An investigation of stressful situations in the workplace: The appraisal of and response to workplace bullying, workplace aggression and similar situations.

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Abstract

Workplace bullying poses a challenge to the health of Australian workers and workplaces. This dissertation describes a research project to investigate the subjective experience of workplace bullying in which 89 participants in a non-clinical sample completed an internet questionnaire including quantitative measures of workplace bullying, posttraumatic stress symptomatology, personality and coping as well as narratives of workplace bullying and similar work experiences. The data were subjected to mixed-method analyses in five concurrent studies making use of the same data set. These studies explored the way workplace bullying was defined by participants, any connection with posttraumatic stress disorder, the potential for posttraumatic growth and the ways in which individuals and organisations respond to workplace bullying. It was found that similar behaviours were interpreted by different individuals as either workplace bullying or not workplace bullying, and quite different behaviours were described as workplace bullying. Participants with higher levels of neuroticism were more likely to report having been bullied in the workplace, whether or not they had been according to objective definitions. Posttraumatic stress disorder was not found to be a useful description of participants’ experiences, as the narratives did not indicate the experience of a trauma according to formal definitions. However, situations which were and were not appraised as workplace bullying were experienced as traumatic in terms of the shattering of the fundamental assumptions. This allowed for the experience of posttraumatic growth, positive self-transformation arising from this difficult life experience, which was evident in a number of narratives. Consistent with Pals (2006), a full acknowledgement of the extent to which an individual’s life can be disrupted by the experience and a coherent positive conclusion to the narrative were both found to predict growth attributed to the traumatic experience (of being bullied). It was concluded that the possibility of post-traumatic growth could inform treatment of individuals experiencing psychological and physical health impacts as a result of workplace bullying.
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Finally, thanks go to the men and women who shared their experiences of the workplace. I feel privileged to have read their frank and insightful stories.
Declaration

I declare that this dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

I further declare that the ethical principles and procedures specified in the Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee documentation have been adhered to in the preparation of this dissertation.

Shelley Connell
1 June 2014
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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Research Topic

The title of a report submitted to the Parliament of Australia by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment (HRSCEE; 2012) sums up the frustration and helplessness experienced by targeted individuals as well as the many organisations and departments tasked with resolving the issue of workplace bullying. *Workplace bullying: We just want it to stop* was prepared after submissions from lawyers, researchers, and other professionals, as well as hearing accounts from individuals who had experienced workplace bullying (HRSCEE).

The present study investigated the subjective experience of individuals who have experienced or observed workplace bullying and other forms of workplace aggression and stress. The research was carried out with a view to contributing an Australian perspective to the growing body of research in the field of workplace bullying, and also to explore the application of a narrative methodology to the examination of the phenomenon.

1.2. Structure of the Thesis

This dissertation is divided into 12 chapters, of which the first and current provides a general overview. Chapters 2 to 5 review the literature in the various fields which are covered by the thesis. These fields are workplace bullying, reviewed in Chapter 2, the nature of trauma and its relevance in workplace bullying research, described in Chapter 3, applying narrative analysis to the field of workplace bullying and posttraumatic growth as explained in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 which describes the evidence regarding individual and organisational responses to workplace bullying. Five concurrent studies are reported which investigated these various aspects using mixed methods designs on the same quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 6 describes the common aspects of the studies including the participant group from which the data were gathered and the way in which they were gathered. Chapter 7 describes Study One: Definition of workplace bullying. Chapter 8 describes Study Two: Trauma and workplace bullying. The narrative aspects are investigated in Chapters 9, which describes
Study Three, and 10, which describes Study Four. Chapter 11 presents Study Five which investigated Responses to workplace bullying. Finally, in Chapter 12 the five studies are summarised and integrated with a view to expanding existing research and conclusions are drawn about the findings.

1.3. History of the Research Project

The research project was conceptualised to investigate a clinical construct (trauma) in a common setting (the workplace). In order to begin examination of the topic, a literature database search was conducted using the search term “workplace bullying” in isolation and then in conjunction with the term “PTSD”. Perusal of the articles generated led to widening the search using the terms “harassment” and “mobbing” as well as “bullying”. Combinations of all these terms with “PTSD”, “trauma”, “coping” or “personality” were used in subsequent searches, as indicated by the articles generated in the original searches.

Due to a further consideration in the conceptualisation, the prospect of making use of a narrative framework, the search term “narrative” was linked with the various bullying search terms as well as with “trauma” and “PTSD”. Throughout the development of the project, further terms such as “posttraumatic growth” and “meaning making” were included in searches and explored.

Literature searches were undertaken throughout the development and implementation of the research project to remain current in the fields explored. As the body of research explored increased, searches were frequently conducted on specific authors or articles as indicated by prior reading. The search term “Australia” was periodically added to the overall searches to ensure local content was captured.

1.4. Overview of the Analysis

This investigation of workplace bullying was undertaken using a mixed methods analysis, which combined quantitative and qualitative data to provide an in-depth picture of the construct of workplace bullying. Quantitative measures were used to gather information about participants’ exposure to bullying, individual characteristics and attitudes towards coping with bullying. Individual narratives of workplace bullying or similar experiences were collected in order to analyse individuals’ interpretations of the events they described.
Chapter 2. Incidence, cost and understanding of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying was swept to the front and centre of Australian attention with the tragic death of Ms Brodie Panlock, a young woman who committed suicide following victimisation from colleagues at a Melbourne café where she worked as a waitress (Turnbull, 2010). The media attention of this and other situations culminated in legislation which is described later in this chapter. While Ms Panlock’s experience was clearly unacceptable, identifying behaviour as workplace bullying is not always so clear-cut. The present chapter reviews the various ways in which workplace bullying can be defined in research, legislation and the community. Previous research into the experience, causes and effects of workplace bullying are also described.

2.1. What is Workplace Bullying?

While most people in Western societies have a conceptualisation of what workplace bullying is, it is necessary to formulate a discrete definition for research purposes. This ensures the same phenomenon is investigated by various researchers. Legislation also requires that a definition be agreed on, and this might not be the same as the one agreed by researchers, as the purposes are quite different. Different again might be the definition used by organisations in anti-bullying policies, as a looser definition might be more desirable for the purpose of preventing workplace bullying.

Historically, bullying research has described bullies and victims of bullying. However, both of these labels have come to be regarded as judgemental, portraying one group as bad and the other as weak. More recent research has distinguished instead between the perpetrators and targets of the bullying behaviours. For the purposes of the present thesis, when research is described, the terminology used is that of the original researchers. For the research conducted as part of the thesis, the terminology of perpetrators and targets is used.
2.1.1. How Workplace Bullying is Defined in Research

The workplace hazard was first identified by Heinz Leymann in the 1980s (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011). As a result, the terminology has its roots in Leymann’s (1995) definition of “hostile and unethical communication…directed in a systematic way” (p. 168) occurring with at least weekly frequency and over a period for at least six months. The majority of research into workplace bullying has followed this European definition. The definitions which have been used in studies to date have been variations on the following proposed standard definition (Einarsen et al., p.22):

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction, or process, the bullying behavior has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict.

The important points to note regarding this are that the behaviour has to be persistent, therefore repeated, and continuing. The criterion that the behaviour be repeated allows for the fact that sometimes people have a bad day, or may unintentionally engage in behaviour which is viewed as aggressive by the recipient of the behaviour (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). Based on Leymann’s (1995) original parameters, research definitions usually require that the frequency of the negative behaviour be at least weekly in order to be considered bullying behaviour. They also specify that the behaviour must have occurred over a period of at least six months in order to be considered workplace bullying (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005).

Research definitions do not require that the actions be intended to cause harm to the individual who is targeted. By stating that the behaviour has to be
repeated, this ensures that a single, isolated event which may have been unintentional is not considered bullying. However, if the behaviour is repeated it is less likely that the action is unintentional; even if it is this does not negate the negative impact which it potentially has on the individual being targeted (Einarsen et al., 2007). The rationale for the requirement that the behaviour be repeated on a weekly basis is less clear, as it does not allow for situations in which the target does not come into frequent contact with the perpetrator but when intermittent contact persistently involves negative behaviour (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). A question to be considered is that if there is frequent contact, but every couple of weeks this involves some negative act, should this be considered bullying?

The six month duration is even more arbitrary than the frequency criterion. The rationale behind the six month duration was that this was the time frame used to indicate that a psychiatric condition was clinically significant according to the current diagnostic criteria at the time (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). However, if a person is exposed to negative behaviours in the workplace on a weekly basis or more often, this is likely to begin to have an impact on them well before six months has passed. A destructive workplace atmosphere which has persisted for this length of time would be difficult to address effectively, particularly as evidence suggests that the longer bullying goes on, the more people get recruited to the bullying, resulting in a larger number of bullies (see Zapf, Escartin, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2011, for a review). Therefore, while having a specified duration may be considered useful for research, a time period of this length may be less helpful for practical purposes.

Bullying can be perpetrated by an individual or group and can be directed against an individual or group. When workplace bullying first came to prominence in the early 1990s, it was referred to as mobbing (Leymann, 1990). In Europe, the two terms are still often used interchangeably. However, as the word in English suggests the action of a group of individuals, some researchers distinguish between mobbing which is perpetrated by a group and bullying which is perpetrated by an individual (Caponecchia & Wyatt, 2009). Other researchers prefer the term mobbing when the focus of the research is on the experience of the target and bullying when the focus is on aspects of the perpetrator (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). For the purpose of the present study, actions of both a group
and an individual are referred to as bullying and mobbing is used only in an historical context.

2.1.2. Legal Context and Definition of Workplace Bullying in Victoria, Australia

In Victoria, workplace bullying has traditionally been covered by the Occupational Health and Safety laws which require employers to provide a safe work environment. Worksafe Victoria is the organisation which follows up and enforces these laws. According to the policy covering workplace bullying, workplace bullying is defined as “persistent and repeated negative behaviour directed at an employee that creates a risk to health and safety” (Worksafe Victoria, 2012, p. 2). Unlike the research definitions, neither the frequency with which the behaviour is exhibited nor the duration over which it occurs is specified. A distinction is drawn between bullying which is direct, such as verbal abuse or interfering with property, and indirect, such as withholding information and excluding from events. Both types of bullying are covered by the policy (Worksafe Victoria, 2010).

Recently, workplace bullying has been introduced into the Victorian Criminal Act under a bill dubbed “Brodie’s Law” in memory of Brodie Panlock, whose parents had lobbied for the changes (Butcher, 2011). Ms Panlock committed suicide after a protracted experience of workplace bullying at a suburban café where she worked as a waitress (Turnbull, 2010). Under the Criminal Act Amendment (Bullying) 2011 (Parliament of Victoria, 2011), the legislation regarding stalking was amended to include direct forms of bullying such as threats and verbal abuse. Another change was that “mental harm” has been explicitly defined as including psychological harm and suicidal thoughts. As a result of this legislation, people who engage in direct workplace bullying can face up to 10 years in jail in Victoria (Butcher).

One distinction between the Worksafe guidelines and this Victorian Criminal Act is that the Criminal Act specifies behaviour which is engaged in with the intention of causing injury, although it also includes behaviour which would reasonably be expected to cause harm (Parliament of Victoria, 2011). By contrast, the Worksafe guidelines do not state that bullying has to be intentional (Worksafe Victoria, 2012).
2.1.3. What is Not Workplace Bullying

Research into any behaviour requires not only a clear definition of what the behaviour is but also of what it is not. This makes it possible to distinguish the construct from other behaviours and study it effectively.

**Appropriate managerial action.** The Worksafe guidelines state that appropriate managerial action is not considered workplace bullying. This includes actions such as failing to promote a person, or providing an underperforming staff member with feedback to that effect. As long as this action is carried out in a reasonable manner, with due respect for the person affected, it is not considered bullying and the manager has the right to perform this action (Worksafe Victoria, 2010).

**Harassment.** The distinction between harassment and bullying is not consistent throughout the literature. Many researchers view the two as different names for the same concept (e.g., Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Caponecchia and Wyatt (2009) distinguish harassment from bullying by the criterion that in harassment the behaviour is focussed on particular characteristics of the person who is being targeted. These aspects include gender, sexuality, race, religion and marital status. Targets may be harassed on the basis of any feature of the individual or their relationship to others. While bullying involves repeated unreasonable behaviour, this may or may not be associated with features characteristic of the individual. Therefore, while the same behaviour may be both bullying and harassment, it is not necessarily always the case. Caponecchia and Wyatt also draw the further distinction between harassment, which involves causing humiliation or offence to another, and discrimination, which involves treating an individual unfairly.

**Violence.** Violence at work is much more uncommon than bullying, but much easier to detect. This includes acts such as verbally abusing, threatening and even physically attacking co-workers. While such behaviour, if repeated, would constitute bullying, bullying can also include behaviours which are much less direct and can consequently be more difficult to identify. Conversely, a single act of violence does not meet the requirement of persistent behaviour in order to constitute bullying (Jones, 2009).
Aggression. Aggression in the workplace is similar to violence in that the behaviour is not necessarily repeated (Jones, 2009). However, like bullying, the acts do not need to be as direct as violence. For this reason, it is sometimes necessary to investigate the role of intent, as, for example, the act of not telling a co-worker about a meeting could be a simple oversight or an intentional act of aggression. This makes workplace aggression much more difficult to identify and measure than workplace bullying and consequently more difficult to research objectively (Jones).

Conflict. As Einarsen et al.’s (2011) definition reproduced at the start of this chapter makes clear, disagreements between peers are not considered bullying for the purposes of research. As long as one party does not end up in a position where they cannot defend themselves, the conflict cannot be characterised as bullying. Zapf and Einarsen (2005) point out that heated disagreements can even be helpful to the performance of workers and the organisation. Conflict in the workplace can sometimes escalate to bullying, violence or both, but it does not always do so (Zapf & Einarsen).

2.1.4. Subjective definitions of bullying

While there are differences between definitions of bullying depending on the purpose for which the definition is intended, the subjective definitions of people who perceive themselves as targets vary even more widely. Research has suggested that if an objective “checklist” definition is utilised, prevalence rates vary from 3% to 7%, whereas directly asking respondents if they have been exposed to bullying can result in prevalence rates between 10% and 25% (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Providing a definition of bullying, against which people self-label, results in prevalence rates of between 1% and 4% (Zapf & Einarsen). Surprisingly little research has been carried out investigating what exactly it is that individuals subjectively describe as bullying.

2.2. The nature of bullying

2.2.1. Types of acts of workplace aggression

As has already been mentioned, Worksafe Victoria (2010) distinguishes between direct and indirect forms of bullying. Kaukiainen et al. (2001) investigated the different ways in which workplace aggression can present. By
administering a questionnaire to 169 Finnish participants (67 men and 102 women), four types of workplace aggression were identified. These were direct overt aggression, which were face to face encounters where there was open confrontation, indirect manipulative aggression, defined as occurring when the perpetrator made it difficult for the target to identify the source of the attack, covert insinuative aggression, where the perpetrator’s intentions are hidden not only from the target but also from any observers as the perpetrator uses insinuations to discredit the target, and rational-appearing aggression. In rational-appearing aggression, the perpetrator directs the attack against the target’s work performance. Targets thereby appear unreasonable if they take offence. The authors found that rational-appearing aggression was negatively correlated with male well-being, whereas there was no relationship between the experience of rational-appearing aggression and the well-being of female targets (Kaukianen et al.). For the other types of aggression, both male and female well-being was negatively correlated with the experience of aggression, although the effect for males was not as strong as with rational-appearing aggression.

2.2.2. Types of Bullying Behaviours

Einarsen and colleagues made use of Leyman’s (1990) list of negative acts in the workplace to develop the Negative Acts Questionnaire and the Negative Acts Questionnaire, Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen & Raknes, 2001; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaars, 2009). Through extensive use of this questionnaire with large samples drawn from government organisations and unions, they have identified three types of negative acts. Work-related bullying consists of behaviours such as overloading with work and setting unrealistic targets for individuals to achieve. Person-related bullying involves more social exclusion such as spreading rumours about a person or failing to invite to social occasions. Physical intimidation involves threats or actions against a person’s physical safety (Einarsen et al.). In a cross-sectional study of 5,388 British workers from various occupations, Hoel, Faragher, and Cooper (2004) found that, for teachers, exclusionary behaviour was more detrimental to health outcomes than other forms of workplace bullying, whereas correctional services officers were more affected by physical intimidation. It is possible that this may have been due to
gender differences in the two professions. The gender split of each profession was not explicated in the article.

2.3. An Overview of Previous Research into Workplace Bullying

Research on workplace bullying has developed substantially over the last 20 years, and covers many different avenues of enquiry (Zapf et al., 2011). The current section gives an overview of an issue common to all investigations of workplace bullying, how to measure the construct, and also describes previous research of most relevance to the present study. The relevant research has investigated individual differences between targets and non-targets of workplace bullying and impacts of workplace bullying. Research into the causes of workplace bullying and some models of workplace bullying are also described.

2.3.1. Measurement of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying can be measured according to subjective or objective measures. In ‘subjective’ measurement the participant is asked to indicate whether they have experienced bullying (often over the last six months). This question may or may not be preceded by the definition of bullying adopted by the research study. ‘Objective’ measurement is achieved by asking the participant to indicate the frequency with which they have experienced a number of acts in the last six months. Nielsen, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2010) have more recently named these two measurement methods as “self-labelling” and “behavioural experience” methods respectively. This more accurately describes the techniques used for measurement. However, for the purposes of the present study, where the construct under study is the experience of being bullied, subjective bullying describes experiences which the individual perceives as bullying and objective bullying where the individual has been bullied according to Leymann’s (1995) definition of bullying.

An example of an objective measure of workplace bullying, or mobbing, is the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaars, 2009). This questionnaire, which asks about acts derived from Leymann’s (1990) definition of mobbing, includes items about work-related bullying, person-related bullying and physical intimidation.
The way in which workplace bullying is measured can impact on research findings, particularly in relation to the reported prevalence of workplace bullying. In a meta-analysis of 130,973 respondents in 86 different participant samples, of which 102 prevalence estimates were made, Nielsen et al. (2010) investigated the extent of this impact. They found that the reported prevalence was lowest when participants were asked to indicate whether they had been bullied after being provided with a definition (11%) and highest when participants were asked to self-label without the benefit of a definition (18%). Studies that used questionnaires of reported behaviours such as the NAQ-R to determine prevalence generally reported prevalence as around 14%. These results indicate that individuals’ implicit understanding of what constitutes workplace bullying is much less conservative than research definitions.

2.3.2. Who Reports Bullying?

**Gender and self-labelling as bullied.** Research on gender distribution of targets of workplace bullying has produced mixed results (see Zapf et al., 2011, for a review). While studies which made use of self-selected groups to identify targets of workplace bullying, such as victim support groups, indicated that targets were around twice as likely to be women than to be men, indications are that this was due to gender differences in the occupations from which the participants came (Zapf et al.). Nevertheless, studies suggest that gender appears to be a factor in professions where there is a serious gender imbalance (Zapf et al.). In a survey of 6,485 Norwegian assistant nurses, a profession where male nurses constitute only 3% of the workforce, men were over twice as likely as women to report having experienced bullying in the preceding six months (Erikson & Einarsen, 2004).

Salin (2011) suggested that some of the increased reporting of bullying among women as opposed to men could also be attributed to gender differences in the way behaviours were labelled. By presenting vignettes of negative workplace situations with different combinations of perpetrator and target to 293 participants who were students of a Finnish business school, Salin found that a significantly higher percentage of women (66%) as opposed to men (42%) would label behaviour as bullying when the vignette was about a male perpetrator with a female target. These gender differences were not apparent when both
characters were of the same gender. These findings suggest that women would be more likely than men to report similar experiences as bullying behaviour if the perpetrator was male. When there is a formal power imbalance between the perpetrator and target, males are more likely to be in the senior position, by virtue of the noted phenomenon that males are overrepresented in senior positions (e.g., McTavish & Miller, 2009).

