NGSE) of Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001). The questionnaire contained eight items for evaluation on a 6-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Two item examples are “I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself” and “When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.” The scale obtains a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$).

Vignette – Perception of the situation, causal attributions and helping behaviors were evaluated according to the situational vignette, a written scenario that can be interpreted as vertically downward psychological harassment (see appendices). This scenario describes a situation between Mrs. Young and her superior, Mr. Smith, from the point of view of Mrs. Young. Vertically downward psychological harassment between a man (the superior) and a woman (his subordinate) was chosen to elaborate our vignette because the majority of complainants are women who report being harassed by their (male) boss (Eurofound, 2015). The scenario was presented to an expert in workplace harassment issues who validated it as a harassment situation according to Belgian law given the length and repetition of acts and the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of Ms. Young. Each participant, regardless of gender, read the same scenario.

Perception of the situation – proximal independent variable. We asked a single question about the severity of the situation: “According to you, what about the situation between Mr. Smith and Mrs. Young in this story?” Four levels of severity were proposed from 1 (*a low conflict*) to 4 (*psychological harassment*).

Causal attributions – proximal independent variables. We followed the procedure proposed by Kouabenan, Calatan, Gandit, and Caroly (2011) to measure

causal attributions. We distinguished internal and external causal attributions by using the words “Mrs. Young” for reporting internal attribution, and the words “the management” or “Mr. Smith” for reporting external attribution. Internal causal attributions were evaluated with three items: [Do you think the situation is due to] “inappropriate behavior from Ms. Young,” “bad habits from Mrs. Young,” and “Mrs. Young’s personality” ($\alpha = .78$). External causal attributions were evaluated by four items: [Do you think the situation is due to] “little interest in well-being issues at work by management,” “bad objectives defined by management,” “lack of recognition of work by Mr. Smith,” and “priority given to production by management” ($\alpha = .78$). The items were presented with a 6-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Helping behaviors – dependent variables. We created a questionnaire based on Hellemans’s (2014) work. We use three components of intervention behaviors for their differential levels of involvement from the bystander—in ascending order of involvement:

(1) “Fear of intervention” which was measured with four items: “I would be afraid to intervene in the situation for fear of losing my job,” “I would be afraid to intervene in the situation for fear of making the situation for worse,” “I would be afraid to intervene in the situation for fear of suffering the same treatment from Mr. Smith,” and “I would be afraid to intervene on behalf of Mrs. Young for fear of being frowned upon by Mr. Smith” ($\alpha = .83$);

(2) “Emotional support” toward the victim, which was measured with three items: “I would encourage Mrs. Young to go to the trade union representative or the prevention advisor,” “I would inform Mrs. Young of the existence of a psychologist

in the organization to go to complain,” and “I would advise Mrs. Young to go to the HR management to inform them of the situation” ($\alpha = .80$); and

(3) “Public support” which was measured with five items: “I would help Mrs. Young to gather evidence against Mr. Smith,” “I would speak of what I saw or heard with my colleagues to create a coalition against Mr. Smith,” “I would defend Mrs. Young facing Mr. Smith,” “I would cover up Mrs. Young’s absence if she wants to see the prevention advisor without anyone knowing it,” and “I would make sure not to leave alone Mr. Smith with Mrs. Young” ($\alpha = .70$).

Instructions were as follows: “Now let’s imagine you are a colleague of Mr. Smith and Mrs. Young, you work in the same department, and you do the same job as Mrs. Young. You witness the particular situation existing between them. How do you honestly think would be your behaviors?” Responses were presented with a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*surely not*) to 4 (*yes, surely*).

Results

All the analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics 22 and PROCESS macro for SPSS.

