



**RESEARCH STUDIES**

*workplacebullying.org*

**The WBI Website  
2012 - I Instant Poll**

**How Bullies Select  
Their Targets**

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## HOW BULLIES SELECT THEIR TARGETS

### WBI 2012-I Instant Poll

Individuals who are bullied ask themselves, “why me?.” They worry that some personal shortcoming is the reason. This self-defeating logic focuses responsibility inward. The truth is that no one wakes on a work day with a plan to invite humiliation and torment, nor does anyone deserve it. Some academic researchers (Tepper, Glomb) adopt “victim precipitation,” an ideology borrowed from criminology that has been thoroughly discredited. It leads to blaming victims/targets. Bullies may rationalize their actions with “the target made me do it,” but anecdotal evidence from targets and witnesses refute this notion.

This 2012 survey of 655 respondents was intended to replicate original WBI 2003 findings exploring from the targets’ perspective why they were targeted.

Workplace Bullying Institute Instant Polls are online single-question surveys that rely upon self-selected samples of individuals bullied at work (typically 98% of any sample). No demographic data are collected. Our non-scientific Instant Polls accurately depict the perceptions of workers targeted for bullying at work as contrasted with the views of all adult Americans in our scientific national surveys.

We asked:

*Why were you (or the witnessed person) targeted for bullying? Check top 2 reasons. [1250 total votes]*

The rank order and percentages for each response option were:

- |    |      |   |
|----|------|---|
| 1  | .208 | <i>Bully/ies threatened by target’s technical skills</i>                                |
| 2  | .176 | <i>Bully/ies abusive-toxic personality/ies</i>  |
| 3  | .140 | <i>Target is not a political game player</i>  |
| 4  | .137 | <i>Bully/ies threatened by target’s popularity with others</i>                          |
| 5  | .099 | <i>Target perceived as weak</i>   |
| 6  | .073 | <i>Single instigator convinced group to mob target</i>                                  |
| 7  | .070 | <i>Bully/ies are noticed by higher ups; promotions depend on willingness to aggress</i> |
| 8  | .066 | <i>Bullying is rewarded at the workplace; experimentation encouraged</i>                |
| 9  | .021 | <i>Group did the bullying &amp; became out of control</i>                               |
| 10 | .010 | <i>Target deliberately provoked attacks upon self</i>                                   |

Similar to the 2003 WBI survey results, targets stated that their technical prowess and personal popularity posed a threat to their bully (chosen by 34.5% of respondents). Target strengths threaten bullies.

Two responses could indicate that bullies perceive a vulnerability in targets selected -- not a political game player and perceived as weak -- accounting for a combined 27.5%.

The majority of reasons for selection involve factors outside targets' control -- personality of the bully, an instigator igniting a mob, organizational incentives -- totaling 38.5%. However, it's nearly as frequent a set of reasons as is target strength.

Proponents of mobbing who point out Leymann's original contention that group cruelty gains a momentum separate from any original reason for selecting the target will notice the extremely low percentage of bullied targets (2%) who stated that this was their experience.

Only 1% of target-respondents stated that their selection was a response to their provoking the bully to attack them. This finding counters the belief advanced by bully apologists that targets share responsibility for bullying with perpetrators.