**Personality and bullying.** Individual characteristics, or personality, of both targets and perpetrators have been linked to workplace bullying. Investigations have taken a trait approach to personality, which posits that a number of internal underlying structures combine to define an individual’s overall personality (McAdams, 2002). The question of whether certain traits might increase an individual’s vulnerability to bullying has been investigated using number of different scales to measure various personality traits with very mixed results. Increased neuroticism, or decreased emotional stability, has been fairly consistently linked to experience of workplace bullying. Scores on this construct have been found to be higher among targets of bullying when compared to non-bullied controls (Coyne, Seigne and Randall, 2000; Persson et al., 2009) while other studies have found neuroticism to be positively correlated with level of bullying experienced (Casimir, McCormack, Djurkovic & Naubuga-Kyobe, 2012; Mathiesen, Øgaard & Einarsen, 2012). The MMPI-2, a clinical personality measure, has also been used to investigate emotional disturbance in targets of workplace bullying and harassment. Targets were consistently found to have elevated profiles (Balducci, Alfano, & Fraccaroli, 2009; Gandolfo, 1995; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001), indicating severe psychological issues. The only study to include a control group (Gandolfo) did not find significant differences between the profiles of harassment claimants and workers’ compensation claimants for issues unrelated to harassment. However, the control group was still drawn from a selected population, claimants.

The relationships of bullying with personality traits other than emotional instability are less consistent. Targets have been found to be higher in agreeableness in some studies (see Coyne et al., 2000) but lower in others (Glasø, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007; Lind, Pallesen, & Einarsen, 2009). Similarly, conscientiousness has been found to be higher among targets in some studies (Coyne et al.; Lind et al.) but not all (Glasø et al.).
In a study of 144 matched (72 bullied and 72 not bullied) participants, Glasø et al. (2007) found that victims of workplace bullying scored lower on conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness and higher on emotional instability than non-victims. This was in contrast to previous studies which found victims scored higher on conscientiousness and agreeableness (e.g., Coyne et al., 2000). In further exploration to explain these results, the authors found there were two distinguishable clusters within the victim group. The first cluster, which comprised two thirds of the self-identified workplace bullying victims, was the same as non-victims on the personality measures. The other third of the victim group scored significantly differently on all five measures (higher on emotional instability and lower on the other four). The authors interpreted their findings as suggesting that interventions needed to be aimed at the organisational level, as personality of the target was distinguishable in a minority of cases.

Matthiesen and Einarsen’s (2001) study of the MMPI-2 profiles of 85 self-selected victims of bullying also found clusters of bullying victims. The authors identified three groups, which they labelled the “seriously affected”, “common” and the “disappointed and depressed”. Interestingly, the “common” group, which displayed profiles similar to the normal population, consisted of the participants who had experienced the most extreme bullying. The authors concluded that there was an implied vulnerability among the other groups to extreme reactions following workplace bullying.

Any investigation of vulnerability to being bullied based on personality is fraught with difficulty. Leymann (1996) contended that the personality differences, which are typically measured after the bullying experience, could be a result of the experience rather than the cause. For example, a person who has been the target of victimisation in the workplace may be less trusting of others in general and therefore score lower on agreeableness. Leymann argued that the ongoing nature of the abuse provoked changes at a deep and pervasive level, which could influence personality. That is, that personality differences between targets and non-targets might be a consequence rather than a cause of the original bullying. This cause versus effect was investigated by Bowling, Beehr, Bennet and Watson (2010) using a prospective design with two waves of data collection, 13 months apart, on 166 non-faculty employees of a medium-sized Midwestern university. The personality factors investigated were positive affectivity,
negative affectivity and core self-evaluations. The study found that the personality variables at the first collection point predicted victimisation by a supervisor at the second collection point, after controlling for victimisation at the first time point. They also found that the relationship between victimisation at the two points was weaker when personality variables were controlled for. These findings suggested that personality factors have some causal effect on victimisation.

What has not been explored to date is any relationship between personality and the interpretation of behaviour. The present research attempts to address this gap by means of an exploration of the impact of personality on the labelling of apparently similar experiences as bullying or otherwise.

2.3.3. Impacts of Workplace Bullying

Posttraumatic symptoms. Almost from the inception of workplace bullying or mobbing as a field of research, the phenomenon has been linked to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000; PTSD), a constellation of anxiety and other symptoms which are experienced in response to a traumatic event (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996). This diagnosis is described in detail in Chapter 3. A growing number of studies (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Rodríguez-Muñoz, Moreno-Jiménez, Vergel, & Hernández, 2010) have indicated the existence of Posttraumatic Stress symptoms in targets of workplace bullying. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Other psychological symptoms. Other psychological symptoms which have been linked to workplace bullying include depression, anxiety, aggression and general psychological distress (see Hogh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2011, 2012). Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Hjelt-Back (2004) surveyed 338 employees of a Finnish university. They measured harassment experienced at work, depression, anxiety and aggression. Individuals who said they had experienced high levels of harassment scored higher on depression, anxiety and aggression than those who experienced low levels of harassment. Women who had experienced harassment reported higher levels of aggression than men who had been harassed. The authors also reported that all victims of harassment attributed their feelings of depression, anxiety and aggression to their experience of
harassment. It is unclear, however, if this was all participants or only the 19 who participated in follow-up interviews. The same study looked at the reasons harassment victims gave for their experience, asking participants to select from a number of possibilities. Envy and competition about jobs and status were frequently endorsed, as were personality aspects of both the perpetrator and the target, although targets themselves appeared unsure about whether their own personalities had contributed.

The mention of personality highlights a major difficulty when approaching causes and consequences of workplace bullying. As discussed in section 2.3.2, psychological states could be either a consequence or cause of the bullying. For example, aggression could be studied from the point of view of personality traits which indicate vulnerability to workplace bullying (for example, Linton & Power, 2013) or as a consequence of the bullying (Vartia, 2001). Similarly, the psychological disturbance of elevated anxious or depressive presentations have been viewed as a consequence of workplace bullying (Demir & Rodwell, 2012; Demir, Rodwell, & Flower, 2013; Hansen, Hogh, & Persson, 2011; Hansen et al., 2006; Rodwell & Demir, 2012) but emotional instability has been suggested as a potential cause (Casimir et al., 2012; Mathisen et al., 2012).

**Physical symptoms.** Workplace bullying has been linked to a range of physical and psychosomatic symptoms, including musculoskeletal and gastrointestinal difficulties (see Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). In their previously-mentioned study of 5,388 employees, Hoel et al. (2004) found significant relationships between levels of workplace bullying and physical health, as measured on the Occupational Stress Indicator. Furthermore, they found that the strength of this relationship was greater for men than for women. The authors speculated that this may have been because men were more likely to view the experience of being bullied as a personal failing rather than an externally driven event.

Utilising a grounded theory approach, Hallberg and Strandmark (2006) interviewed 20 self-labelled targets of workplace bullying and 2 people who worked in the field of workplace bullying to explore their subjective experiences of workplace bullying. They found that a number of psychosomatic symptoms were reported and were usually recollected as commencing relatively early in the
bullying experience. Gastric symptoms, headaches, hypersensitivity, among other symptoms, were recalled as initially being specific to the work situation but became chronic, global conditions.

**View of self.** Qualitative studies have found a target’s sense of self-worth has been found to be impacted by the experience of workplace bullying (see Hogh et al., 2012). Hallberg and Strandmark’s (2006) study found the core theme which emerged in participants’ stories was one of having been “marked for life” (p. 112). Part of this was a negative impact to their self-esteem, and participants reflected a sense of personal shame or guilt about the event.

This notion of shame was also investigated by Lewis (2004) using content analysis of interviews with 15 college and university lecturers. These accounts highlighted feelings of shame, embarrassment and humiliation. While there were accounts that talked of being humiliated in front of others, other accounts referred to not being willing to complain because of a desire to hide the fact of being bullied from other people, including subordinates and family.

There is evidence for many and varied reactions to workplace bullying on the part of targets. These reactions are by no means universal. It was discussed in section 2.3.2 that targets’ personality traits can impact the degree to which they experience reactions to workplace bullying (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001). Personality variables have found to have a moderating effect on the relationship between bullying and its impact (Moreno-Jiménez, Rodríguez-Muñoz, Moreno, & Garrosa, 2007; Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2008).

**2.3.4. Causes of Workplace Bullying**

The potential vulnerability of certain people, based on their gender or other personal characteristics, to becoming targets of workplace bullying has been discussed in section 2.3.2. The focus of the present research is on the subjective experience of individuals and as a result focuses on these individual differences. However, personal characteristics of targets are by no means the only cause of workplace bullying, or even universally accepted as one potential cause. Some of the other theorised causes of workplace bullying, and models of workplace bullying, are summarised.

**Stress in the workplace.** A number of large studies drawn from European populations have found correlations between reported bullying and
various organisational factors including the poor organisation of the workplace and ambiguity of job roles (see Salin & Hoel, 2011, for a review). In a survey of 2,539 employees randomly selected from the Norwegian register of employees, Hauge, Skogstad, and Einarsen (2007) found that role conflict, destructive leadership behaviour and interpersonal conflicts were the strongest predictors of workplace bullying as reported by targets of bullying.

**Leadership style.** Up to 80% of self-reported targets of workplace bullying identify their direct superior as the bully (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). Destructive leadership of this kind can be tyrannical leadership, in which the leader is determined to serve the organisation at the expense of respect for his/her subordinates. However, laissez-faire leadership, where the leader does not have clear expectations and team members do not have enough information to do their jobs effectively, can create an atmosphere in which bullying is likely to occur (Einarsen et al.).

**Escalation of incivility.** When workers do not provide each other with evidence of mutual respect, this can lead to a situation where each new instance of incivility is interpreted as mounting evidence for a conspiracy of bullying. As the initial, self-perceived, target reacts to each new instance, this can appear unreasonable to the other individual, resulting in a “tit for tat” situation which can escalate into bullying (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

2.3.5. **Models of Workplace Bullying**

**The three-pathway model of bullying.** In an attempt to elaborate on the process by which bullying occurs, and to investigate competing theories for the causes of bullying, Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, and De Cuyper (2009) interviewed employees of 19 Belgian organisations. Utilising the method of analytic induction, where participants performed the analysis as reflective practitioners, it was possible to extract 87 stories of workplace bullying. By interviewing a number of people in the same organisations, many stories overlapped, with 24 events related from multiple points of view, in addition to 32 unique stories which were only related by a single person. Using a qualitative approach to the research, the researchers postulated three possible pathways by which bullying could occur.
The first was the *intrapersonal pathway*, where frustrations, experienced either by the target or the perpetrator, lead to counterproductive behaviour. If the frustrations are experienced by the perpetrator he/she may look for ways to vent, choosing proximal targets. On the other hand, if the work stress is experienced by the target in the first instance, the counterproductive behaviours they engage in for self-preservation, such as taking longer lunch breaks or more leave, may impact negatively on staff around them. This may result in a perceived need to modify the target’s behaviour, resulting in bullying as a form of group coercive behaviour. The second pathway is the *interpersonal*, where a conflict between two employees (often initially work-related) remains unresolved and as such escalates into bullying. The third and final pathway allows for aspects of the *organisation*, as exemplified by a culture of coercive management techniques, in which bullying is able to thrive.

While the research was novel in the way in which stories were combined, the model developed does not appear to contribute anything new to the existing literature other than suggesting that all the previously-speculated causes had merit. The pathways were not really integrated in any meaningful way. Although the authors suggested that it was possible for the pathways to interact, this was not done in the model they presented.

**Reciprocity and attribution processes.** Bowling and Beehr (2006) proposed a theoretical model of workplace harassment from the perspective of the target. In this model, characteristics of both the victim and the perpetrator, organisational culture and role stressors all interacted to influence workplace harassment. The impact of the harassment was dependent on the attributions the target made about the cause of the harassment. For example, the impact on targets who blamed their organisation for creating the climate in which the harassment occurred would be to their work performance, whereas targets who blamed themselves would be more likely to suffer impacts to their wellbeing. The model developed is shown as Figure 2.1.
In a meta-analysis of 90 study samples, Bowling and Beehr (2006) investigated the direct links between harassment and potential antecedents and consequences predicted by the theoretical model. They found particularly strong evidence for links between aspects of the work environment and harassment (Bowling & Beehr).

2.3.6. Limitations of Previous Research

As has previously been indicated, a potential limitation in the way previous research into bullying has been conducted is the means of measuring subjective or self-labelled bullying. While the measure is the participants’ responses to the question of whether they have experienced bullying, this has almost universally been preceded with a definition against which to compare their experiences. As Hoel et al. (2004) suggested when explaining their finding that objective measures of bullying predicted health outcomes better than self-labelling, asking whether people’s experience matches a definition does not necessarily capture the label which they have internally given to the experience.
A person may acknowledge that their experience does not match the definition, but still believe they have been bullied.

The present research aimed to address this gap in the research by investigating the content of experiences which people described as bullying.

2.4. Summary of Chapter

The present chapter has provided a brief overview of workplace bullying research to date. While many definitions exist for workplace bullying, consistent elements are that the behaviour is repeated and frequent. The provision of a definition to research participants in the questionnaires they complete appears to increase the accuracy with which individuals subjectively report their experiences. However, little research has been conducted into investigating the experiences which people self-label as bullying, when they are not provided with an objective definition.

While there is evidence of individual differences between targets and non-targets of workplace bullying, the directionality of cause and effect is not clear. The present research aimed to incorporate the subjective labelling of the experience into the investigation of bullying and other stressful situations in the workplace. Investigations included how accounts labelled as workplace bullying differed from those that did not, as well as individual differences in personal characteristics between those who did and did not label their experiences as bullying.

The current chapter has investigated the interpretations of behaviour related to workplace bullying. Chapter 3 will investigate more closely one of the frequently-cited impacts of workplace bullying, post-traumatic stress disorder.
Chapter 3. The nature of trauma

As discussed in the previous chapter, a prominent psychological issue which has been linked to workplace bullying is posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Any assertions regarding this disorder must first address the issue of whether workplace bullying can be considered a trauma. This chapter discusses the nature and formulation of trauma, according to theoretical standpoints as well as accepted current diagnostic practice and discusses the characterisation of workplace bullying as a trauma.

3.1. Definition of Trauma

The Greek root of the word “trauma” means “wound” (Pearsall & Trumble, 1995, p.1533). Medically, the word is still used to describe any injury to the body. However, perhaps the more commonly understood meaning is of “a distressing or emotionally disturbing experience” (Pearsall & Trumble, p.1533). Psychological definitions of trauma vary widely, and there is no single definition (Reyes, Elhai, & Ford, 2008). Most, however, draw the distinction between a potentially traumatic experience and the trauma, which is the reaction to the event (Reyes et al.). Trauma can be viewed as a continuum on which PTSD is at the extreme end (e.g., Mulder, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2013) or it can be viewed as a point on a continuum between stress and crisis (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2003). Trauma can be defined by a dismantling of the view of the world (Herman, 1997) or by the physiological stress responses triggered by a threat which is inescapable (Roberts, 2005). The present chapter introduces two of these definitions of trauma. Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) “shattered assumptions” is one of the models of trauma based on the definition of the dismantling of the worldview. The other definition presented is that used within the diagnostic criteria for PTSD.

3.2. Shattered Assumptions

3.2.1. Basic Assumptions

One formulation of the impact of a traumatic event is that of “shattered assumptions” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This formulation is based on the premise that we all hold certain fundamental assumptions about our world. Janoff-Bulman argues that these core beliefs are developed during early attachment, at the pre-verbal stage, and as such have never been brought to conscious awareness.
Because individuals are not aware that they hold these assumptions, it is unlikely that they will be questioned unless an extreme event forces this process to occur (Janoff-Bulman).

Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) model is based on a schematic model, which posits that in order to understand and make sense of the world, people develop an internal representation of what the world is. Any new information which is presented to the individual is incorporated into this representation. When individuals are confronted with new evidence about the world, they have two alternatives as to how to incorporate this additional information (Piaget & Cook, 1952). The information can be assimilated into existing structures. In this case, the new information is interpreted in the light of what is already “known” about this item. The alternative is to change the existing structures to accommodate the new information. While clearly in early years accommodation must be particularly active in order to develop an understanding of the world, by the time adulthood is reached the internal representation of the world is rich and complex and most new information is able to be assimilated into this (Block, 1982).

These existing structures, or schemata, are not limited to definitions of words but come to represent a series of “truths” which we “know” to be accurate. The internal structures related to ourselves are particularly rich and complex, as we are presented with new information on these every day, from the day we are born (Markus, 1977).

3.2.2. Common Assumptions Relevant to Trauma

Three fundamental assumptions have been most consistently linked to trauma. These are that the world is benevolent, that the world is meaningful, and that the self is good. All of these assumptions have been developed in most people by the “good enough” parenting most receive in their early years (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

By nurturing infants, mothers ensure that the world their babies experience is safe and caring. In these early formative days, every person a baby comes into contact with is caring towards him/her. As babies grow to be adults, they may learn that earthquakes kill people and that people hurt each other, but in relation to themselves, which is the world they experience, most people do not have this basic assumption challenged. Similarly, when infants cry, they are generally comforted. A consistent pattern of reactions to a baby’s interactions teaches the
infant what to expect from the world. As they grow, most people find that when challenges do arise, it is for a definable reason and they therefore reinforce this “just world hypothesis” that what happens in the world makes sense. Finally, if an individual’s world is generally a kind place, and good things happen to good people, it follows that the individual is a good person. In this way, the third assumption of the self as good is also developed and reinforced (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

3.2.3. Impact of Shattered Assumptions

Janoff-Bulman (1992) theorises that experiencing a trauma, such as violence directed against oneself, may shatter one or all of these three fundamental assumptions. If the world generally is a kind place, and bad things only happen to bad people, then how could this have happened to me, a good person? At least one of these tenets must be false. Because the assumptions which have been shattered are so fundamental to the individual’s belief system, and therefore identity, the impact can be enormous. The core beliefs that we hold determine how we act in certain situations, and how we react, in terms of our thoughts and emotions as well as behaviour. As these actions and reactions are what make up our personality, anything which proves the falsehood of any of those assumptions fundamentally changes who we are. People who no longer believe that they are safe when they leave their homes, for example, find it impossible to function in the world.

Janoff-Bulman (1992) has proposed that an extreme reaction to an experience which threatens the individual’s sense of identity can explain the symptoms of PTSD (DSM-IV-TR). In fact, PTSD is suggested as the outcome of the individual’s coping with the event. Because the implications of the shattered assumptions are too overwhelming for the individual to deal with, his/her system simply shuts down, explaining the emotional numbing and other avoidance strategies, so that he/she does not have to deal with the implications. At the same time, however, there is an innate need to make sense of the new information, which results in re-experiencing of the original traumatic event, so that the individual can make sense of the event by reanalysing what has happened. When attempting to interpret the event becomes impossible, the numbing process takes over again in order to protect the individual (Janoff-Bulman).
Slowly, Janoff-Bulman (1992) asserts, the tandem processes of numbing and re-experiencing allow the individual to eventually make sense of what has happened to them. They may be able to gradually integrate the information into the core beliefs they held before, or they may need to develop a new set of beliefs to describe the world that they now inhabit.

3.3. Other Conceptualisations of Trauma

While Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) model of trauma is quite cognitive in nature, many other ways of conceptualising reaction to trauma include biological, social and other psychological aspects (see Delahanty & Irish, 2008, for a review). Biological models of trauma often focus on the sympathetic nervous system, which implements the “fight or flight” response and may become primed to anticipate threat constantly (Delahanty & Irish). Social aspects include the responses of people around the trauma victim, such as parents of traumatised children, and how this affects whether some of the more extreme reactions to trauma, discussed later in this chapter, are more likely to occur in the child (Delahanty & Irish). Other psychological models, such as psychoanalytic models, also investigate factors which predispose individuals to extreme stress responses to trauma. An advantage of Janoff-Bulman’s model, for the purposes of the present study, is that it examines the nature of the trauma itself, and the individual’s subjective experience of this, rather than primarily investigating the way the individual responds to the trauma.