After reading the story, respondents rated the situation’s severity. The analyses showed that respondents had quite differentiated perceptions: 30.93% of respondents considered the situation as bullying, 37.63% as a major conflict, 26.80% as a moderate conflict, and 4.64% as a minor conflict; given the small percentage of respondents in the “minor conflict” category, we merged it with “moderate conflict” for further analysis. The resulting “moderate conflict” category comprised 31.44% of respondents. This pattern of results highlights the difficulty of recognizing and interpreting a situation as workplace bullying, as suggested by Bowes-Sperry and O’Leary-Kelly (2005).

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Emotional support was the behavior with the highest intention of use ($m = 3.06$) and “fear of intervention” was the least-intended one ($m = 1.71$). Concerning public support, the behavior intention with the highest involvement, its score was medium ($m = 2.32$). Table 1 contains also the correlations between variables. Correlations ranged from .04 to .42, indicating there was no problem of collinearity between the variables.

****Table 1 placeholder****

To test the hypotheses concerning distinctive antecedents for the three kinds of helping behavior intentions, we conducted three hierarchical regressions. In step 1, we included gender, tenure, hierarchical position, and the organization’s size as control variables. In step 2, we included all predictors (distal: BJW-O and self-efficacy; proximal: severity, internal attribution, and external attribution; see Table 2).

****Table 2 placeholder****

Findings of step 1 show that no control variable was significantly associated with fear of intervention and public support. Gender and tenure, however, predicted emotional support ($p = .008$): Men had less intention to support emotionally than women. The longer an employee’s tenure, the higher his/her intention to support emotionally.

Second, predictors taken as a whole in step 2 explained a substantial part of the behavioral intentions (R^2), respectively: .15, .25, and .27 for fear of intervention, emotional support, and public support.

Third, the pattern of results was quite different between, on the one hand, fear of intervention and, on the other hand, emotional support and public support. No intervention was indeed the only behavioral intention that was explained by a distal

variable: Low self-efficacy increased fear to intervene. This result is very important because it shows the effect of a witness' personal resources on his or her (non)-intervention in cases of workplace bullying. However, we did not find an effect of BJW- O, which is consistent with Correia and Dalbert's (2008) propositions suggesting that it is difficult for respondents to identify a victim without doubt when there are multiple ways to qualify the situation. Fear of intervention is also explained by external causal attribution: the more Mrs. Young's situation is seen as due to management (external attribution), the less there is fear to intervene. At least two interpretations of this result are possible. First, knowing the instructions given to respondents indicated "you are a colleague, you do the same job as Mrs. Young," we can argue that the respondents believing that managerial behaviors could also affect them (external attribution), are less afraid to intervene in the situation because of solidarity or social identity (Kouabenan et al., 2001; Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). The second interpretation concerns the labor context more specifically. Given the insecurity of the current job-market, if the cause of the situation was not (or not strongly) attributed to management, the respondents opted for passivity and avoided taking any position because the situation was seen as complex (there was no one responsible), and they either did not know what to do in the situation, or they knew what they could do but they did not dare to intervene because it was not their responsibility or because they feared negative consequences for themselves, the victim, or the whole team (see Omari and Standen, 2012; D'Cruz and Noronha, 2011; Pozzoli and Gini, 2013).

The same three proximal predictors (severity, internal attribution, and external attribution) were significantly associated with emotional support and public support, two intervention behaviors distinguishable by their involvement level. The

more the situation was perceived as severe, the more the intervention intention was characterized by public involvement. Furthermore, the more causal attribution was external (management), the more there was intention of emotional support and supporting publicly the harassed ($\beta=.23$ for both), strengthening the interpretation in terms of solidarity inside the team. By contrast, considering Mrs. Young (the victim) as more responsible for the situation brought about less intention to emotionally support her, and less intention to support her publicly. These last results are convergent with those from Mulder et al. (2013) or Rudolph et al. (2004). As external attribution and internal attribution were not simply opposite, blaming the victim did not signify that there was no blame for the management (and *vice versa*). The two “conditions” (to not blame victim and to blame externally—i.e., to blame the management) are therefore required to understand the intention to support the victim. This is a special feature from our study: the question of developing helping behaviors or interventions depended not only on the attribution of victim but also on other “actors” or characteristics in the environment. Mr. Smith was not only seen as another person or the perpetrator; he was also the manager who had responsibility in a complex system of rules.