3.4. Trauma as Defined for the Purpose of Diagnosis

While there are a variety of theoretical perspectives on trauma, including those already mentioned in this chapter, the concept has also been defined for the purpose of diagnosing psychological disorders in reaction to a traumatic experience. While a traumatic experience can trigger disorders such as those categorised as anxiety or dissociative, the trauma and stressor related disorders are recognised to be a result of an external trigger. These include reactive attachment disorder, disinhibited social engagement disorder, acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder (DSM-5). Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the most salient for the purposes of the present research. This is one of the few psychological disorders in which the aetiology of the disorder, the traumatic event, makes up a part of the criteria. The International Classification of Diseases (10th ed. Version: 2010; ICD-10; World Health
Organisation [WHO], 2010) states that the precipitating event must be of an “exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone” (p.F43.1). In this definition, the clinical understanding of trauma is noticeably more extreme than the general community understanding of the term.

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) published the most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*; APA, 2013). The previous edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text revision; *DSM-IV-TR*; APA, 2000) had been in use for the preceding 13 years and was consequently used for the present research. Under the *DSM-IV-TR* criteria, to be considered a trauma the experience must involve (Criterion A1) “actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others.” (APA, p.467). It was also necessary that the event at the time had to have provoked a reaction (Criterion A2) of “fear, helplessness or horror” (p.467). With *DSM-5* there is no criterion about the individual’s emotional reaction (Criterion A2 of *DSM-IV-TR*) and there is more allowance for vicarious trauma through exposure such as hearing about it happening to someone close or exposure to explicit details through work. However, the definition of the traumatic event itself has become even more precisely defined to be “Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (p. 271). It can be seen that these definitions more closely resemble the medical definition of a physical injury.

### 3.5. Reactions to Trauma

#### 3.5.1. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

As already discussed, one of the possible responses to trauma is known as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is a predefined set of responses to a trauma. This clinically significant condition is seen to exist at the extreme end of the continuum of responses to a traumatic event. For the *DSM-IV-TR* (APA, 2000) and *DSM-5* (APA 2013), Criterion A deals with the nature of the trauma and has already been discussed.

Within the *DSM-IV-TR*, the responses which make up the diagnosis of PTSD are grouped into three categories. Re-experiencing symptoms (Criterion B) include intrusive thoughts about the event or dreams about the event. The second set of symptoms (Criterion C) consists of the Avoidance symptoms, such as
deliberately attempting not to think about the event or changing your activities so that you will not find yourself in a similar situation. Finally, the Arousal symptoms (Criterion D) include hypervigilance to cues which may signal the possibility that the event may recur, such as the rape survivor who is finely tuned to every footstep in the street she walks down (APA, 2000).

The DSM-5 criteria also include the Intrusion (Criterion B), Avoidance (Criterion C) and Arousal symptoms (Criterion E) but have added a fourth cluster (Criterion D) of Numbing symptoms. The Numbing symptoms include some which were previously included within the Avoidance criterion as well as dissociation and loss of interest in activities (APA, 2013). As the research described in this thesis was conducted prior to the release of the latest version, the DSM-IV-TR (2000) criteria have been used for analysis. The implications of the recent changes to the diagnosis are discussed in Chapter 12.

Preceded by conditions such as shellshock among soldiers in earlier wars, the formal diagnosis of PTSD was first entered into the psychiatric lexicon in 1980 and grew out of diagnoses describing reactions to the extreme stress of the Vietnam War, sexual violence and domestic violence (Ford, 2009). While these events continue to be stressors which can lead to the diagnosis, PTSD has since been diagnosed among many different populations, including those who have experienced natural disasters (e.g., Bokszczanin, 2008) and people who receive a diagnosis of a terminal illness (e.g., Olley, Zeier, Seedat, & Stein, 2005).

3.5.2. Physical Health Reactions

Physical symptoms, for example, sleep difficulties, are included in the DSM-IV criteria for PTSD. However, research has identified a high co-morbidity rate with other physical health issues such as various cardiovascular illnesses and also diabetes. Suggested explanations for these findings include that affected individuals have a more negative appraisal of overall health, or cognitive deficits which increase risk taking behaviour and decrease help-seeking behaviour (Dougall & Swanson, 2011). This does not explain all of the physical health issues observed in people with a diagnosis of PTSD, as even when health-related behaviours are controlled for there are poorer health outcomes for individuals with a diagnosis of PTSD (Dougall & Swanson). Another suggested explanation is that the body's resources get depleted in dealing with the extreme stressor. When other, more usual, stressful life events occur, the individual is less able to cope
due to these depleted resources, therefore the impact of these subsequent events is increased, further depleting the resources. This places the individual in a state of chronic stress, which ultimately leads to compromised physical health in the traumatised individual (Dougall & Swanson).

A higher incidence of health issues has also been found in survivors of trauma who do not meet criteria for PTSD. This indicates that the physical reactions are not simply an unidentified feature of PTSD, but an additional reaction to the traumatic event and its aftermath (Dougall & Swanson, 2011).

3.5.3. General Psychological Distress

In a similar manner to physical symptoms, a higher than expected incidence of psychological disorders other than PTSD has been found in survivors of trauma. That is, anxiety and depressive disorders can exist both co-morbidly with PTSD and in its absence (Dougall & Swanson, 2011).

3.5.4. Posttraumatic Growth

Not all reactions to trauma are purely negative. Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006), among others, have investigated the idea that extremely stressful experiences can lead to development as an individual, becoming more than one was before the experience (see also Joseph, 2011; McMillen, 2004; Park & Fenster, 2004). While Calhoun and Tedeschi have labelled this development posttraumatic growth, the phenomenon has also been investigated under other terms such as stress-related growth, benefit finding, meaning making and redemption (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; McAdams, 2008; McMillen, 1999; Park, 1998, 2010). The central premise is that the shattering of assumptions often necessitates the building of a new identity, making posttraumatic growth a relatively common phenomenon in the face of trauma. The postulated growth is independent from wellbeing, in that many people still feel extreme distress, and continue to wish that the trauma had not occurred, while also acknowledging that they have changed for the better as a result of the experience. The definition of trauma used when researching posttraumatic growth is broader than the common diagnostic definitions and has been applied to a range of experiences such as being diagnosed with a terminal illness, being involved in natural disasters or terrorist attacks (Fischer, 2006), bereavement (Harvey, Barnett, & Rupe, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008), or
adjusting to the parenting of a child with a serious disability (King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000).

The primary criterion for trauma in the context of posttraumatic growth is that the event disrupts the life narrative, in that it splits life into a “before” and “after” the event from the point of view of the person who experiences it (Neimeyer, 2006). As a result, posttraumatic growth lends itself to narrative analysis, which is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Five domains in which posttraumatic growth can occur have been identified by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2006). These include appreciation of life, relationships, personal strength, life direction and spirituality.

3.6. Workplace Bullying as a Trauma

Targets of workplace bullying are frequently diagnosed with PTSD. In many cases, such a diagnosis is the only way to show the impact of the bullying in a manner suitable for court proceedings. However, this diagnosis has been disputed as the nature of workplace bullying is often covert and consequently does not suggest any physical injury or the threat of such (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). This calls into question whether the client meets Criterion A1. However, the evidence of posttraumatic symptomatology in targets of workplace bullying (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004) suggests that there is a need for further investigation.

3.6.1. Shattered Assumptions

Researchers have made use of Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) characterisation of trauma to demonstrate that targets of workplace bullying may experience the bullying as a trauma. For example, Mikkelsen and Einarsen’s (2002) study compared a group of 118 self-selected targets of bullying with a matched group of 118 people who did not report being bullied on the World Assumptions Scale (WAS; Janoff-Bulman, 1989). This scale measures the degree to which people believe certain fundamental assumptions which make the world a place they want to live in. The bullying targets held more negative views of the world and themselves, differing on all eight assumptions with the exceptions of randomness and controllability (Mikkelsen & Einarsen). Their results suggested that the fundamental assumption that was particularly shattered in victims of workplace bullying was the just world hypothesis. By contrast, only 29% of the targets had experiences which matched the diagnostic criterion of a threat to physical
integrity. The authors interpreted these findings as indicating that workplace bullying did indeed constitute a traumatic experience as described by Janoff-Bulman. It should be noted, however, that Janoff-Bulman maintained that a necessary pre-requisite of the shattering of assumptions was the experience of confronting death. This was described as the “death imprint” which calls into question everything an individual has known about the world and the self up until that point.

Similarly, Rodríguez-Muñoz et al.’s (2010) investigation of PTSD symptomatology among 183 self-selected victims of workplace bullying compared them with 183 control participants, recruited from various organisations in Madrid. With regard to the fundamental assumptions, Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. (2010) reported that the victim group reported a significantly lower belief in these assumptions, as measured on the WAS (Janoff-Bulman, 1989) than the control group. The authors concluded that their study overall supported the notion that PTSD was a consequence of the bullying for a substantial proportion of those who experienced workplace bullying (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al.).

3.6.2. Threat to Life via Livelihood

It has been suggested that targets of workplace bullying can experience a threat to their life (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). This is because the experience of bullying can make the workplace intolerable. If targets feel that they cannot cope with work, or, once there, with functioning effectively, they may feel that their ability to support themselves is at risk. Additionally, the nature of the bullying may be aimed at ensuring the target loses their job. People who feel unable to support themselves financially, which thus threatens their ability to provide security to themselves and their families, could rationally believe that they are experiencing a threat to their survival (Mikkelsen & Einarsen).

3.6.3. Posttraumatic Stress Symptomatology in Workplace Bullying Targets

An additional argument for the view of workplace bullying as a potentially traumatising experience is the observation of symptoms in targets of workplace bullying which are consistent with reactions to trauma. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) investigated PTSD symptomatology among 118 self-selected victims of workplace bullying who had either contacted the authors after hearing about the study or had been contacted by a union representative following making a complaint about workplace bullying. This study made use of the Posttraumatic
Diagnostic Scale (PDS; Foa, Cashman, Jaycox, & Perry, 1997), which investigates all criteria of PTSD. They found that 76% of the respondents reported PTSD symptomatology, although only 29% met full criteria by having experienced threats to their physical integrity. The authors also reported that the more severe the bullying, the greater the degree of the reported PTSD symptomatology.

In a Norwegian study of 102 participants, recruited from the members of 2 national anti-bullying associations, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004) measured psychiatric distress and symptoms of PTSD following exposure to bullying. Exposure to bullying was measured using both a subjective measure which provided a definition of bullying and then asked participants if they had been exposed to bullying, and an objective measure, using the Negative Acts Questionnaire, Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). Scores on the various questions of the NAQ-R were summed to provide an overall measure of the extent of the bullying experienced. The authors found that a majority of victims of bullying were experiencing a clinical level of psychiatric distress (Matthiesen & Einarsen), as measured by the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL; Derogatis, 1974), and also of PTSD, as measured by both the Posttraumatic Stress Scale (PTSS-10; Raphael, Lundin, & Weisaeth, 1989) and the Impact of Events Scale, Revised (IES-R; Weiss & Marmar, 1997). Some issues with this conclusion exist, however, as the authors of the IES-R explicitly caution against the use of cut-off scores to indicate clinical levels of PTSD and as such do not provide appropriate scores to determine clinical distress (Weiss & Marmar). The reason given for this position is that the questions only relate to the level to which symptoms have been experienced, and do not measure impact on functioning which is necessary for a diagnosis of PTSD (Weiss & Marmar).

Another criterion which is not measured by the IES-R is the traumatic nature of the precipitating event (Weiss & Marmar, 1997). In Matthiesen and Einarsen’s (2004) study, the levels of distress were higher among the bullied group than among comparison groups which included parents who had lost their children in a bus accident. The authors were careful to point out that this did not mean bullying was a more stressful event, and drew the distinction between the single catastrophic event which generally categorises PTSD and the more ongoing nature of workplace bullying, which by definition is of prolonged duration. This
discussion raises the question of whether bullying can be considered a trauma, which is a necessary criterion for PTSD to be an appropriate diagnosis.

A further finding of the study (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004) was that while subjective evaluation of the level of bullying was related to the level of distress and symptoms of PTSD, the stronger relationship was with the objective measure of the level of bullying based on the number and frequency of negative acts experienced. This finding might be explained by the provision of a definition of bullying before asking for the subjective evaluation. It was discussed in Chapter 2 that the provision of a definition for participants to define their experience against does not actually identify whether the person felt bullied at the time. Duration of the bullying was not related to levels of PTSD symptomatology, which the authors attributed to a homogenous sample, but more recent bullying resulted in higher levels of distress and PTSD. Another predictor of higher levels of distress and PTSD-related symptoms was being bullied by leaders as opposed to peers. The authors suggested that this indicated the importance of a power differential when workplace bullying occurs (Matthiesen & Einarsen).

Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. (2010) also investigated PTSD symptomatology in a study of 183 victims of workplace bullying, recruited from victim support groups in a number of regions of Spain, and 183 control participants, recruited from various organisations in Madrid. PTSD in this study was measured using the Structured Interview for PTSD (Davidson, Malik, & Travers, 1997), thereby allowing measurement of Criteria A1 and A2. The authors reported that, of the victim group, 43% met the full criteria for PTSD, including both A criteria (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al.). They also reported that 54% met all the criteria except A1. This latter statement, however, was not consistent with other reported figures in the study. The authors further found that women were more likely to report PTSD symptomatology, particularly re-experiencing, although there were no mean differences between men and women in terms of the level of bullying experienced (Rodríguez-Muñoz et al.). Given the potential gender differences in the interpretation of experiences as bullying that were discussed in Chapter 2, Rodríguez-Muñoz et al.’s findings reinforce the need for an investigation of the impact of the subjective experience of stressful situations in the workplace.
Although targets of workplace bullying can display reactions consistent with those in PTSD, the pattern of the symptoms may not be the same as for those who have experienced another kind of traumatic experience. In investigating workplace bullying prevalence and PTSD symptomatology among care professionals, Tehrani (2004) surveyed 165 care professionals, making use of the extended Impact of Events Scale (IES-E; Tehrani, Cox & Cox, 2002) which was developed as an alternative to the IES-R (Weiss & Marmar, 1997). Of the 67 who reported experiencing bullying, 36 were found to be experiencing PTSD symptoms. Through factor analysis of the entire participant group, Tehrani found only two factors compared with the three factors of Arousal, Avoidance and Re-experiencing usually observed in PTSD. The two factors Tehrani found consisted of the first factor, Arousal, and a second factor which included both the Avoidance and Re-experiencing symptoms. This suggests that while there is mounting evidence for the diagnosis of PTSD within targets of workplace bullying, there may be qualitative differences in the experience of targets as opposed to victims of other types of trauma.

3.6.4. Prolonged Duress Stress Disorder

Because of the aforementioned difficulties in ascribing a label of trauma to the experience of workplace bullying, but the consistent research findings of post traumatic symptomatology in targets of workplace bullying, a new diagnostic category has been suggested. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) suggested that the category of prolonged duress stress disorder (PDSD) could be used to classify individuals who meet the criteria of PTSD with the exception of Criterion A1. Thus, the cumulative effect of smaller violations, and the firm belief of the target that it is not possible to remove him/herself from the situation and the prolonged duress, would be considered to have an impact of similar magnitude to an acute traumatic event. A similar rationale has been used for the informal use of the term complex PTSD, although this is more commonly associated with prolonged duress during early development, such as sexual abuse (Litt, 2013). Neither PDSD nor complex PTSD has been included in the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013).
3.7. Summary of Chapter

The present chapter has introduced the concept of trauma and potential consequences of trauma. The two main conceptualisations of trauma investigated in the present research were the *DSM-IV-TR* definition, which is as a threat to physical integrity, and Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) formulation as the shattering of fundamental assumptions about the world. The response to trauma explored in the present studies, PTSD, was presented. Finally, an overview of previous work linking workplace bullying with PTSD was given.

The present research, specifically Study Two which is presented in Chapter 8, aimed to explore the idea of workplace bullying as a trauma. Workplace bullying and other stressful situations were examined from the point of view of shattered assumptions and also as a threat to physical integrity. Symptomatology of PTSD in response to these situations was also investigated.

This chapter has outlined the current thinking around workplace bullying and its relation to PTSD. Chapter 4 discusses the area of posttraumatic growth, and explains how a narrative methodology can be utilised to explore traumatic experiences, including posttraumatic growth.
Chapter 4. Narrative analysis of difficult life experiences such as bullying

Building on the exploration of workplace bullying as a traumatic experience discussed in Chapter 3, the present chapter presents the argument for using narrative analysis to investigate workplace bullying and introduces McAdams’ (1993) approach which was used in the present research. Posttraumatic growth is also revisited from a narrative perspective and the method by which this was examined is explained.

4.1. Processing Trauma Through Narrative

One of the formulations of trauma presented in Chapter 3 was as the shattering of fundamental assumptions about the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). As discussed in Chapter 3, these fundamental assumptions are viewed as a basic part of an individual’s identity. The development of identity has been investigated in many different ways and with many different viewpoints. One viewpoint is the idea that identity is developed through the process of using stories to explain the meaning of one’s existence to oneself (Adler & McAdams, 2007; Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1988; Hermans, 1996; Singer & Blagov, 2004). Essentially viewed as the search for meaning, the stories developed explain past events and behaviour. This can especially be true of traumatic events which make up part of the life story. Furthermore, a traumatic event can serve to highlight the degree to which we have created meaning of our lives. This is because the traumatic event is a stark contrast and, as discussed in the previous chapter, can shatter the assumptions which had hitherto been so fundamental as to be unsuspected (Crossley, 2000; Janoff-Bulman, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1996). Narrative can also serve as a means of containing the trauma. If the event can be expressed in words, it might become less overwhelming than it first appeared (Crossley; Thorne & McLean, 2003). Identity as a life narrative is a concept which has gained momentum in recent decades (McAdams, 2001b) and is particularly useful when analysing trauma and posttraumatic growth (Pals & McAdams, 2004).
4.1.1. Describing our Lives

Throughout human history, people have used stories to describe events as well as their own actions and even existence (Hermans, 1996; McAdams, 2001b; Polkinghorne, 1988). The use of a narrative form has been shown to render information more easily recalled. This is particularly true for more richly detailed stories (see Graesser & Singer, 1994; ). It has been suggested that the use of narrative allows the narrator and audience to draw inferences about causality and to ascribe meaning and purpose to actions and circumstances. Furthermore, researchers have theorised that analysing the way in which a narrator tells a story gives insights into his/her motivations and interpretation of the world (Crossley, 2000; Hermans; McAdams; Polkinghorne).

How individuals tell stories has been investigated by many different researchers. Polkinghorne (1988) explains that narrative is one of the operations by which humans make sense of the world, by drawing together events and actions that are separated in time and space so that they are able to be understood as a unified whole. Like Polkinghorne, Hermans (1999) indicates that space and time are fundamental elements of a story, and suggests that integration naturally forms when a story is created. Furthermore, Hermans argues that selecting stories from their own histories enables individuals to explain their own behaviour and essentially display their own values thereby defining who they truly are.

In support of Hermans’ (1999) contention that stories are the means by which people explain their identities are the findings of Thorne and colleagues (McLean & Thorne, 2003; Thorne, 2000; Thorne & McLean, 2003; Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004) who have looked at the development of narrative thought throughout the life span. They have found that when people tell stories of their past, these personal memories tend to be mostly from adolescence and early adulthood, a time when identity development is particularly important. Additionally, for memories which were extremely important to the individuals’ identity, self-defining memories, most also included a vivid memory of telling the event to someone else, supporting Hermans’ linking of telling stories with identity.

While there are varying narrative views of identity, there are commonalities between them which include the idea that our view of who we are is supported by stories from our past and that the act of telling these stories, either
to ourselves or to others, helps us to develop this view and determine how we would act in future situations as well as who we fundamentally are. McAdams’ (1993) Theory of Personality integrates these different ideas quite successfully (Hermans, 1996). The theory states that individuals develop a tendency to describe events in a particular way, and that each individual's narrative form is indicative of his/her way of interacting with the world, otherwise known as personality (McAdams, 1993). In later years, this has been refined to suggest that the life narrative is deeper than simply personality but is the representation of an individual’s identity (McAdams, 2001b).

4.1.2. What Makes a Narrative?

At a very young age, children develop awareness that a story has a beginning, middle and end. They are also able to distinguish between narratives and other forms of spoken information (McAdams, 1993). The end is usually expected to involve some type of resolution or denouement (McAdams, 2006). Another important feature of a story is that events have a sequence or order. Although they may not always be described in a purely chronological order, it is important that this order exists (Adler & McAdams, 2007). A feature which stories have, which life often does not, is that there appears to be some type of causality implied in the way in which events follow one another (McAdams, 2006). Therefore, beginning, middle and end often follow the form of an action leading to a consequence leading to a reaction. McAdams (1993) also identified that expectations we have of a story include that it has a setting as well as characters.

4.2. Scope of Narratives

Narratives can be used to describe single events or chains of events, and can also be used to make sense of an individual’s entire life experiences. The former are sometimes referred to as micronarratives (Baumister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990), whereas the latter have been described as the personal myth (McAdams, 1993). The interviews used to elicit each type of narrative differ on aspects other than simply the scope of the story told.
4.2.1. The Life Story Interview

McAdams (1993) developed a life story interview to capture the meaning and significant events of a person's entire life to date, and hopes and fears for the future. Divided into nine sections, participants are guided through the articulation of the broad outline of their lives to the finer detail of events which were particularly significant or important to them (McAdams).

**Life chapters.** In the life chapters section, interviewees are asked to think of their lives as a book. They are then asked to divide the book into chapters and name each chapter. This allows the interviewer to determine what the participant views as the structure of the life narrative.

**Critical events.** Participants are then asked to tell, in some detail, the stories of critical events in their lives. The first to be identified is a peak experience, which is, as the name implies, a high point in the individual's life. A nadir experience, which is a low point, is then described. Participants are then asked to describe a turning point in their life story, an event that caused their lives to take a new direction. After describing their earliest memory, participants are then asked to relate an important scene from childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Finally, one other important scene, from anywhere in the life story, is narrated. In this way, participants select and tell micronarratives of events they found particularly important.

**Life challenge.** The greatest challenge is described, and the impact of this on the life story. Also any assistance from others which the individual had to meet this challenge is identified.

**Influences on story.** The next sections of the interview ask the participant to identify influences on their life story: people or organisations, and also a story or movie.

**Alternative Futures.** The participant is asked to describe both positive and negative possible futures.

**Interpretation.** The final three sections request that the interviewee identify his/her values, identify an overarching theme to the life story, and also provide any other information the interviewer may need to understand the life story.
4.2.2. Episodic Interviews

In the life story interview, the researcher investigates scenes of an individual's life that the interviewee considers to be important. That is, the participant determines which experience was the best, the worst or the most challenging and which important events form the life story. However, a narrative approach can also ask participants to tell the story of a particular event or, more commonly, type of event that is of research interest. This type of narrative interview is called the episodic interview (Flick, 1998), and has been utilised to investigate experiences common to a group of people, such as a hospital stay. Because the event or event category to be described is determined by the researcher, it is therefore the researcher who has ascribed meaning. The event may or may not have had meaning or importance for the participant.

4.3. Elements of Narratives

A number of methods are brought to bear when analysing narrative accounts. The form of the story itself can be analysed or particular aspects of the content (Murray, 2003).

4.3.1. The Story

By utilising the Life Story Interview, McAdams (1993) has found that individuals differ on a number of aspects of their stories. The most basic of these is the narrative tone of their stories, in terms of whether they are generally positive or negative. The structure of the story can also vary, following the form of a comedy, tragedy, romance or irony. From the form of an individual’s personal myth, it can be determined, for example, whether that person generally expects good things from life, or whether there is an expectation this is simply a precursor to disaster. The characters in individuals’ life stories are also important, representing the way they see themselves in different settings and how they want to be seen by others (McAdams).

4.3.2. Themes

Individuals’ autobiographical narratives are often defined by two fundamental motives: Power and Love. McAdams (1993) labels these two fundamental thematic categories Agency, a more individualistic focus on events, and Communion, a desire to be closer to others.
Agency. Agentic themes denote personal striving, achievement, and individualistic pursuits. McAdams (1993) has identified four agency themes. Self-mastery is the ability to protect the self. The Status or Victory theme is that of being recognised for individual characteristics or achievements. By contrast, the Achievement/Responsibility theme is more about striving to do the best one can, without necessarily receiving recognition for this. The final Agency theme is Empowerment, or being enabled by assistance from a powerful other to achieve (McAdams, 2001a).

Communion. The Communion themes are concerned with feeling connected to others and being at one with them (McAdams, 1993). Love/Friendship is the theme of being powerfully close to a significant other. Dialogue is achieved when, through conversation, a strong understanding is reached between two others. Care/Help is the experience of being able to assist another person, and be there for them. Unity is the theme of being a part of a cohesive group, and feeling one with them (McAdams, 2001a).

Negative Agency and Communion themes. McAdams (2001a) indicated that when agency and communion themes are present, they are almost always in a positive direction. That is, if empowerment is mentioned, for example, the person will be speaking about being empowered by someone else to achieve something. The agentic and communal themes are therefore most useful when analysing narrative accounts about peak experiences and other positive stories. Early work by McAdams (1985) recommended that nadir experiences be analysed using negative power (agency) and love (communion) themes. The negative agency themes are mostly concerned with some failing on the part of the self and consist of Failure/Weakness, Losing Face, Ignorance and Conflict. The negative communion themes are Separation, Rejection, Disillusionment and Another’s Misfortune. These negative themes have been utilised by researchers when analysing micronarratives of challenging life experiences such as a hospital stay (Polimeni, 2004) or a business failure (Cuesta, 2007).

Opposite Agency and Communion themes. Polimeni (2004), who interviewed 19 women about periods in hospital which they experienced as life-changing, found that a number of narratives contained themes which were best described as the opposite of the agentic and communal themes identified by McAdams (1993). For example, narratives contained themes which were around
being unable to care for the self, or protect the self from harm, which was identified as the opposite of Self-Mastery.

4.3.3. Attributions or Interpretation

The direction which the story takes, whether positive or negative, is an aspect on which individual accounts differ. Even the same story can contain sequences which have this feature of direction.

**Contamination sequence.** A contamination sequence is one in which the story moves from a mostly good or neutral situation to an irretrievably bad situation. The predominance of contamination sequences within stories of life transitions has been associated with more negative outcomes (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001).

**Redemption sequence.** In redemption sequences, a bad situation or event ends by some good occurring. This good outcome does not necessarily balance the bad event, in that the magnitude of the good that occurs does not have to be the same as that of the loss or distress which has precipitated it (McAdams et al., 2001). Three aspects have been identified on which redemption sequences could go beyond a simple move from negative to positive. These identified domains were enhanced agency, enhanced communion, and ultimate concerns. Thus, a person might discover that they had more coping resources than they had previously imagined, or they might develop an increased closeness to others as a result of the event or situation. Finally, individuals might discover an increased appreciation for existential, spiritual or religious matters (Center, 1999).

4.3.4. Aspects of Self-Defining Memories

Blagov and Singer (2004) have investigated self-defining memories, which are memories that are vivid and easily recalled. They are memories which individuals use as examples of their life narrative and which define their personality. The aspects on which Blagov and Singer noted individuals as differing in their self-defining memories were the specificity, content and affective tone of the narratives, as well as whether the individual has integrated the memory, or drawn meaning from it as relating to the overall life narrative. Workplace bullying narratives may or may not be self-defining. However, these aspects, particularly the integration of the story into the life narrative, may be informative to examine.
**Specificity.** A self-defining memory can be very specific, tied to a particular moment in time. Others may be about a broad period of time, such as a year, or a season (Blagov & Singer, 2004). Blagov and Singer found that individuals with less specific self-defining memories were higher in repressive defensiveness, a type of avoidant coping strategy.

**Content.** The content of self-defining memories can also differ, describing relationships, work or other life areas (Blagov & Singer, 2004). This aspect is less relevant in studies where the researcher has defined the content of the narrative, such as workplace bullying.

**Affect.** The emotional tone of a narrative can be positive, negative or sometimes neutral (Blagov & Singer, 2004). While this is a helpful aspect to investigate in the types of memories individuals select as self-defining memories, as with content, when the subject of the story is defined by the researcher, the affective tone of the narrative is less informative.

**Integration or meaning.** An aspect which may be informative for any memory, self-defining or otherwise, is the degree to which the event has been integrated into the life narrative. Singer and Blagov (2004) define this aspect as whether the individual is able to take a step back from the event itself and draw meaning from the situation, relating it to the person he/she is. This may involve individuals feeling that they have learnt something from the event which has affected who they are, or simply that the event is an example of aspects of their personality. In this way, integration is often similar to redemptive sequences. However, a memory can be integrated into a negative view of self as well as a positive one (Blagov & Singer, 2004).

4.3.5. **Relevance of Narrative Analysis to Workplace Bullying**

The narrative analysis elements, particularly the themes of Agency and Communion as well as Redemption and Contamination sequences, have been used to describe life events which are difficult and which challenge identity (e.g., Adler & Poulin, 2009; Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Gallia & Pines, 2009; Gonzalez, Bockting, Beckman, & Duran, 2012; McAdams & Bowman, 2001; McAdams et al., 2001; Polimeni, 2004; SimanTov-Nachlieli, Shnabel, & Nadler, 2013). Polimeni, for example, interviewed 19 women about hospital stays which they had perceived as life-altering. She found redemption and contamination sequences as well as agentic and communal themes in the narratives about the
women’s hospital stays, but also found that the opposite of these themes were present in many narratives. The opposite of feeling agency was particularly prominent. Polimeni recommended that future studies consider using the agency and communion scales as bipolar, such that the opposite of the themes (for example, feelings of powerlessness) could be coded.

Workplace bullying could, like a particularly disempowering hospital stay, be viewed as a difficult experience which also has the potential to challenge at least one aspect of an individual’s identity: the work identity. For this reason, McAdams’ (1993) themes of agency and communion, as well as Polimeni’s (2004) identified opposites of these were deemed appropriate to be applied to the experience of workplace bullying and similar experiences, as were redemption and contamination sequences (McAdams et al., 2001).

4.4. A Narrative Understanding of Posttraumatic Growth

Chapter 3 explained that the view of trauma as a disruption to the life narrative (Neimeyer, 2006), which is the basis of posttraumatic growth, lends itself to narrative analysis. This section explains how by applying a narrative approach to traumatic experiences, an understanding of posttraumatic growth can be achieved.

4.4.1. Shattered Assumptions and Disruption to the Life Narrative

Stories are considered the essence of identity, and the means by which people develop and consolidate their fundamental assumptions. A trauma which shatters these assumptions, thereby threatening the self, can be seen as a disruption to the life narrative (Neimeyer, 2006). Indeed, Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) have noted a tendency on the part of those who have experienced trauma to refer to 'before' and 'after' the event, as though the identities on either side are different people, defined by different stories.

4.4.2. The Reconstruction of Narrative

This disruption of narrative, and the perceived ending of the self whom one was before, makes the process of constructing a new self equivalent to writing a new narrative or life story. This activity of creating a new self through narrative has been conceptualised as identity processing (Pals & McAdams, 2004). Pals (2006) argued that posttraumatic growth by means of identity processing is achieved by the two steps of narrative processing and coherent positive resolution. In narrative processing, individuals develop a story to fully acknowledge the deep
pain or horror they have experienced, and fully appreciate the negative impact it has had on their lives. This has been identified as a necessary step in achieving posttraumatic growth, as for change to occur, prior assumptions need to be recognised as having been shattered. After this impact has been processed through narrative, providing a coherent positive resolution to the story completes the identity processing. Pals investigated this model among women in their 50s, when describing the most difficult period in their lives.

Using data from the Mills Longitudinal Study of Lives, Pals (2006) collected stories from 83 women (at the age of 52) about their most difficult time since college. These narratives were coded by three independent researchers for the degree to which they demonstrated evidence of the two theorised elements of narrative identity processing. The first element, exploratory narrative processing or fully acknowledging and examining the negative aspects of the situation was scored using the average of two 5-point scales. Exploratory narrative processing was found to be related to the personality trait of coping openness at age 21 years and also to maturity at age 61 years. Furthermore, exploratory narrative processing mediated the relationship between coping openness at 21 and maturity at 61. The second element, coherent positive resolution or the development of a meaningful and positive ending to the story was scored using the average of two 3-point and two 4-point scales. Coherent positive resolution was found to be related to ego-resiliency at age 52, increase in ego-resiliency from 21 to 52, and also life satisfaction at age 61. The change in ego-resiliency from 21 to 52 was found to mediate the relationship between coherent positive resolution and life satisfaction. Pals found that the two elements, exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution, combined to predict positive self-transformation which was coded on a 5 point scale. This was presented by the author as evidence that coding of narrative accounts was a valid and preferred means of scoring an individual's level of posttraumatic growth, characterised in the study as positive self-transformation.

Pals (2006) identified limitations of the study as being the homogenous sample and also the variation in the difficult life events chosen. However, the variation in difficult life events was also presented as a potential strength, as it is important for individuals to select the events to which they attach meaning. The use of scales with such a limited number of possible values (particularly the 5-
point positive self-transformation coding values) as variables in a multiple regression is not recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), who state that this analysis is for use with continuous variables and may also make use of dichotomous variables. However, the relevance of the use of narrative to investigate posttraumatic growth is inherent in the definition of trauma as a disruption to the life narrative. It was therefore considered worthwhile to make use of this method of analysis when analysing individuals’ stories of workplace bullying.

Further work in the field of growth (Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Lilgendahl, McLean, & Mansfield, 2013) suggests that the ability to grow from difficult experiences can be influenced by individual characteristics. These can include neuroticism, with lower levels of neuroticism being associated with more growth, individuals’ view of personality, with individuals more able to achieve growth if they believe that personality is able to be changed, and the tendency to engage in positive processing of events.

4.4.3. Relevance of Identity Processing Analysis to Workplace Bullying

Chapter 3 introduced the conceptualisation of workplace bullying as a traumatic experience. Analysing posttraumatic growth from workplace bullying experiences was therefore a relevant extension of Pals’ (2006) analysis of difficult life experiences from the perspective of posttraumatic growth.

Resilience in the context of workplace bullying is beginning to be given attention (Jackson, Firtgo, & Edenborough, 2007; Van Heugton, 2013), both as a coping strategy and as an outcome. Van Heugton, through semi-structured interviews with 17 social workers in New Zealand who self-identified as having been bullied, identified resilience as a common theme identified by participants as having been an outcome of their experience of bullying. Van Heugton proposed that this outcome has been underexplored in the research so far. The present research aimed to explore the means by which positive outcomes might be achieved. Identity processing leading to posttraumatic growth (Pals, 2006) was therefore investigated in the context of workplace bullying.
4.5. Summary

The present chapter has presented an overview of some of the many different ways narrative can be analysed to provide information about individual differences, and, more specifically, about identity. A brief introduction of some forms of narrative analysis was provided, particularly around pivotal life events and posttraumatic growth.

A narrative approach was taken to workplace bullying in two of the studies making up the present research. Study Three, described in Chapter 9, applied McAdams’ (1993) themes of agency and communion, with Polimeni’s (2004) suggested modifications, as well as redemption and contamination sequences (McAdams et al., 2001), to the study of stressful situations in the workplace. Chapter 10 describes Study Four, which replicated a part of Pals’ (2006) investigation of identity processing of difficult life experiences by applying this to the processing of workplace bullying and similar experiences. Chapter 5 addresses the different ways in which coping with workplace bullying has been researched and its relevance to the present research.
Chapter 5. Responses to workplace bullying

A comprehensive investigation into workplace bullying would not be complete without some reference to how individuals and organisations deal with the threat posed by workplace bullying. The present chapter reviews research on this aspect of workplace bullying, including coping responses at both the individual and organisational levels, as well as the role of therapists in working with targets of workplace bullying.

5.1. Organisational Responses and Requirements

There is a distinction between what responses to bullying at an organisational level should be and what actually occurs. The key to an effective response appears to be having a clear policy in place (Hoel & Einarsen, 2011). Rayner and Lewis (2011) have provided guidelines on what such policies should contain. This section looks at such policies and their implementation.

5.1.1. Global Context

As with bullying research in general, Europe appears to be more advanced in developing standards for dealing with workplace bullying than Australia. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and employers signed up to a framework for managing situations of bullying in the workplace (European Social Dialogue, 2007). Responses to occupational risks to health have been categorised as primary, secondary and tertiary responses (Vartia & Leka, 2011). Primary responses are where most policies are aimed: at preventing the injury (in this case workplace bullying) from occurring in the first place by creating a safe workplace environment. Tertiary responses involve rehabilitating injured workers after the injury has occurred. Secondary responses, which are the focus of this section of the present research, are responding as soon as the risk or threat is brought to attention and ensuring the issue is resolved with respect to all parties (Vartia & Leka).

Hoel and Einarsen (2011) presented recommendations for this secondary response to workplace bullying, based on the European Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (European Social Dialogue, 2007) and on previous research. They stressed the importance of having a strong policy, not only for preventing bullying but also for specifying how incidents will be
investigated, before such a policy is required to be used. In order to be effective, these policies must include a clear definition of what behaviour is unacceptable in the workplace, and allow for confidentiality to be maintained as much as is possible without interfering with the investigation, rather than simply guaranteeing confidentiality. In addition to providing investigators with the authority to carry out their investigation, Hoel and Einarsen also strongly recommend that identified investigators receive thorough training in the procedures and how to carry out an investigation, as these are very specific skills and experience in other management practices is not sufficient.

5.1.2. Australian and Victorian policy

Federal policy with regard to workplace bullying is still in its infancy in Australia, with recommendations around workplace bullying by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment (2012) being submitted to Parliament in November 2013 and resulting in a draft Code of Practice (Safe Work Australia [SWA], 2011) being released for comment in March 2013 (SWA, 2013). The draft code (SWA, 2011) recommends a clearly-defined policy for dealing with workplace bullying and, in addition to recommending early intervention strategies, defines a four-step process consisting of a complaint being lodged, management informing both parties what the process will be, a formal investigation, and outcomes. Finally, the post-outcome activities which are recommended are follow-up and possible appeals processes (SWA, 2011). Victoria, the Australian state in which the present research was conducted, does not fall under the purview of Safe Work Australia, instead being guided by Worksafe Victoria. Like the SWA (2011) draft Code, guidelines developed by Worksafe Victoria (2012) provide recommendations for a clearly defined process which respects all parties concerned and results in a clearly defined outcome in the form of a report.

5.1.3. Individual Reactions to Organisational Responses

While recommendations and policies may be put in place, these must be appropriately evaluated. Fredricksen and McCorkle (2013) have raised the need for a structure for recording and examining organisational responses to workplace bullying. The question also remains as to how a target of bullying experiences the organisational response. Examinations of this question have traditionally been qualitative in nature and often presented as single case studies (see Hogh, 2012 for
a review). More recent studies have used qualitative analysis to draw conclusions about overarching themes among the stories of a number of targets (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2010a; Dzurac, 2013).

Organisational responses can be viewed as extremely invalidating (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Dzurac, 2013) and the way in which targets respond to this additional stressor can impact their decisions about what actions they ultimately take. Utilising a phenomenological approach, D’Cruz and Noronha (2010a) analysed the interviews of 10 employees from different international-facing call centres in India, who had self-identified as having experienced bullying. The authors found that when initially responding to bullying, individuals felt a level of confidence that their concerns would be addressed, based on the professed philosophy of the organisation for which they worked. However, as time went on and nothing appeared to happen or, worse, as representatives of the organisation appeared to align themselves with the bully, individuals became disillusioned with the organisation. Most participants ultimately responded by a strategic search for a new position in a different organisation (D’Cruz & Noronha). These findings suggest that individuals’ perceptions of the organisational responses are worthy of analysis, as they impact on both individuals and organisations.