To complete our analyses, we tested for moderation effects in order to examine the possible effects of personal characteristics on severity, and internal and external attributions. We checked the presence of interactions between gender, tenure, position and harassment experiences on the one hand, and severity on the other, for each of the three dependent variables (model 1 of Hayes’s template) - no moderation effect was detected. We checked then the presence of interactions between gender, tenure, position and harassment experiences on the one hand, and internal and external attributions on the other, for each of the three dependent

variables (model 1 of Hayes's template). The results showed three moderations.

First, a borderline significant interaction between tenure and external attribution on emotional support ($B = -.33$; $p = .05$; $LLCI = -.66$; $ULCI = .00$) shows that the contribution of external attribution on emotional support was significant and positive when tenure was less than 5 years (effect = $.42$; $p < .00$; $LLCI = .22$; $ULCI = .62$) and between 5 and 15 years (effect = $.28$; $p < .00$; $LLCI = .15$; $ULCI = .42$), but this effect disappeared for people with more than 15 years tenure (effect = $.15$; $p = .12$; $LLCI = -.04$; $ULCI = .33$). Second, to have been a witness moderated the relation between internal attribution and emotional support ($B = .37$; $p = .01$; $LLCI = .10$; $ULCI = .64$): the contribution of internal attribution on emotional support was significant and negative when the participants had already witnessed a harassment situation (effect = $-.46$; $p < .00$; $LLCI = -.66$; $ULCI = -.28$), but this effect disappeared when the participants had not witnessed a harassment situation (effect = $-.09$; $p = .34$; $LLCI = -.29$; $ULCI = .10$). Thirdly, to have been a witness moderated also the relation between external attribution and public support ($B = -.37$; $p = .01$; $LLCI = -.64$; $ULCI = -.10$): the contribution of external attribution on public support was significant and positive when the participants have already witnessed a harassment situation (effect = $.44$, $p < .00$; $LLCI = .27$; $ULCI = .62$) but this effect disappear when the participants had not witnessed a harassment situation (effect = $.07$; $p = .49$; $LLCI = -.13$; $ULCI = .28$). In other words, having already been a witness strengthen the negative effect of internal attribution on emotional support and the positive effect of external attribution on public support.

Discussion

According to the results, our first hypothesis was partly confirmed; we observed that low self-efficacy was an antecedent of the fear to intervene, along with external attribution (in reference to the victim). Not to be afraid to intervene requires having a high sense of self-efficacy and external attribution – but the link between self-efficacy and external attribution is negative: the greater self-efficacy, the lower external attribution. Our second and third hypotheses were partly confirmed: we predicted and found a contribution of internal and external attributions to the explanation of emotional support and public support, but we also expected a contribution of belief in a just world and not of severity perception to the intention of emotional support. Our results showed that the belief in a just world did not explain any of the three kinds of intervention, probably because workplace bullying is ambiguous. Possibly, in absence of information about the victim's responsibility, observers with a high or a low BJW will equally victimize the victim because he/she is perceived as causing his/her own plight (Correia & Dalbert, 2008). In our result, respondents with high or low BJW did not express different behaviors to help Mrs. Young. In terms of proximal variables, causal attributions are not sufficient to explain support; severity perception is also necessary. This result is understandable in terms of the intention to support the harassed publicly because it has a higher degree of involvement. But it is somewhat troubling in terms of the intention to offer emotional support because it means that "simple" emotional support must be earned doubly, from the subjective point of view of the witness.

We observed that fear to intervene was explained especially by low self-efficacy (see Pozzoli and Gini, 2013). Given this result, it could be useful to develop moral courage to intervene (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007) inside the prevention programs. Furthermore, there are many conceivable ways to train employees in order

to reinforce their resources and self-efficacy, and to clarify roles and rules about which actions are prohibited and which are possible, recommended, or required—in others words, to decrease uncertainty and ambiguity in workplace situations.