5.1.4. Organisational Differences

It has already been mentioned that the need for taxonomy of organisational responses has been highlighted (Fredricksen & McCorkle, 2013). An early attempt at this was made by Ferris (2004), based on personal experience as a counsellor of targets of workplace bullying. Ferris suggested that the responses which an organisational representative can make to workplace bullying fall into three categories. These are to excuse the behaviour, to characterise the situation as a personality conflict between two individuals who are equally to blame, or to label the behaviour as damaging and take action accordingly. Of these, only the latter response was determined to avoid further harm to the target of the bullying. Ferris reported that this response was only observed in organisations which had already had costly interactions with the legal system because of their responses to bullying.
5.2. Individual Responses

In addition to organisational responses, and how these are viewed by individuals, also of interest are the ways in which individuals attempt to deal with being the target of workplace bullying. Research which has investigated individuals’ responses have generally conceptualised workplace bullying as a stressor and make use of the field of coping research as a framework for their investigations.

5.2.1. Coping Responses

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described coping as behaviour which attempts to adapt to the challenge imposed by an external stressor and categorised coping responses into problem-focussed and emotion-focussed coping strategies. Problem-focused strategies involve doing something to manage the situation whereas emotion-focused strategies involve managing the individual’s emotional response to the problem. Folkman and Lazarus (1985) demonstrated that most people tend to use a combination of the different types of strategies and, furthermore, that the predominance of the type of strategy depends on the demands of the situation. For example, prior to an academic examination, students made more use of problem-focused strategies directed at learning the required material whereas following the examination, when the outcome was already decided, they made more use of emotion-focused strategies aimed at managing their anxiety about their performance (Folkman & Lazarus). Folkman (1997) later included meaning-based coping strategies, such as positive reappraisal of the situation and turning to spiritual beliefs, which can elicit positive emotions even in the midst of extremely difficult situations which in turn sustain the problem- or emotion-focused coping strategies. Other proposed categorisations of coping strategies include active versus passive and vigilance versus avoidance strategies (Krohne, 2003).

5.2.2. Coping with Workplace Bullying

A number of studies on coping with workplace bullying look at general coping strategies and personality traits such as resilience or sense of coherence (e.g., Jackson et al., 2007; Nielsen et al., 2010). A study that looked at general coping strategies was that of Dehue, Bolman, Vollink, and Poutielse (2012) who investigated the links between bullying, coping strategy used and health outcomes
in a study of 356 workers in the Netherlands. By means of a mailed survey, the researchers compared participants who had not been bullied, who had experienced bullying monthly, and who had experienced bullying weekly. While significant differences were found between the three groups on measures of health, depression, wellbeing and absenteeism, few differences were found between the groups on their coping strategies as measured by the Coping Style section of the Dutch Occupational Stress Indicator. The coping style of “compensation”, which involved items such as “When I have problems at work, I drink”, was the only one on which there were significant differences. People who had experienced workplace bullying were more likely to use this coping strategy. One explanation offered by the authors for the lack of findings was that the coping items were not explicitly related to workplace bullying.

Rather than looking at general personality traits and generic coping strategies for all situations in life, it might be useful to specifically investigate how employees handle being the target of workplace bullying. In a study of 398 Icelandic store and office workers and bank employees, Olaffson and Johansdottir (2004) tested a scale specifically focussed on coping with workplace bullying. They found that coping strategies fell into four categories: Seek help, Avoidance, Assertiveness and Do nothing. They also found that males were less likely than females to use seeking help or avoidance strategies, and more likely to use the specific assertiveness strategy of confronting the bully. Increased age was associated with strategies which involved doing nothing. In terms of the scale which was used to measure coping strategies, Olaffson and Johansdottir found that while the four factor structure was stable, the internal reliabilities of the four subscales were quite low. The authors suggested that the reliabilities could be improved by the addition of more items and the removal of essentially duplicate items.

It should also be noted that a quantitative scale which measures ways in which people respond to bullying behaviours in the workplace can only measure responses which have been included in the scale items. It cannot measure other, more novel, strategies which individuals might make use of. An aim of the present research was to begin to address these issues by qualitatively exploring individuals’ attempted coping strategies in order to generate more possible items for a scale measuring ways people respond to bullying in the workplace.
5.2.3. Leaving as a Coping Strategy

A number of studies have suggested that targets of workplace bullying are more likely than non-targets to express an intention to resign from their organisations (e.g., D’Cruz & Noronha, 2010a, 2010b; Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Inderrieden, 2005; Niedl, 1996). Berthelsen, Skogstad, Lau, and Einarsen (2011) investigated whether this expressed intention translated to a higher turnover among targets of workplace bullying. By surveying 1,775 participants drawn from the Norwegian Central Employee Register at two timepoints, 2005 and again in 2007, Berthelsen et al. investigated relationships between exposure to workplace bullying, self-labelling as a target of workplace bullying, intention to leave and actual change of employer between the two timepoints.

Their findings indicated that although self-labelled targets of workplace bullying expressed a higher intention to leave at both timepoints than those who did not label themselves as targets, they were not more likely to have changed employer over the two-year time-frame. However, participants who had been exposed to bullying behaviours (as objectively measured by the Negative Acts Questionnaire) scored higher than those who had not been exposed on intention to leave at both timepoints, and were also significantly more likely to have changed employer between the two timepoints.

5.3. Therapeutic responses

A difficulty faced by therapists when confronting a systemic issue such as workplace bullying is that usually only one person within the system is engaged with the therapy (Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011). Working with this reality requires maintaining an awareness of the external system.

5.3.1. Individual Counselling

Targets of workplace bullying can be treated in an individual counselling setting, in which case only the target and the therapist are present. Tehrani (2011) cautions that individual counsellors, unable to observe the organisation and discuss with other actors, cannot be aware of the true situation, and recommends an awareness of the existence of other perspectives and roles. Individuals have a tendency to see their own actions as explainable by the situation, while judging others’ actions as a result of personality flaws (Jones & Nisbett, 1972), and it is important to gently bring clients to an awareness of their own roles. Tehrani describes a process of revealing the “bullying drama” (p. 385), in which the four
roles of victim, persecutor, rescuer (who tries to save the victim from the situation) and avenger (who usually has been bullied previously and acts ‘for’ the victim) are present. Rather than playing out these roles, clients are encouraged to explore the feelings from which they stem. She suggests these are vulnerability, power, responsiveness and justice for the victim, persecutor, rescuer and avenger roles, respectively. Individual clients can then learn to interact more effectively with colleagues, whether they decide to go back to the same workplace or move onto another (Tehrani).

5.3.2. Inpatient Treatment

Group settings can be used for treating people who have been exposed to workplace bullying although, as in the case with individual counselling, it is extremely rare to have exposure to other people within the complete system of bullying. Schwickerath and Zapf (2011) reported on a treatment at a German hospital for individuals whose issues (which were predominantly depressive symptoms) were identified as being, at least in part, linked to bullying in the workplace. After allowing the client to gain some distance from the work situation, the treatment was based around a group therapy. The main focus of the therapy was the understanding and acceptance of the “dysfunctional model”, or the way in which the individual’s thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours interact with each other to exacerbate the distress the individual experiences, as well as the way these exacerbate the workplace situation (Schwickerath & Zapf, p. 408). This understanding was gained by first eliciting the external factors, such as organisational issues and the contribution of other individuals, as people are more ready to identify these than their own possible contribution to the situation. Through the use of role plays where the individual takes on the perspective of another actor in the situation, a gradual understanding of the individual’s own contribution is achieved. Once this had been achieved, a future-focused stance was taken as participants identified what decisions they wanted to make around their future at work and in other aspects of their lives, and then built up the skills to move towards this goal. The skills developed might be rectifying deficits identified when developing the individual’s personal dysfunctional model (Schwickerath & Zapf).

In an evaluation study of 102 patients, Schwickerath and Zapf (2011) found that depressive symptoms substantially reduced for all participants between
the beginning of treatment and after treatment. A year following the treatment, depressive symptoms were significantly lower than pre-treatment levels for those who had retired, those who had changed jobs, those who had returned to the same work situation and those who had returned to work but the bullies had left. The only group for whom distress had increased to close to pre-treatment levels were those who were still unable to work at the time of the follow-up.

5.3.3. Target Attributions

Both of the treatment models described above, individual counselling and group inpatient treatment, acknowledge the tendency for people to find it easier to see the contribution of others to the bullying situation than to recognise their own contribution. An important aspect of therapy, where the entire system cannot be worked with, is for people to come to an understanding of their own roles in the workplace bullying situation. Attribution theory, the study of how individuals assign causality to situations, suggests that when viewing another person’s behaviour, we are more likely to attribute his/her behaviour to internal traits than to situational factors. When viewing our own actions, by contrast, we are more able to identify the situational factors than see our own traits that may have prompted the behaviour (Ross & Nisbett, 1972). People are also prone to make the judgement that casts them in the best possible light, by making internal attributions for good things that happen to the self (Miller & Ross, 1975). Because the therapeutic responses to workplace bullying are so fundamentally tied to the attributions the actors make about the situation, it is of value to investigate the nature of these attributions through the present research.

5.4. Summary of Chapter

The research outlined in the current chapter argues that ideally organisational responses when workplace bullying has occurred should be guided by a clearly-defined procedure that respects all parties concerned. However, individuals involved in workplace bullying have often reported feeling disempowered and bullied further by the processes they have experienced. While the way in which individuals cope with bullying has been researched to some degree, a need has been identified for a scale which is specifically targeted at coping with bullying. Olafsson and Johannsdottir’s (2004) attempt at such a scale identified gender and age differences in the way individuals cope with bullying, however showed low reliabilities. One way of improving such scales might be to
identify more methods which individuals make use of to combat bullying when they are exposed to bullying. Finally, the present chapter has reviewed literature where it has been suggested that an important part of therapy with individuals who have been exposed to bullying often involves assisting clients to understand their own contributions to the bullying scenario, so that they are better able to manage such situations in future.

The current chapter has provided a brief overview of how workplace bullying is dealt with by organisations, individuals and therapists. The present research investigated responses to workplace bullying in the last of the five studies presented which made use of the same participant pool. The responses to workplace bullying study is reported in Chapter 11. The research aims for Study Five were to explore organisational and individual responses to bullying and examine individual differences within these.

5.5. Summary of Research Aims

Chapters 2 to 5 have introduced the concepts to be examined in the five studies described within the present thesis. Each study has discrete research aims as identified within these early chapters. Chapter 2 introduced the research aims for Study One, which were to examine how the definition of workplace bullying differs between individuals, and also to examine individual differences among targets and non-targets of workplace bullying. Study Two was based on the research outlined in Chapter 3 and had the research aim of examining the conceptualisation of workplace bullying as a traumatic experience. Chapter 4 introduced narrative approaches to analysis and set up the research aims for Studies Three, to explore themes of agency and communion as well as redemption and contamination sequences within narratives of stressful work situations, and Four, to examine workplace bullying and similar accounts from the perspective of identity processing as a means of achieving posttraumatic growth. Finally, the research aims of Study Five were outlined in the precent chapter and were to explore responses to workplace bullying at both the organisational and individual levels.

The separate studies are reported in Chapters 7 to 11. There are commonalities to all the studies, particularly in terms of the data collection, as all the studies were based on the same data set. The means by which these data were collected are described in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6. The present study

6.1. Outline of the Research

In order to investigate the issues outlined in the previous four chapters, the present research was conducted as five studies using data from the same participant pool. The five studies are listed in Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Investigated Workplace Bullying and Similar Stressful Situations in the Workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Definition of workplace bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Workplace bullying as a trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Narrative components in accounts of workplace bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Posttraumatic growth from stressful workplace situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Responses to workplace bullying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The studies presented in Table 6.1 all investigated the same data set. The present chapter outlines how this data set was collected, indicating the commonalities between all five studies.

6.2. Method Common to the Five Studies

6.2.1. Participants

The final sample of 89 participants included 62 women ranging from 20 to 65 years of age ($M = 39.9$ years, $SD = 10.6$ years) and 27 men from 22 to 63 years ($M = 37.8$ years, $SD = 11.3$ years). The great majority of participants (90%) resided in Australia. A majority (78%) reported Australia as their country of origin. The gender and employment status of participants is shown in Table 6.2.

Approximately half (52%) of the participants described themselves as currently full-time employed although, as can be seen from Table 6.2, this proportion was greater for men than women.
Table 6.2

Reported Employment Status of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed/Home duties/studying</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can further be seen from Table 6.2 that 79% of participants had some form of employment. This proportion was substantially higher for men (89%) than for women (74%). Of the employed participants, Table 6.3 shows the workplaces in which these participants were currently working.

Table 6.3

Current Workplaces of Employed Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of workplace</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology/Telecommunications/Consulting</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial institution/organisation</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government department/Trade association</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Services</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate/Office/Call Centre</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Government Organisation</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical Company</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing/Freight</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology Practice</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art/Design</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 70
It can be seen from Table 6.3 that there was a strong representation from the Education and Technology sectors. This was a function of the method of recruitment, which made use of a sample of convenience. As this method of recruitment does not generate a representative sample, conclusions cannot be drawn about prevalence of bullying or comparisons made between different industries.

6.2.2. Measures

All the measures were combined within an internet questionnaire, a copy of which is contained in Appendix A. The survey was compiled using the Opinio software. Participants were first asked a series of demographic questions, followed by questions which measured their objective and subjective experience of workplace bullying. Based on their answers to the bullying questions, participants were asked one of four narrative questions. The decision flow of the questionnaire is shown in Figure 6.1.

It can be seen from Figure 6.1 that the flow of the questionnaire was based on whether the participant reported experiencing or observing bullying. This was the participant’s subjective experience of bullying, how they subjectively appraised the situation. The other relevant measure was the participant’s experience of negative acts in the workplace. This was a more objective measure of whether the participant had been bullied in the workplace.

The two measures relevant to determining the process flow of the questionnaire, objective and subjective experience of bullying, are described in the current chapter. The other measures contained in the questionnaire are described within the study which makes use of them.

**Objective experience of bullying.** The Negative Acts Questionnaire, Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) was utilised to gain an objective measure of whether the participant had been bullied although it is recognised that it is a self-report instrument. This instrument does not include references to the word bullying but lists 22 negative acts which are believed to constitute bullying behaviour (for example, “Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job”) and respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which the acts occurred at the time (“Never”, “Now and then”, “Monthly”, “Weekly” or “Daily”).
Figure 6.1. Workflow of survey questions
The NAQ-R can be used to gain a measure of the extent of the bullying experienced, with higher scores representing higher intensity of bullying. Einarsen et al. (2009) reported a high reliability ($\alpha = .90$) when used in this way, with similar results in the present research ($\alpha = .93$). The NAQ-R was used in this way for Studies Two and Five.

Within the process flow, and within all the studies except Study Four, the NAQ-R was used to determine whether the participant had experienced bullying according to Leymann’s (1996) criteria. These require that one or more of the negative behaviours must have occurred weekly or more often in order to be considered bullying, as well as being experienced over a 6 month period. As the NAQ-R does not include an indication of duration, for the purposes of the present research, a participant was considered to have been objectively bullied if they indicated they had experienced any of the behaviours either weekly or daily. However, their experiences were also considered worthy of enquiry if the behaviours had occurred on a monthly basis.

**Subjective appraisal of bullying experience.** Following the administration of the NAQ-R (Einarsen et al., 2009), participants were asked whether they had experienced and/or observed bullying in the workplace. Contrary to common research practice, a definition of workplace bullying was not provided to assist this decision. The reason for this was that the aim of the current study was to explore the subjective experience of being bullied at work and thus participants were not constrained by a standard definition being supplied to them.

### 6.3. Procedure

A research design including a full copy of the questionnaire was submitted to the Swinburne Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval from this committee was received prior to commencement of data collection.

Participants were recruited via email from a sample of convenience, that is, initially contacting acquaintances of the student researcher, and then making use of the snowball effect. The email directed potential participants to a web address which contained the consent information statement and a link to the survey. Because of this method of recruitment, it was not possible to determine refusal rates. It was, however, possible to determine that although 206 surveys were initiated, only 107 were completed. This could have been due to technical difficulty during the process, with the participant initiating and completing a new
response, or it could have been due to other unknown reasons. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with completion of the survey being interpreted as consent for participation in the survey.

Following completion of the survey by participants, responses were stored in the Opinio database and then exported as data files for analysis. The raw data files and subsequent analysed files were stored on a password-protected computer.

The software available to the researchers for the online questionnaire was incompatible with many of the commonly-used modern internet browsers, meaning that on these browsers, responses to the narrative questions were limited to 256 characters. Unfortunately, this limitation was not identified until after the questionnaire had been distributed, as testing of the questionnaire had been performed on a compatible browser. Apart from potentially impacting the number of completed questionnaires, the limitation apparently also resulted in a small number of participants responding using telegraphic language. Because of the difficulty of identifying the participants who were affected, unless they explicitly indicated they could not or would not answer the narrative questions, all narratives were included.

One hundred and seven responses to the survey were submitted, although two were removed from the analysis because only the initial demographic questions were completed. A further response contained information in the narrative account that made it clear it was a continuation of an earlier response. This second narrative account was therefore merged into the earlier response. Thirteen participants had completed the quantitative questions but had not responded to the open-ended narrative questions, making narrative analysis impossible. These participants were therefore excluded from the study.

6.4. Conclusion

The present chapter has demonstrated how the data were collected for the research project. Subsequent chapters present the separate studies which analysed the data collected.
Chapter 7. Study One: Definition of workplace bullying

7.1. Introduction

Previous chapters have explored the research relevant to workplace bullying. The present chapter describes the first study which examined the way different individuals define workplace bullying, including individual differences in the people who report experiencing bullying. Chapter 2 introduced the extant research about workplace bullying, including the types of behaviour which can be categorised as workplace bullying.

The aim of the present study was to explore how individuals’ definitions of workplace bullying compared to research and legal definitions, as well as from other individuals’ definitions. Leymann (1995) defined a number of behaviours that, repeated at least as frequently as weekly, over duration of at least six months, constituted bullying. Legislation in Victoria, Australia, also reflected Leymann’s frequency criterion, but did not specify a duration for which the behaviour needed to continue to be bullying.

Research Question 1: To what extent do subjective definitions of bullying meet Leymann’s criteria for workplace bullying?

Research Question 2: How does the behaviour subjectively defined as bullying differ from that which is not interpreted as bullying?

Within this overall research aim, the present study investigated individual differences between people who reported experiencing bullying behaviours. It was explained in Chapter 2 that the research regarding workplace bullying and gender was somewhat mixed. Based on findings that women were more likely to interpret behaviour as bullying when the target was female and the perpetrator was male, Salin (2011) theorised that there would be gender differences in reporting of bullying because women were more likely to report behaviour they experienced as bullying.

Hypothesis 1: Women would be more likely than men to report having experienced bullying.

This investigation of gender differences was furthered by looking at gender balance within specific workplaces. It was described in Chapter 2 how Zapf et al. (2011) explained the mixed research findings regarding gender by the
gender balance within workplace, citing studies which found that individuals who were in a gender minority were more likely to report bullying. The findings were expected to be reflected in the present study.

**Hypothesis 2:** People who have been objectively bullied would be more likely than those who have not been objectively bullied to be in a gender minority in their current workplace.

**Hypothesis 3:** People who have been objectively bullied would be more likely to have been in a gender minority in the workplace in which the incident occurred.

Individual differences in personality were also investigated. As introduced in Chapter 2, personality differences have been found between individuals who report and do not report being bullied. These possible personality differences were investigated in the present study. It was explained in Chapter 2 that while research consistently found that individuals who reported experiencing bullying were higher in neuroticism than those who did not report this experience, the research was mixed on the directionality of conscientiousness and openness, both of which were usually found to be linked to workplace bullying exposure. Because of the mixed nature of the evidence, directionality was not included in this hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 4:** People who define their experience as bullying would differ from those who do not on measures of conscientiousness, neuroticism and intellect/imagination.

The present chapter describes the mixed-method analyses by which the above questions and hypotheses were explored.

### 7.2. Method

#### 7.2.1. Participants

As described in Chapter 6, participants were recruited via email from a nonclinical sample. The final sample of 89 participants included 62 women ranging from 20 to 65 years of age (\(M = 39.9\) years, \(SD = 10.6\) years) and 27 men from 22 to 63 years (\(M = 37.8\) years, \(SD = 11.3\) years). The great majority of participants (90%) resided in Australia. A majority (78%) also reported Australia as their country of origin. Chapter 6 presented the breakdown of the employment status and industries of the various participants in Tables 6.2 and 6.3.
7.2.2. Measures

The internet questionnaire was described in Chapter 6. The operationalisation of the variables used in the present study is described below.

**Objective experience of bullying.** Chapter 6 described how the Negative Acts Questionnaire, Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) was utilised to gain an objective measure of whether the participant had been bullied. While the NAQ-R can be used to gain a measure of the extent of the bullying experienced as a continuous variable, this was not done in the present study. As described in Chapter 6, participants were deemed to be objectively bullied if they had experienced one or more negative acts on a weekly basis or more often.

**Subjective and objective appraisal of bullying experience.** Chapter 6 also explained that participants who indicated they had experienced bullying were considered to have had the subjective experience of being bullied. According to these appraisals, participants could be objectively bullied (according to Leymann’s criteria on the NAQ-R) or not, and subjectively bullied (according to their own judgement) or not. This resulted in four categories, as depicted in Figure 7.1.

![Figure 7.1. Diagrammatic representation of subjective and objective appraisal](image-url)
It can be seen from Figure 7.1 that the possible categories consisted of OS for individuals who had been both objectively and subjectively bullied, ON for those who had been objectively but not subjectively bullied, NS for those who had been subjectively but not objectively bullied, and NN for those neither objectively nor subjectively bullied.

**Narrative.** Participants were asked to describe their experience/observation of bullying and the resolution as a narrative account. The specific questions asked are shown in Table 7.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exp – Y</td>
<td>1. Please think about the time you were bullied. Please describe the events in as much detail as you can. It may help to focus on a particular instance, or you may prefer to talk about the experience over a period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exp – N</td>
<td>2. Please think about the time that you observed someone being bullied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obs – Y</td>
<td>3. You have mentioned experiencing a number of negative behaviours at work on a monthly basis or more often. Please think about one or more of those experiences. Please describe the events in as much detail as you can. It may help to focus on a particular instance, or you may prefer to talk about the experience over a period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obs – N</td>
<td>NA &gt;= monthly = all participants asked this following the first narrative question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Exp – response to question “Have you experienced bullying in the workplace?”; Obs – response to question “Have you observed bullying in the workplace?”; NA – frequency of Negative Acts as indicated by responses on the NAQ-R; All – all participants asked this following the first narrative question
The wording of the questions shown in Table 7.1 was based on McAdams’ (1985) Life Story Questionnaire items regarding peak and nadir experiences. That is, the participant was asked to describe the experience as a narrative, in terms of who, what, where, when and any associated feelings. As shown in Table 7.1, the experience the participants were asked to describe was based on their responses to previous questions. All prompts were followed by the same instructions, “Please be specific. We would like to know what happened, who was there, how it felt, what you were thinking and how (if at all) the experience changed you.”

The questions described in Table 7.1 resulted in two narratives for each participant, one of the situation and one of its resolution. Upon examination of the narratives produced, they made more sense as a unified whole rather than as separate descriptions of the situation and resolution. Therefore, analysis was performed on the situation and resolution narratives together.

**Categories of bullying experience.** For the analyses which investigated the stories participants told, further categories related to participants’ experience of bullying situations were developed because there were four possible questions an individual could be asked. These categories are explained in Table 7.2.

It can be seen from Table 7.2 that based on the question asked, and whether or not the individual had been objectively bullied, seven groups were identified. These groups were used for analyses which made use of codings from the narratives or which used the IES-R, which referred to the event described by the narratives.

**Gender minority.** Based on their responses to the demographic questions, a female participant was considered to be in a gender minority if her current workplace was either mostly or entirely male, and a male participant if his workplace was either mostly or entirely female. The same coding was used for the workplace in which the narrative response was set.

**Personality.** The 20-item Mini-IPIP (Donellan, Oswald, Baird & Lucas, 2006) was utilised to measure individuals’ personality factors using the Five Factor Model which consists of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Intellectual Curiosity, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. The profile generated using this measure is not as robust as personality measures utilising more items, however it has been found to be of adequate reliability for studies which require keeping the questionnaire to a minimum length (Donellan et al.). The creators of the scale
reported strong internal reliabilities on Extraversion ($\alpha = .94$), Agreeableness ($\alpha = .91$), Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .90$), Neuroticism ($\alpha = .93$) and Intellect/Imagination ($\alpha = .83$). The reliabilities obtained in the present study were low to moderate ($\alpha = .80, .63, .51, .76, .70$ respectively).

Table 7.2

*Explanation of Categories of Bullying Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Q</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>Participants indicated that they had been bullied, and their responses to the NAQ-R indicated that they had been bullied according to Leymann’s criteria.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perceived</td>
<td>Participants indicated that they had been bullied, but their responses to the NAQ-R indicated that they had not been bullied according to Leymann’s criteria.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied Observer</td>
<td>Participants indicated that they had not been bullied, but that they had observed bullying. However, their responses to the NAQ-R indicated that they had been bullied.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Participants indicated that they had not been bullied, but that they had observed bullying, and their responses to the NAQ-R indicated that they had not been bullied according to Leymann’s criteria.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Negative Acts (WNA)</td>
<td>Participants indicated that they had neither experienced nor observed bullying, although their responses to the NAQ-R indicated that they had been bullied.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Negative Acts (MNA)</td>
<td>Participants indicated that they had neither experienced nor observed bullying. They reported experiencing one or more negative acts on a monthly basis.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Participants reported neither experiencing nor observing bullying, nor did they indicate they had experienced negative acts on a monthly basis or more often.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Q – Question number answered by the participant.*
7.3. Results

7.3.1. Self-Reported Exposure to Bullying

As described earlier, the four types of narratives and whether the participant had been objectively bullied, as indicated by their responses on the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009) led to the creation of seven categories of bullying experience. The numbers of participants in each of the seven categories are shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 shows that 40 of the 89 participants expressed a belief that they had experienced bullying in the past. Of these, 22 were identified as having been bullied according to Leymann’s (1996) definition of having experienced one or more negative acts on a monthly basis or more often. A further 12 participants (13%) did not identify themselves as being bullied although they had been bullied according to their responses on the NAQ-R (combination of Bullied Observer and Weekly Negative Acts groups). This comparatively small number suggests that, in general, participants who had been bullied were able to recognise it as such.

Table 7.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perceived</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied Observer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Negative Acts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Negative Acts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.2. Research Question 1: Do subjective definitions of bullying meet Leymann’s (1996) criteria for workplace bullying?

To gain a perspective on whether the bullying described met Leymann's (1996) criteria for workplace bullying, the narratives were analysed for mention of
these criteria. Leymann’s criteria are that the behaviour must be repeated, frequent (at least weekly) over at least six months. While this was not directly requested, information about whether the behaviour was repeated and/or the duration was able to be determined from 45 of the narratives. This information is presented in Table 7.4. These results are discussed in more detail, with reference to the individual accounts, in terms of Leymann’s frequency criteria, repeated nature and duration of the negative acts.

**Frequency.** Only one participant identified explicitly the frequency of the behaviour, “They harassed me every day for approximately 6 months” (self-perceived group). However, a number referred to “constantly” experiencing the behaviour or it being “ongoing over a number of months”. Comments about the frequency of the behaviour did not distinguish between the bullied and self-perceived groups. That is, as seen in Table 7.4, a number of participants who identified themselves as having been bullied and whose NAQ-R responses indicated they had been objectively bullied described only a single episode. While it was sometimes made clear that this was an exemplar of the behaviour experienced, in other cases the participant appeared to view the single episode as bullying.

Table 7.4

*Participants who Indicated Duration (n = 42) for Bullying Category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Bullied</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>BOb</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>WNA</th>
<th>MNA</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once/days</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 6 months</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Bullied – objectively and subjectively bullied; Self – described self as bullied but not objectively bullied; BObs – Described observing bullying but had been objectively bullied themselves; Obs – Described observing bullying and had not been objectively bullied; WNA – Described weekly negative acts (objective bullying) they had experienced; MNA – Described monthly negative acts they had experienced; Neutral – Described a neutral situation.
Repeated nature. The repeated nature of the negative acts was sometimes referred to as the most difficult aspect to endure. For example, “You get the drift - non-specific, grind-them-down, almost child-like” (self-perceived group).

It can be seen from Table 7.4 that, of the 38 participants who indicated duration and whose accounts were of behaviour they described as bullying (i.e., the bullied, self-perceived, bullied observer and observer groups), 39% described a single episode. In many cases the account was clearly of a single incident which was defined as bullying.

All of a sudden the owner starting shouting at this guy, threatening him with legal actions, belittling him in front of others, told him he would never work again in this city. (observer group)

By contrast, in cases where the behaviour more closely matched the formal definition of bullying by referring to repeated behaviour, the target of the bullying expressed some doubt as to whether what they had experienced could be referred to as bullying.

It took me a long time before I was willing to conceptualise this as a pattern of bullying behaviour …

Even now, I read what I've written and think how it must sound like just 'office politics' because it's hard to pinpoint the way you could with someone shouting loudly at you. (self-perceived group)

Duration. It is evident in Table 7.4 that, of the 45 participants who specified duration, 17 referred to either a single event or events which took place over a few days. A further 18 described events which took place over less than 6 months, with 8 describing events from 6 months to a year. Only three participants described situations which lasted more than a year, although two others described the situation as taking over a year to completely resolve. Significantly, of those participants who indicated duration, well over half of the participants who described an event which they identified as bullying were referring to a situation which lasted for less than six months. This contrasts with most research definitions (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2011).
Although a number of participants clearly felt that an experience that went on for more than a week or two was unendurable, this belief was not universal.

I think this is because the period of time I was feeling under pressure was a relatively short period of time (less than 12 months) and so I'm better able to put it into perspective. (*bullied group*)

7.3.3. Research Question 2: How does the behaviour subjectively defined as bullying differ from that which is not interpreted as bullying?

**Lack of distinction between narratives of the seven groups.** There was very little difference between the groups in terms of the stories they chose to tell. Even some participants who did not identify themselves as having been bullied, and whose responses to the NAQ-R suggested they had not experienced bullying, related stories which appeared to match the definition of bullying.

We had a new manager take over the department. She changed all our job roles - to include tasks we had never done before … We were working 12 hour days, over the Christmas / New Year period, and being told we were hopeless. I went home every night for 6 weeks and cried, it was that bad. … downgraded my performance review to the lowest it could get. … (My old manager) passed (my new manager) and said to (them) 'why are you employing (them? They’re) hopeless.' (*neutral group*)

By contrast, other participants who viewed themselves as bullied, and whose responses to the NAQ-R met Leymann's (1996) criteria for bullying, spoke about a single event, which was not in itself a bullying situation.

I was threatened by one of my colleagues (along the lines of '...If I ever see you on my floor again there will be trouble...'). (*bullied group*)
Covert behaviour. One aspect which appeared to distinguish the self-labelled accounts was the mention of covert behaviour. All of the accounts which mentioned lying were those self-labelled as bullying. This may have been because the act of lying made it appear more deliberate and targeted.

… my boss expressed shock, and my colleague as bold as anything, simply lied through her teeth and told him 'Oh gosh, I'm so sorry, I had no idea they were going to do that' (self-perceived group)

Another form of covert behaviour was failing to report incidents which had placed staff in danger.

After we collected ourselves from diving out of the road, from the roof collapse, the 2 supervisors blamed each other, and failed to report the incident (illegal) (bullied group)

Organisational responses often had an element of a covert nature about them. A number of participants reported being pressured to withdraw their complaint.

The meeting was horrible. They completely abused their power and told me that I should never have made a complaint and started to pick on me and break me down and I was told to keep quiet in future. (bullied group)

7.3.4. Hypothesis 1: Women would be more likely than men to report having experienced bullying

The gender distributions of the participants in terms of their subjective and objective appraisals of bullying experience are presented in Table 7.5. Table 7.5 shows that more than twice as many women as men responded to the questionnaire, and that the main increase in representation was in the groups who identified themselves as having experienced bullying: both those that did and did not meet Leymann's (1996) frequency criterion for having experienced workplace bullying. While this might suggest that women are more likely than men to label their experience as bullying, approximately half of these women were objectively determined to have been bullied according to Leymann's frequency criterion.
Table 7.5

Subjective and Objective Appraisal of Bullying for Male and Female Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NN</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* NN – Neither objectively nor subjectively bullied; NS – Subjectively but not objectively bullied; OS – Objectively and subjectively bullied; ON – Objectively but not subjectively bullied.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between gender and bullying experience shown in Table 7.5. The relationship was non-significant, $\chi^2(3, N = 89) = 6.30, p = .10$.

7.3.5. Hypothesis 2: People who have been objectively bullied would be more likely than those who have not to be in a gender minority in their current workplace.

The status of the currently employed participants with regard to the gender balance in the current workplace is presented in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6

Gender Minority Status at Current Workplace, Grouped by Subjective and Objective Appraisal of Bullying Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Balanced</th>
<th>Majority</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NN</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* NN – Neither objectively nor subjectively bullied; NS – Subjectively but not objectively bullied; OS – Objectively and subjectively bullied; ON – Objectively but not subjectively bullied;
A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender minority in the current workplace and bullying experience, as shown in Table 7.6. The relationship was non-significant, \( \chi^2(6, N = 70) = 2.19, p = .90 \).

7.3.6. **Hypothesis 3:** People who have been objectively bullied would be more likely to have been in a gender minority in the workplace in which the incident occurred.

Similarly, the participants were categorised according to the gender minority status of participants at the time the incident occurred. Table 7.7 shows the status of participants with respect to the gender balance in their workplaces at the time of the incident described.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender minority status at time of incident and bullying experience, as shown in Table 7.7. The relationship was non-significant, \( \chi^2(6, N = 66) = 1.32, p = .97 \).

**Table 7.7**

*Gender Minority Status at Time of Incident, Grouped by Subjective and Objective Appraisal of Bullying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Balanced</th>
<th>Majority</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NN</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>66</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* NN – Neither objectively nor subjectively bullied; NS – Subjectively but not objectively bullied; OS – Objectively and subjectively bullied; ON – Objectively but not subjectively bullied; Observers are not included as the incident they were narrating did not involve them as the target.
7.3.7. **Hypothesis 4:** People who define their experience as bullying would differ from those who do not on measures of conscientiousness, neuroticism and intellect/imagination.

Five separate one-way between-groups analyses of variance were conducted to explore whether participants in the different categories of subjective and objective appraisal of the situation differed on measures of personality traits, as measured by the Mini-IPIP (Donellan et al., 2006). The means and standard deviations of the scores on the different personality factors for each group, together with tests of statistical significance, are presented in Table 7.8.

The only personality factor on which significant differences were found among the groups was neuroticism (see Table 7.8). The mean differences among these had a medium effect size ($\eta^2 = .10$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score on neuroticism for the NN group was significantly different to the OS group. ($p < .05$). Examination of the mean scores shown in Table 7.8 indicates that those participants who had been both subjectively and objectively bullied scored higher on neuroticism than participants who had been neither subjectively nor objectively bullied.

Table 7.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Factor Scores on Mini-IPIP, Grouped by Subjective and Objective Appraisal of Bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellect/Imagination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: NN – Neither objectively nor subjectively bullied; NS – Subjectively but not objectively bullied; OS – Objectively and subjectively bullied; ON – Objectively but not subjectively bullied; * $p < .05$
7.4. Discussion of Study One

7.4.1. Summary of Findings

The expectation that individuals’ definitions of workplace bullying would differ from research and legal definitions was borne out by the present study. An unexpected finding was the degree to which individuals varied in their interpretations of behaviour as bullying or otherwise.

**Research questions.** Regarding the question as to whether participants’ accounts differed from the research and legal definitions, a major difference between the research and legal definitions of bullying and participants’ descriptions of bullying behaviour was that a single act of aggression was often labelled as bullying. Although in some accounts this may have been a result of the wording of the narrative question, which encouraged describing a single exemplar, in many cases the account was clearly of a single incident which was defined as bullying. Many participants, whether or not their responses to the quantitative measure met the Leymann (1996) frequency criterion for workplace bullying, described a single, overt, once-off action as the behaviour that they recognised as bullying. Over a third of the participants whose narrative accounts were of behaviour they described as bullying, and whose accounts included an indication of duration, described a single incident.

The most striking finding in relation to the definition of bullying was found in response to Research Question 2 around the high degree of variability in what individuals defined as bullying. Many narratives described behaviour which did not fit either the research or legal definitions of workplace bullying. Additionally, similar events were described by people who did and did not view the behaviour as bullying as well as by those who had or had not reported experiencing behaviours which would be objectively defined as bullying.

**Hypotheses.** The hypothesis that women would be more likely than men to report having experienced bullying was not supported, with the distribution of women and men between the four groups based on subjective and/or objective bullying not being significantly different than what would be expected by chance.

Similarly, the present study did not find any support for the hypotheses regarding gender minority in the workplace. The hypothesis concerning personality was partially supported. Although there were no significant differences between the four categories on conscientiousness or openness, people
who had been both subjectively and objectively bullied scored significantly higher on neuroticism than participants who had been neither subjectively nor objectively bullied. However, this finding should be considered in the context that significant differences were not found between participants who had similar experiences based on whether these were subjectively evaluated as bullying. That is, the participants who differed were those who had experienced both subjective and objective bullying from those who had experienced neither.

One explanation for this finding could be Leymann’s (1996) suggestion that the experience of bullying caused changes as deep as the level of personality. However, the finding could also be explained using models which allow for the impact of the target on the bullying scenario, particularly those models which describe a spiralling behaviour scenario (e.g., Baillien et al., 2009). Individuals might be exposed to negative behaviours, but those with higher levels of emotional instability (neuroticism) might be more likely to interpret this as bullying and modify their behaviour accordingly. This modified behaviour might include increased absenteeism, a failure to complete tasks due to increased stress about performance, or similar behaviours, and could then elicit more extreme responses from colleagues who have to take up the slack. This situation could spiral out of control, as ‘perpetrators’ gain more justification for their negative acts and ‘targets’ receive further confirmation of their appraisal of the situation as bullying.

7.4.2. Implications for Future Research

The findings of Study One supported previous research indicating that individuals differ in their definitions of what constitutes workplace bullying. The difficulty with defining the behaviour has dogged workplace bullying and mobbing research from its inception (see Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, for a review). However, the present study has demonstrated that behaviour which is not strictly defined as workplace bullying can still be experienced in much the same way by targets. This suggests that investigating single acts of aggression in the workplace, for example, could yield findings every bit as rich as those uncovered by using the research definition of workplace bullying.
7.4.3. Implications for Organisational Practice

**Does the definition of workplace bullying matter?** The discrepancies around the definition of workplace bullying, while frustrating from a research perspective, are informative in terms of organisational practice. A key finding was that the organisational impacts of workplace bullying, including increased turnover and reduced loyalty to the company, were not limited to situations which met the definition of workplace bullying. While clearly a strict definition is necessary for legal purposes, as well as research, the question of whether the behaviour is strictly workplace bullying may not be particularly meaningful for organisational representatives.

**Potential vulnerability to becoming a target.** The findings might suggest that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism may be more vulnerable to becoming the targets of workplace bullying and similar types of workplace aggression. As previously discussed, the cross-sectional nature of the present study did not allow for conclusions to be drawn about causal links in either direction between neuroticism and workplace bullying.