We also observed that emotional support and public support were explained both by low internal and high external causal attribution, as well as by perceived severity. The result regarding low internal attribution was consistent with those of Mulder et al. (2013), and Rudolph et al. (2004). The one regarding high external attribution was understandable according to the work of Kouabenan et al. (2001) on causal attribution in workplace contexts that shows that people tend to protect their group from blame or prejudice. There is indeed a hierarchical structure in an organization that helps employees of similar status within the organization to feel closer and develop solidarity.

Besides the distinction of the three types of intervention in response to workplace bullying, one of the core results of our research concerns the perception of the situation—the more respondents perceived the situation as serious, the more they mentioned an intention to give emotional support and public support to the harassed employee. Our procedure presented the same situation (the same vignette) to all participants. In other words, a crucial criterion for promoting intervention concerns the identification of workplace bullying – moreover we showed that having been a witness moderates the relations between causal attribution and emotional and public support. Noticing a situation as requiring action is the entrance point of Latané and Darley's model (1970), but, as Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly (2005) note, workplace bullying is more ambiguous and thus more difficult to notice than an emergency situation like the one in Latané and Darley's model. This highlights the challenge of information and awareness regarding workplace bullying, and the many

actors (colleagues, direct superior, HR, prevention advisor, confidential supporter) with a role to play in the situation (Hubert, 2012).

We want to note that, although research has shown many times that helping behaviors depend on the attribution of responsibility or on victim innocence (Rudolph et al., 2004; Shaver, 1970), the issue of innocence is not the core question in the context of organizations. Indeed, working involves fitting into a complex system of constraints, duties, and obligations, both from the point of view of the employee and his/her leader. Therefore, looking for one guilty party in workplace bullying is a reductive approach. The responsibilities are so multifaceted that in the comments of the Belgian Law of Welfare at Work, it is mentioned that a normal exercise of authority, even though it may be unpleasant or difficult to accept for the worker, cannot be considered as bullying. Another major difficulty in studying workplace bullying is the ambiguity of the phenomenon itself. Bullying is ambiguous because it is characterized by repetition and duration—each event can be minor, and practically invisible—and because everyone's roles are rarely well-defined, and the limits between controlling tasks and stalking are narrow. These ambiguous properties make it almost impossible to determine the complete innocence of the victim, even if the identities of the victim and the perpetrator can be established. In this way, once again, we can understand why BJW-O did not appear as a predictor for the different kinds of intervention in our study (Correia and Vala, 2003).

We measured helping behaviors from bystanders and found that not to intervene had the lowest means, which could be interpreted as the outcome of social desirability. On the other hand, the intention of emotional support had the highest mean, and the intention of supporting publicly did not. Regardless, the research

procedure (vignette and self-reported questionnaires) can be seen as having a poor ecological validity. A challenge for future studies is certainly the development of methodologies with greater ecological validity or with implicit measures (Dal Cason, Hellemans, & Casini, 2014), and perhaps a better gender control by matching victim and participant gender.

Despite these limitations, the interest of the study was to extend the understanding of workplace bullying by taking into account the judgments and behaviors of others in the socio-professional environment. Besides the contribution of Mulder et al. (2013), and those of Desrumaux and colleagues (2007, 2012, 2015), which did not distinguish between different kinds of helping behaviors, this study is the only one we know which quantitatively analyzes the predictors of intervention behaviors from bystanders in response to workplace bullying. Differentiating helping behaviors as a function of their level of involvement is useful because there is a plurality of potential behaviors from bystanders in the real world, and because as expected, different kinds of behaviors are explained by different antecedents.