7.5. Conclusion

Study One provided insights into subjective perceptions of workplace bullying held by the general public. Participants’ definitions of workplace bullying differed from research and legal definitions, particularly by describing single acts of aggression as bullying. There were also major differences between participants, with similar behaviour being described as bullying by some respondents and not bullying by others. Implications of the findings for research and organisational practice were described. The variability between what types of behaviours were seen as bullying, both within and between the different respondent groups had implications for the analysis in the present research. Behaviours which respondents viewed as bullying bore qualitative similarities to those which were not viewed as bullying either by the respondent or by the researcher. This made all types of narrative as worthy of investigation in the future studies.

Chapter 8 reports the investigation of whether the participants' self-labelling impacted on their responses to the event, particularly in relation to trauma-relevant reactions.
Chapter 8. Study Two: Workplace bullying as a trauma

8.1. Introduction

Study One investigated the different ways in which workplace bullying was defined by participants, and how individual differences impacted on the appraisal of behaviour as bullying. Study Two, which is described in the present chapter, investigated one of the commonly-stated impacts of workplace bullying, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This was done from the perspectives of whether bullying can be described as a trauma and whether targets and/or observers of bullying display trauma symptoms as operationalised within the PTSD diagnosis. The field of trauma and PTSD in relation to workplace bullying was outlined in Chapter 3.

The first aim of Study Two was to investigate whether workplace bullying could be viewed as a trauma. Chapter 3 introduced different conceptualisations of trauma. The model determined as most appropriate for the present research was the shattering of core beliefs about the world and the self (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). The three fundamental assumptions which can be shattered by a traumatic experience are the benevolent world assumption, the just world hypothesis or the assumption of the self as worthy (Janoff-Bulman). The first research question investigated whether the shattering of these assumptions occurred in workplace bullying situations.

Research Question 1: Do accounts of workplace bullying indicate shattering of one or more of the three fundamental assumptions?

Another way of viewing trauma introduced in Chapter 3, which is more relevant to PTSD, is the definition of trauma in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed., text revision; DSM-IV-TR; APA, 2000) for the disorder of PTSD. This definition requires that the individual either experiences or witnesses a threat to physical integrity. Study Two also investigated workplace bullying under this formulation of trauma.

Research Question 2: Do accounts of workplace bullying indicate an appraisal of the bullying as a threat to physical integrity?

The second aim of Study Two was to investigate trauma responses to workplace bullying. Chapter 3 presented the DSM operationalisation of trauma
symptoms under PTSD which included three clusters of symptoms, consisting of re-experiencing, avoidance and arousal (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Although the most recent version of DSM (DSM-5, 2013) now includes an additional cluster of numbing, the data were collected prior to the release of DSM-5 and the quantitative data was recorded using a scale based on DSM-IV-TR. For this reason, and to retain consistency with past research, the analyses were all performed based on the earlier edition.

Research Question 3: Do narrative accounts of workplace bullying indicate that the narrator has experienced reactions consistent with PTSD?

This research aim was also examined quantitatively. Chapter 3 described a study by Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004), which found that levels of PTSD symptomatology were linked to intensity of negative acts experienced, as well as to the subjective appraisal of the experience as bullying. These findings were expected to be replicated in the present study.

Hypothesis 1: There would be a difference in the levels of posttraumatic stress reactions between the different categories of bullying experience described by participants.

Hypothesis 2: Levels of negative acts experienced would predict levels of posttraumatic stress reactions reported.

The current chapter describes the mixed-methods analysis by which the above research questions and hypotheses were examined.

8.2. Method

8.2.1. Participants

Study Two used the same sample as Study One, which was described in detail in Chapter 6.

8.2.2. Measures

As discussed in Chapter 6, all the measures were combined into an internet questionnaire, a copy of which is contained in Appendix A.

Objective experience of bullying. Chapter 6 described how the Negative Acts Questionnaire, Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) could
be used to gain an objective measure of whether or not the participant had experienced bullying, as well as a quantitative measure of the degree of bullying which had been experienced. As in Study One, participants were deemed to have been objectively bullied if they reported experiencing one or more negative acts on a weekly basis or more often.

**Subjective appraisal of bullying experience.** Subjective appraisal of bullying was measured as described in Chapter 6, with participants who indicated they had experienced bullying being defined as subjectively bullied.

**Narrative of stressful work situation.** The collection of stressful work narratives was described in Chapter 7 as part of Study One. Table 7.1 shows the narrative questions participants were asked based on their responses to previous questions.

**Presence and absence of shattered assumptions.** The narrative accounts were coded for the shattering of Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) three fundamental assumptions. These were that the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful and that the self is worthy. The coder was blind to any demographic information about the participant while coding the assumptions. The accounts were then cross-coded by a separate coder. An iterative process was undertaken to reach agreement, with codes being discussed and re-evaluated after each 15 narratives were analysed. This iterative method resulted in interrater reliabilities of Kappa = .85, .92 and .89 (p < .001) for the assumptions of a benevolent world, a meaningful world and a worthy self respectively.

**Categories of bullying experience.** The seven categories of bullying experience, as based on participants’ responses, were also described in Chapter 7 and were outlined in Table 7.2.

**Posttraumatic stress.** The Impact of Events Scale – Revised (IES-R; Weiss & Marmar, 1997/2004) was administered in relation to the experiences just described in order to give a quantitative measure of posttraumatic stress symptomatology. This 22-item 5-point Likert scale investigates the degree to which the individual has experienced post-traumatic stress reactions (for example, “I thought about it when I didn’t mean to”) in the last seven days (“Not at all”, “A little bit”, “Moderately”, “Quite a bit”, “Extremely”). Weiss and Marmar recommend that the mean of scores on individual items be utilised to provide an indication of the degree to which the individual has experienced post-traumatic
stress reactions overall, or within each of the subgroups of Hyperarousal, Avoidance and Re-experiencing. Weiss and Marmar report a high internal consistency for Hyperarousal, Avoidance and Re-experiencing ($\alpha = .82, .84, .89$ respectively) and this was also found in the present study ($\alpha = .92, .82, .90$ respectively). The internal consistency of the overall scale in the present study was .95. The authors of the IES-R caution against using a cut-off on the scale to indicate clinical “caseness” of PTSD (Weiss & Marmar).

Posttraumatic stress symptomatology was also identified within the narrative accounts by coding each narrative account for the presence of each of the PTSD symptom clusters: Re-experiencing, Avoidance and Arousal. The method used for identifying and reaching agreement on shattered assumptions was also used to identify the PTSD symptom clusters. Interrater reliability using this method was Kappa = 0.94, 0.88 and 0.96 ($p < .001$) for Re-experiencing, Avoidance and Arousal respectively.

8.3. Results

8.3.1. Research Question 1: Do accounts of workplace bullying indicate shattering of one or more of the three fundamental assumptions?

The first research question investigated workplace bullying using Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) shattered assumptions view of trauma. Janoff-Bulman’s three fundamental assumptions were that the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful and the self is worthy. The narratives were analysed for evidence that the participant’s view of the world had been disrupted in some significant way. These results are summarised in Table 8.1.

**World as benevolent.** Participants who had been challenged in their assumption of a world that is basically good primarily described the discovery that people are not always benevolent.

Like it didn't matter how I performed at work because there were nasty women who could criticise my personal appearance. *(self-perceived group)*
Table 8.1

Percentage of Participants Whose Narratives Identified Shattered Assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Good World</th>
<th>Just World</th>
<th>Worthy Self</th>
<th>Any</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Experience</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Observation</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Acts</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=89; Note: Percentages do not add to 100% as the same participant may have mentioned more than one assumption.

World as meaningful. Table 8.1 shows that the assumption of the world as meaningful was the most prevalent in terms of the number of participants who identified this assumption as being challenged in some way. The just world hypothesis, for people in the workforce, appeared to consist of the idea that if one worked hard, one would be rewarded. A number of people indicated unhappiness that this assumption had been proven false by their experiences.

I, as a competent person behaving appropriately, ended up having to leave a job I love while those who did wrong got away with it essentially unscathed. (self-perceived group)

Self as worthy. A number of participants described doubting themselves, either in terms of their competence or their ability to adequately define the situation.

It makes you question the worth of yourself and your function when the larger organisation leaves you to work in such circumstances (weekly negative acts group)

8.3.2. Research Question 2: Do accounts of workplace bullying indicate an appraisal of the bullying as a threat to physical integrity?

The second research question investigated workplace bullying as a trauma under PTSD criteria which, according to DSM-IV-TR (2000) is defined as “actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or
others” (p.467). Workplace bullying was described by a number of participants in language suggesting a threat to survival. For some, this was because of a feeling of physical threat. In other cases, participants described feeling as though their survival was at risk because of risks to their livelihood.

**Physical threat.** Two respondents wrote of life-threatening situations which arose out of the bullying, for example “If I hadn't of taken the time to argue for as long as I did, we all would have been instantly dead.” *(bullied group).* Others used the language of physical threat, describing themselves as feeling “intimidated” or “violated”.

**Loss of livelihood.** A number of participants related feeling that, because of their financial situation, they could not leave at the time. Age (or “time of life”) was a commonly expressed reason for limited options. One narrative exemplified this link between financial security and physical integrity.

> "Well why don't you just leave?' My need was to survive. At that time I was under very great financial pressure myself, and at my age unlikely to get employed in a short enough time and at a sufficient remuneration level to... survive. *(self-perceived group)*

### 8.3.3. Research Question 3: Do narrative accounts of workplace bullying indicate that the narrator has experienced reactions consistent with PTSD?

The narratives were thematically analysed for the presence of mention of experiences similar to PTSD criteria. Table 8.2 shows the number of participants whose narratives indicated each of the symptomatology criteria. Notably, these do not indicate a diagnosis of PTSD as most participants only mentioned one or two criteria and this was usually in the context of what was occurring at the time the experience occurred, rather than the individual's present state of mind at the time of responding to the study.

It can be seen from Table 8.2 that all groups contained narratives that reported some PTSD criteria, including those who responded to the neutral situation. This may be due to the fact, as noted in Chapter 7, that some of the 'Neutral Situation' responses described situations which were very similar to experiences other respondents had identified as workplace bullying.
Table 8.2

*Percentage of Participants Whose Narratives Identified Criteria From the Diagnosis of PTSD, Grouped by Category of Bullying Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Intrusion</th>
<th>Avoidance</th>
<th>Arousal</th>
<th>PTSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perceived</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied Observer</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Negative Acts</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Negative Acts</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>36%</strong></td>
<td><strong>14%</strong></td>
<td><strong>44%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100 as the same participant may have mentioned more than one cluster.*

**Intrusions.** Statements regarding re-experiencing the event largely involved recollections of the event. All of these had a more ruminative, rather than 'intrusive', quality to them. Examples include “I still feel that I was hard done by (8 years later)” (*weekly negative acts group*) and “I still regret my actions to this day for that poor guy” (*bullied observer group*). Some physiological or psychological reaction to external cues (usually the workplace) were mentioned “The times I did have to go in I regularly had anxiety attacks” (*bullied group*).

**Avoidance.** A common attempted coping strategy which participants reported was avoiding either the perpetrator or the situation. This behaviour was sometimes described as quite pathological.

… employees started actually hiding from the manager.

This sounds insane but I have seen people take the stairs 8 storeys up just to avoid a chance 'elevator meeting' with the manager. (*bullied observer group*)

**Arousal.** All five arousal symptoms were mentioned, including sleep disturbance, “I barely got any sleep” (*bullied group*), outbursts of anger, “I yelled at the manager and told him he’d ‘fucked up …’” (*bullied group*) and concentration “difficulty concentrating on lengthy discussions” (*bullied group*).
Hypervigilence was also indicated, including a participant who reflected she was “probably hypervigilent in a lot of my work practices” (self-perceived group). Although an exaggerated startle response was not directly referred to, one participant described herself as “always nervous” (neutral group), which may have indicated she was easily startled.

8.3.4. Hypothesis 1: There would be a difference in the levels of posttraumatic stress reactions between the different categories of bullying experience described by participants.

PTSD symptomatology was also investigated quantitatively, using the IES-R (Weiss & Marmar, 1997). Scores on the IES-R were compared between each of the categories of bullying experience. Means and standard deviations of scores on each of the three subscales and the overall scale were calculated and are presented in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>IES-R scale</th>
<th>Arousal</th>
<th>Avoidance</th>
<th>Intrusion</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perceived</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied Observer</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Negative Acts</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Negative Acts</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=89; Note: IES-R scores are calculated as a mean. Therefore, scores on subscales as well as the overall score can range between 0 and 4.

The distribution of the subscales of the IES-R (Weiss & Marmar, 1997) were all very strongly positively skewed, with around half of the participants recording scores of 0 for all subscales. Scores between the subscales were positively correlated, with the highest correlation being between Arousal and Intrusions ($r = .90, p < .001$) and with moderate correlations between Arousal and
Avoidance ($r = .77, p < .001$) and between Avoidance and Intrusions ($r = .74, p < .001$). Because the scores on the subscales were so highly correlated, and because the number of participants in some of the groups was low, groups were compared on only the one dependent variable, the overall score, rather than multiple dependent variables by using the subscales.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was performed to investigate differences in PTSD symptomatology based on amount of actual or perceived bullying the individual had experienced. The dependent variable was the overall IES-R (Weiss & Marmar, 1997) scale score (which was calculated as the mean of all items answered). The independent variable was the group to which participants belonged in terms of their actual and perceived exposure to bullying. Preliminary assumption testing indicated that the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were both violated. Given the small sample size, it was therefore not appropriate to further test to see whether any of the differences in means were significant. Merging groups was investigated but not found to be useful. The analysis was run for the sake of completeness and it was found that there were no significant differences between the groups ($F[6,82] = 1.36, p = .24$).

8.3.5. **Hypothesis 2: Levels of negative acts experienced would predict levels of posttraumatic stress reactions reported.**

To test the hypothesis that the number and intensity of negative acts experienced would predict levels of posttraumatic stress reactions, a standard linear regression was performed with scores on the IES-R (Weiss & Marmar, 1997) as the dependent variable. Participants’ score on the NAQ-R (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009) was the independent variable, with time since the event also introduced as an independent variable to control for this potential impact on IES-R scores. The NAQ-R measured events experienced by the narrator, whereas the IES-R scores were associated with the event being described. This meant there was no connection between the scales for the observer groups, who were consequently removed from the analysis. This meant that the total number of participants for the analysis was 66. The results of the standard multiple regression are presented in Table 8.4.
Table 8.4

*Standard Multiple Regression of NAQ-R score and Time Since Event on IES-R Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>IES-R</th>
<th>NAQ-R</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>$sr^2$ (unique)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NAQ-R</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-.2</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = .20$

Adjusted $R^2 = .17$

$R = .44**$

$N = 66$; Note: *** $p<.001$ ** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$; IES-R – Overall score on IES-R scale, NAQ-R – Overall score on the NAQ-R, Time – Time since the event described.

It can be seen from Table 8.4 that while time since the event and level of bullying experienced were both significantly correlated with overall score on the IES-R, only the level of bullying was a significant predictor in the model when both measures were included. The model predicted 20% of the variance in IES-R score (see Table 8.4).

**8.4. Discussion of Study Two**

**8.4.1. Summary of Results**

The investigation of the research question, of whether narratives about workplace bullying included shattering of assumptions, indicated that this did occur. There was evidence within the narratives of having certain views about the world shattered, including the three fundamental assumptions. The assumption most commonly reported as having been shattered up to the time the questionnaire was completed was that the world was meaningful. By contrast, the self as worthy assumption was acknowledged to have been challenged during the course of the workplace bullying experience, but typically had been restored with the change to a new job or simply the gaining of perspective once the participant was removed or removed themselves from the immediate situation. This suggested that workplace bullying could be traumatic for those who experienced or
witnessed it. This shattering of assumptions was not limited to experiences which met either the legal or research definitions of workplace bullying.

Much of the controversy around the diagnosis of PTSD for targets of workplace bullying has been around whether or not workplace bullying can be described as a trauma, as the *DSM-IV-TR* diagnosis requires that the event involves a threat to physical integrity, either to the self or another (Criterion A1). The investigation into the research question of whether workplace bullying constituted a trauma by this definition suggested it did not. Some participants mentioned feeling they could not escape the bullying for financial reasons, and others described their goal at the time as being to ‘survive’. However, the only two accounts which mentioned a threat to physical integrity were those in which the bullying had taken the form of placing the target in a life-threatening situation.

The investigation of the research question regarding whether narrative accounts indicated that the narrator had experienced trauma reactions as operationalised within a PTSD diagnosis (*DSM-IV-TR*, 2000) found there were narratives in all groups which described responses which were consistent with avoidance, increased arousal and intrusions. A notable difference between the responses described and the more usual presentations of trauma symptoms within PTSD was that the re-experiencing mentioned was usually in the form of rumination, rather than sudden, intrusive ‘flashbacks’ or memories.

The hypothesis that there would be a difference between posttraumatic stress reactions between the different groups of bullying experience was not supported, as no significant differences were found among the different groups on symptomatology consistent with PTSD, with most participants in all groups scoring fairly low on the Impact of Events Scale (IES-R) (Weiss & Marmar, 1997). However, the second hypothesis was supported, with higher level of negative acts experienced predicting higher levels of posttraumatic stress symptomatology.

**8.4.2. Integration of Findings**

A possible explanation for the lack of significant quantitative results about posttraumatic stress symptomatology is the potentially long time frame since the bullying took place. The IES-R (Weiss & Marmar, 1997) asks about the participants’ reported symptoms in the previous seven days. For a participant to
have experienced these so recently, the event must either have been recent or have had a devastating and far-reaching impact. This proposal was partially supported by the finding that time since the event was related to levels of posttraumatic stress but only extent of bullying was a significantly predictor when both were present in the model.

The time frame since the event might also explain the difference between PTSD symptomatology as measured qualitatively and quantitatively. The IES-R measures symptoms experienced in the past seven days whereas the symptoms mentioned in the narratives were largely experienced at the time of the stressful situation. Regardless of what reactions may have been observed (through the IES-R or through narrative), a diagnosis of PTSD cannot be made unless the criterion that the event has been traumatic has been met (APA, 2000).

Taken together, the results suggest that while workplace bullying and similar stressful situations can be experienced as traumatic, there was little to no evidence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) being an appropriate diagnosis following workplace bullying at the levels investigated in the present study. With the exceptions of two events which were potentially life-threatening, where it could be argued that the threat to life event itself rather than the bullying around the situation was the trauma, there was little evidence that the situations described constituted a threat to physical integrity. Additionally, the posttraumatic symptomatology as measured quantitatively was very low. These conclusions are cautious as the present study was designed to explore the traumatic nature of stressful workplace experiences, rather than to provide a basis for diagnosis of PTSD.

There was evidence that all categories of stressful situations in the workplace could be experienced as traumatic, although not meeting criteria for PTSD. Narrative accounts indicated feelings that survival was threatened, as well as the shattering of fundamental assumptions about the world and the self.

8.4.3. Implications for Future Research

Allocation of groups. One difficulty noted when analysing the quantitative results was that there was a mismatch between the scales for the participants who fell in the observer groups. For example, while the questions about PTSD symptomatology and the narratives were about the event which the
participant had witnessed, the objective bullying questions asked about bullying which the participant had experienced. This limited the analyses which could be meaningfully performed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

The reasoning behind asking the observers about the event they had witnessed was that if a person had identified an event as bullying, he/she might feel a desire to tell the story of the event they had witnessed. A way to resolve this might have been to ask the observers about both individual experiences and the event they had witnessed. While this would make the questionnaire longer for the observers, it would have allowed the groups to be reduced in number to five groups, making some of the analyses more robust (Tabachnick & Fidell). Interestingly, in the neutral situation responses, where the question was about “a time someone in the workplace did something you disapproved of”, all respondents chose to narrate events which had directly impacted them, rather than behaviour which had only been observed.

Similarly, the choice to ask respondents about negative acts they had experienced less often than is required for the research definition of bullying created an additional category of bullying experience. Participants who had not either subjectively or objectively experienced bullying, or observed it, could have responded to either the question about negative acts or the neutral situation, depending on the frequency with which they had experienced the negative acts. The decision was made to cast the net wider for the negative acts question because it was considered more closely related to the bullying experience and therefore more meaningful for the present study. A solution to this might have been to reword the neutral experience question to more closely suggest negative behaviours which had been experienced, and to limit responses to the negative acts question to those who had been objectively bullied.