The results highlight the importance of training on the severity of bullying among colleagues. The scope of colleague-bystander behaviors when confronted with workplace bullying is wide open. Many questions remain unanswered. As an illustration, although our first results considered the influence of responsibility attribution on intervention, we did not test the bystander's attribution of his/her own personal responsibility to his/her bullied colleague, depending on whether he/she was a friend or a "simple" colleague. This aspect of attribution of (auto-)responsibility requires analysis, as it has a central role in Latané and Darley's model, even if the results of D'Cruz and Noronha (2011) lead one to think that the most important predictors of intervention in cases of workplace bullying are not the

personal links constructed with the victim, but the perceived organizational constraints (management, culture, norms, etc.). Another avenue for future research is to focus on more or less threatening organizational climates and the contribution of moral courage to the decision to intervene (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007).

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Appendix

The Vignette

Mr. Smith has held a law degree for less than one year and is employed by an insurance company as a manager of fire accidents. Mr. Smith is a “challenger”—he is pragmatic and goes straight to the point. Mr. Smith works with Mrs. Young. She is an employee of the same department and has been in charge of minor fire accidents

for more than ten years. Mrs. Young has been hoping to hold the position of fire accidents manager due to her experience in the company and her an associate's degree in law, but the fact that she did not hold a master's degree worked against her, and HR finally chose Mr. Smith. Recruiting a manager was not easy because the subject is quite complex—it is necessary to manage many different products, to delve into taxation, to have numerous telephone contacts with other branches, and to be especially motivated to learn. In addition, the company has recently been experiencing a difficult period marked by poor economic conditions and a higher number of severe accidents.

Five months after Mr. Smith's hiring, Mrs. Young is talking about a particular situation as follows: "In recent months, Mr. Smith has been giving me non-stop work, and I don't really know what the overall goal is. He comes all the time to check my progress, is excessively fussy, and constantly gives me new instructions. Moreover, he never agrees with my methods or my priorities, and he is often sarcastic. He is angry and doesn't accept discussion, watches me closely, and always makes offensive remarks. It causes me tremendous stress. Today, for personal reasons, I didn't work in the morning, and when I was coming back in the afternoon, he publicly blamed me for losing time."

BYSTANDERS BEHAVIORS AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

1

Table 1

Descriptive analysis (scale range, mean, standard deviation), correlation and Cronbach alpha in parentheses

	scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. BJW-O	1-6	3.18	.78	(.85)							
2. Self-efficacy	1-6	4.55	.68	.35**	(.89)						
3. Severity	2-4	2.99	.79	-.21**	-.03	/					
4. Internal attribution	1-6	2.84	.89	.04	-.10	-.18*	(.78)				
5. External attribution	1-6	4.02	.95	-.13	-.19**	.22**	.05	(.78)			
6. Fear of intervention	1-4	1.71	.64	.05	-.18*	-.07	.08	-.28**	(.83)		
7. Emotional support	1-4	3.06	.76	-.08	-.05	.27**	-.30**	.27**	-.10	(.80)	
8. Public support	1-4	2.32	.65	-.18*	-.17*	.37**	-.22**	.30**	.08	.42**	(.70)

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Results of hierarchical regression analyzes for the three kinds of helping behaviors (standardised coefficients).

	Dependent variables: Helping behaviors					
	Fear of intervention		Emotional support		To support publicly	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Step 1 (β)						
Gender	.06	.04	-.20**	-.16*	-.06	.03
Tenure	-.01	.03	.19*	.18**	.03	.06
Position	-.05	-.03	.05	.01	-.05	-.11
Size	-.06	-.04	-.09	-.06	-.11	-.10
Step 2 (β)						
BJW-O		.09		.02		-.07
Self-efficacy		-.28**		-.04		-.13
Severity		.03		.17*		.28**
Internal attribution		.07		-.28**		-.20**
External attribution		-.32**		.23**		.23**
R^2	.006	.153	.070	.249	.019	.269
ΔR^2	.006	.147	.070	.179	.019	.249
p change	.879	.000	.008	.000	.442	.000

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$