**Shattered assumptions.** While the narratives were analysed for evidence of shattered assumptions, this was not examined quantitatively. A quantitative measure such as the World Assumptions Scale (Janoff-Bulman, 1989) was not included in the interests of parsimony. The predominance in the present study of the shattering of the just world assumption among narratives of stressful workplace situations was consistent with previous quantitative research in a European setting (Cubela Adoric & Kvartuc, 2007). Future research comparing Australian targets and non-targets of workplace bullying on a quantitative
measure of world assumptions might be considered to extend previous European research in this area (e.g. Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2010). This would require a better way of distinguishing the groups, as the present research found blurred lines between behaviour which was and was not defined as bullying. Because quantitative scales of assumptions do not investigate in reference to a specific event, as the present research did by analysing narratives, identifying discrete groups would be necessary.

**Other psychological consequences of workplace bullying.** The observation of rumination within accounts of workplace bullying might indicate psychological disorders other than PTSD, such as major depression (*DSM-5*, APA, 2013). As previously indicated, conclusions about diagnoses could not be made from the design of the present study. However, investigating depressive as well as trauma reactions could have been undertaken quantitatively as these have been researched in response to workplace bullying. This is also true of anxiety and psychosomatic reactions (see Einarsen, 2005 for a review).

8.4.4. **Implications for therapeutic practice**

**Diagnosis.** Some Australian therapists (e.g., Cullen, 2012; Field, 2013) diagnose PTSD in targets of workplace bullying. The experiences related by participants in the present study, who were recruited from a non-clinical population, may be very different to those seen by therapists who specialise in treating the targets of workplace bullying.

**PTSD in DSM-5.** It was mentioned in Chapter 3 that the diagnosis of PTSD has very recently changed. Of most relevance to the discussion of PTSD in relation to workplace bullying is in the criterion about what constitutes a traumatic event. This has now been clearly defined as requiring a physical violation, whether actual or threatened (APA, 2013). The scope for allowing a diagnosis of PTSD for workplace bullying has therefore been limited even further than under the *DSM-IV-TR* (2000).

**Trauma-focused treatment.** As has previously been discussed, while not necessarily meeting the *DSM-IV-TR* (2000) criteria for PTSD, the results of the present study suggest that workplace bullying and similar situations can be experienced as traumatic. This suggests that treatment which views the event as a
trauma may be beneficial to clients. This contention is explored further in Study Four, described in Chapter 10.

8.5. Conclusion

Study Two has explored the traumatic nature of exposure to workplace aggression. There was little quantitative evidence that individuals’ experiences of bullying resulted in symptoms consistent with PTSD. However, qualitatively, almost half the participants related some behaviour or experience which had qualities of posttraumatic stress reactions. Avoidance was particularly salient for participants. Re-experiencing was mostly through thoughts of the incident that were more ruminative than qualitative. These reports were not limited to individuals who had experienced bullying, either subjectively or objectively but included observers and those whose experience was neither subjectively nor objectively labelled as bullying.

In terms of the traumatic nature of the event, there were participants who described the event as a threat to survival and participants who described having world assumptions shattered. This indicates that workplace bullying and similar stressful situations could be experienced as traumatic by individuals.

Chapters 9 and 10 present Studies Three and Four using narrative analysis which explored how experiencing the situation as traumatic can lead to posttraumatic growth.
Chapter 9. Study Three: Narrative components in accounts of workplace bullying

9.1. Introduction

Following on from the investigation of workplace bullying and similar situations as traumatic experiences presented in Chapter 8, the present chapter explores some of the narrative aspects of the experience. The qualitative data gathered in individuals’ stories about their experiences requires a different approach to analysis. Study Three explored narratives of stressful workplace situations making use of narrative analysis techniques introduced in Chapter 4. Specifically, themes of Agency and Communion were investigated as well as Redemption and Contamination sequences.

As explained in Chapter 4, the experience of workplace bullying lends itself to narrative analysis for a number of reasons. These include the potential threat to aspects of identity posed by workplace bullying, as identity can be conceived narratively. Another reason is the possible view of workplace bullying as a trauma, because trauma involves a disruption to the life narrative. McAdams’ (1985) Theory of Personality was introduced in Chapter 4 and posits that an individual’s identity is represented as an overall narrative, consisting of stories that the individual constructs to explain events. The ways in which these stories are told provide insights into personality.

Elements which McAdams (1985) has identified in nuclear episodes, micronarratives that are pivotal to individuals’ identity, include the themes of Agency and Communion. It was explained in Chapter 4 that themes of Agency concern individualistic ambition and achievement while Communion themes involve connection with other people. The negative Agency and Communion themes, which have been identified by some researchers (e.g., Cuesta, 2007; Polimeni, 2004), were also introduced, as were the Opposite of Agency and Communion themes which Polimeni found to be of aid in describing themes within narratives of difficult experiences, such as a hospital stay. The experience of being bullied in the workplace, and similar stressful situations, was considered by the researcher to be an equivalent difficult experience, making an aim of the study described in the present chapter to investigate these themes within the accounts.
Research Question 1: Do workplace bullying narratives contain themes of Agency?

Research Question 2: Do workplace bullying narratives contain themes of Communion?

Chapter 4 also described investigations into stories of life transition (e.g., McAdams et al., 2001). These have been found to involve either redemption sequences, where the direction of the story is in a positive direction, or contamination sequences, where a good situation at the start of the story has transformed into an irrevocably bad situation by the end. Workplace bullying was deemed to have the potential of being described in these terms.

Research Question 3: Do workplace bullying narratives contain redemption sequences?

Research Question 4: Do workplace bullying narratives contain contamination sequences?

McAdams et al. (2001) found that the presence of these sequences was linked to wellbeing. A further aim of the current study was to examine whether there was a link between these sequences and posttraumatic stress symptomatology within narratives of workplace bullying.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals whose narratives contain contamination Sequences would report higher PTSD symptomatology in relation to the experience than those whose accounts did not contain such sequences.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals whose narratives contain redemption Sequences would report lower PTSD symptomatology in relation to the experience than those whose accounts did not contain such sequences.

Finally, the presence of redemption and contamination sequences was expected to be connected to the importance the narrator placed on the event being described (as part of the life narrative). In the present study, this was investigated in terms of whether the narrator considered the experience to be an account of bullying.

Hypothesis 3: There would be a difference in the presence of redemption sequences between accounts describing behaviour the
narrator viewed as bullying and those the narrator did not view as bullying.

Hypothesis 4: There would be a difference in the presence of contamination sequences between accounts describing behaviour the narrator viewed as bullying and those the narrator did not view as bullying.

The present chapter describes the investigation of these research questions and hypotheses, making use of the narrative analysis techniques introduced in Chapter 4.

9.2. Method

9.2.1. Participants

Study Three made use of the same participant sample as Studies One and Two. These participants were described in detail in Chapter 6.

9.2.2. Measures

The compilation of the internet questionnaire to gather the data was described in Chapter 6. Chapter 6 also described the process by which a participant was presented with narrative questions (see Figure 6.1).

The four specific narrative questions participants could be presented with were described in Chapter 7 and shown in Table 7.1. The narratives of all participants were analysed for themes and sequences according to the descriptions below. For analysis of the narratives, the coder was blind to any demographic information about the participant while coding the pre-determined themes and sequences. The accounts were then cross-coded by a separate coder. An iterative process was undertaken to reach agreement, with codes being discussed and re-evaluated after each 10 narratives were analysed. Table 9.1 shows the final agreement between the two coders for each variable, as reported using Cohen’s kappa, with differences being resolved by discussion.

Agency. The amount of control that individuals felt over the process, and their tendency to emphasise this in their narratives, was investigated using McAdams’ (2001a) coding for agency. The four agency themes were: Self-Mastery (SM), Status/Victory (SV), Achievement/Responsibility (AR), and Empowerment (EM). The coding developed by McAdams (2001a) assumes that when Agency is present as a theme, it is always positive (i.e., the participant mentions possessing agency). The themes are therefore coded 1 (for presence) or
0 (for absence). However, due to the nature of the episodes individuals were asked to describe, it was expected that the lack of agency could also be a salient theme. Polimeni (2004) addressed this in a study about hospital experiences by using two methods for coding the negative of agency. One was the coding of the negative power themes identified by McAdams for analysing nadir episodes (1985). These negative themes were Conflict, Failure, Ignorance and Losing Face. Additionally, the opposite of the agency themes were used. Positive Agency was present if the individual mentioned having control over their situation or self and Opposite of Agency was coded if the individual mentioned a lack of control over their situation or self (Polimeni).

Table 9.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cohen’s Kappa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N = 89$

**Communion.** Similarly, the degree to which an individual felt linked to those around them and part of a greater whole was investigated using a modified form of McAdams’ (2001a) coding for Communion. The four communion themes were: Love/Friendship (LF), Dialogue (DG), Caring/Help (CH), and Unity/Togetherness (UT). The negative communion themes were Another’s Misfortune, Disillusionment, Rejection and Separation (McAdams, 1985). Narratives were coded for Negative Communion themes, Positive Communion themes and Opposite Communion themes (Polimeni, 2004).

**Contamination.** Following the criteria set out by the Foley Centre for the Study of Lives (FCLS; 1998), an account was coded as containing a contamination sequence if the sequence of events went from a positive, or simply acceptable, situation to a much more negative state. To qualify as a contamination sequence, the remembrance of the previous, more positive state had to have been tainted by the negative events which followed, to the degree it could no longer be
remembered as positive. There was 100% agreement between the raters for the contamination sequences (Kappa = 1, p < .001).

**Redemption.** Redemption sequences were also coded according to the FCSL (1999) criteria. An account was therefore coded for a redemptive sequence if it contained a move from negative to positive, or if some good (not necessarily in proportion to the bad event) was drawn from the experience. In contrast to the FCSL criteria, additional scores were not awarded for enhanced agency, enhanced communion or ultimate concerns. There was 100% agreement between the raters for the redemption sequences (Kappa = 1, p < .001).

**Posttraumatic stress.** Posttraumatic stress was measured using the Impact of Events Scale – Revised (IES-R; Weiss & Marmar, 1997/2004) which was also used in Study Two and is described in Chapter 8.

**Identification of the situation as bullying.** Participants who indicated they had experienced or observed bullying were asked to narrate that experience, and were therefore describing an event they perceived as bullying, whereas the other participants were describing events they did not perceive as bullying.

9.3. **Results**

9.3.1. **Research Question 1: Do workplace bullying narratives contain themes of Agency?**

The narratives were coded using McAdams' (1985) coding system for nadir experiences, which identified the four negative themes of agency as Failure/Weakness, Losing Face, Ignorance and Conflict. Additionally, the narratives were coded for McAdams' (2001a) positive agency themes of Self-Mastery, Status/Victory, Achievement/Responsibility and Empowerment. Finally, following the example of Polimeni (2004), the opposites of these positive agency themes of Self-Mastery, Status/Victory, Achievement/Responsibility and Empowerment were coded for. The numbers of participants whose narratives demonstrated each of the types of Agency themes, grouped according to the narrative question responded to, are presented in Table 9.2.
Table 9.2

*Percentage of Participants Whose Narratives Included Agentic Themes, Grouped by Narrative Question Responded to*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Question</th>
<th>Negative Agency %</th>
<th>Positive Agency %</th>
<th>Opposite Agency %</th>
<th>Agentic Themes %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Experience (n=40)</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Observation (n=23)</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Acts Experience (n=12)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (n=14)</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All categories</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N=89; Note: Consolidated numbers ("Agentic Themes") are not simply the sum of lower order aspects, as the same participant may have mentioned, for example, both Negative and Positive Agency.*

It can be seen from Table 9.2 that the opposite agency themes were more commonly mentioned than the themes which McAdams identified as negative Agency themes. This may be because McAdams' (McAdams, 1985) nadir experience coding scheme appeared to assume events had been bad experiences due to some failing of the self, whereas the overarching theme of the bullying narratives was one of being thwarted by external forces in attempts to be Agentic. The specific themes behind the figures in Table 9.2 are discussed in detail below.

**Negative Agency Themes.** The most commonly-reported of the negative Agency themes was Losing Face, being humiliated in front of others, with 18 respondents mentioning this. Participants described feeling “belittled and stupid” and “embarrassed” by the encounter.

Arguing was extremely hard, as the dogmatic treatment, ridicule and sarcasm, of anything you'd say towards safety, (not to mention written warnings from management), made it extremely scary to voice up about an if or maybe. (*bullying experience*)

Two participants (both observers) spoke of being uncomfortable about being in conflict with other individuals, where they took pride in their ability to get along with others.
The meeting where this was demanded by our manager was embarrassing to be part of, to have to detail the failures of the vendor and (the Project Manager) in particular put me in an uncomfortable position, in that I had a good working relationship with the (the Project Manager), but had to side with our manager. *(bullying observation)*

With regard to the Failure/Weakness theme, some participants did reflect on their belief, at the time, that they were incompetent in some way. This was put in the context that, at the time of writing the narrative, they no longer believed the fault to lie with them.

I felt like I was going crazy and maybe it was me with the problem. I became so paranoid about my work and I would agonise over it and spend so much time on the simplest and easiest of tasks for fear of stuffing up. *(bullying experience)*

There were six cases where Ignorance was a theme; this was viewed as being the result of information actively being withheld, and therefore part of the bullying scenario or stressful situation, rather than a failing on the part of the participant.

For the record, I have not yet been given induction training nor is there anything in the Procedures Manual to cover (the situation). *(negative acts experience)*

**Positive Agency Themes.** Agentic themes were present in a number of narratives, as participants sought to confirm their worth when telling the story of a situation which had threatened this. A sense of pride in the way they had handled the situation, particularly in standing up for themselves, or refusing to allow their inner turmoil to affect their presentation, represented the theme of Self Mastery, as in “I felt very proud of myself for standing up to what I now know was just a big bully exploiting young kids looking for work. *(bullying experience)*” Empowerment seemed to come from being supported by colleagues or managers, such as “… my new line manager stood up to him, as she knew what I was capable of.” *(neutral)*. The Achievement/Responsibility theme, reflecting a personal belief in the participants' true abilities often accompanied stories of being
viewed by others as incompetent. For example, “I had a high level of confidence that my team does perform - and that we were respected and appreciated in other parts of the company.”  (neutral)

Although feeling that recognition was absent from certain quarters, the Status/Victory theme was evident as some participants reported receiving recognition from others who were involved with their work.

… good positive feedback was soon received from customers. Management were very happy with the way services were implemented and my team and I received some official recognition for the job we had done with a divisional award for excellence.  (negative acts experience)

**Opposite of Agency Themes.** Reflecting the opposite of the self-mastery theme, statements such as “I was very surprised at how much the incident affected my self-confidence and how long I felt bad about it”  (bullying experience) demonstrated participants were unpleasantly surprised by the way they were unable to stand up for themselves. Including words such as “powerless”, “disempowered” or “helpless”, the Opposite of Empowerment theme responses expressed a sense of betrayal that those in more powerful positions, who had the ability to resolve the situation, or at least to assist the target, failed to do so.

… the senior management team who were based interstate were oblivious to his incompetence and poor management.  (bullying experience)

The Opposite of Status/Victory theme was demonstrated by participants relating that they had been given poor performance appraisals, or that their hard work was not recognised in any formal way. As one respondent stated, “I felt I worked hard and all I was getting was disrespect and abuse”  (bullying experience). With regards to the Opposite of Achievement/Responsibility theme, some respondents expressed frustration that the bullying had impacted on their sense of personal pride in their work, outside of recognition from others.

I also found that it negatively affected my motivation and work performance once I was in my new job because I'd spent so long 'learning' how to do the lower-skilled, less challenging work and feel OK with it, so it was hard to crank up again to full effort.  (bullying experience)
9.3.2. Research Question 2: Do workplace bullying narratives contain themes of Communion?

Similar to the process for the Agentic themes, the narratives were coded using McAdams’ (1985) coding system for the four negative Communion themes of Separation, Rejection, Disillusionment and Another’s Misfortune. McAdams’ (2001a) positive communion themes were Love/Friendship, Dialogue, Care/Help and Unity and these, as well as their opposites (Polimeni, 2004), were coded for. The numbers of participants whose narratives demonstrated each of the types of Communion themes, grouped according to the bullying category, are presented in Table 9.3.

Table 9.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Negative Communion %</th>
<th>Positive Communion %</th>
<th>Opposite Communion %</th>
<th>Communal Themes %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Experience (n=40)</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Observation (n=23)</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Acts (n=12)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (n=14)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All categories</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=89; Note: Consolidated numbers (“Communal Themes”) are not simply the sum of lower order aspects, as the same participant may have mentioned, for example, both Negative and Positive Communion.

Table 9.3 shows that communal themes were less frequently identified than agentic themes. How these were specifically represented is discussed below.

**Negative Communion Themes.** The most commonly identified of the negative communion themes, with 19 participants reporting this, was Disillusionment, the loss of faith in other people. While a number of participants described themselves as “disillusioned”, others made statements such as “I no longer felt I could trust many of my colleagues and management the way I had trusted them before this incident” (bullying experience). The Rejection theme was evident in narratives from four participants who described their own experience of
being bullied, “As if overnight, I was left off the invitation list … I would have to walk past the team as they sat around having drinks, listening to them snigger as I walked past” (bullying experience). All the narratives which referred to vicariously experiencing Another’s Misfortune were from participants who reported observing bullying and related this experience. Respondents described feeling “at least as affronted” (bullying observation) as the person at whom the behaviour had been targeted, and also finding the experience “intimidating by proxy” (bullying observation). No participants related narratives involving Separation, or being removed from family, friends or loved ones as a result of uncontrollable loss. This may have been because the participants who described their colleagues at work as friends, and who ended up leaving the workplace, made an effort to stay in touch with those friends.

Positive Communion Themes. With 10 participants mentioning it, the most commonly identified of the positive communion themes was that of Unity/Togetherness. Respondents related banding together to meet the challenge offered by the bullying or otherwise stressful situation, such as “We discussed it in our team and came up with a specific strategy to not bend to the way this person wanted to do things - but to do them our way” (neutral). Dialogue was evident in narratives where participants described talking to others as the means by which they were able to effectively deal with the situation. For example, “Through talking through things with my family, I was able to finally confront my supervisor” (bullying experience). A small number of observers, in particular, reflected the Caring/Help theme by relating that they had taken care of the targets of bullying in some way. For example, “I thought that I should say something, because all the other instances had been told to me by the staff member, this was the first time I had witnessed anything overt” (bullied bullying observation). Very few of the narratives described particularly close friendships. Those which mentioned friendship usually referred to receiving support from a group of friends, and as such were identified as themes of Unity/Togetherness. In terms of a one-on-one supportive friendship, which is more accurately placed under the Love/Friendship theme, one participant described receiving support from a close friend, “My best friend came over to comfort me” (weekly negative acts), and another related putting up with the difficult situation because of another individual in the workplace, “I was very fond of the (employer’s) wife so I put up with more
than I would have normally” (neutral). These were the only two narratives coded under the Love/Friendship theme.

**Opposite Communion Themes.** As with the theme of Agency, the opposite of Communion themes were identified in a number of narratives. The representation of the opposite themes matched that of the positive themes, in that Unity/Togetherness was the most commonly reported, with 19 participants reporting this and Love/Friendship had the lowest representation with only 2, both in the bullying experience identifying this theme. The narratives reflected the Opposite of Unity/Togetherness were primarily concerned with team membership, as well as a “harmonious working environment” (neutral). In addition to not feeling a part of a team any more, statements such as “Once (the perpetrator) got a promotion, I found the only way to continue working there was to make a concerted effort not to be friends with anyone, to do my job and go home” (bullying experience) reflected participants changing their own attitudes towards team membership. The Opposite of Dialogue theme, indicating the inability to have open communication, particularly with co-workers, was expressed through statements such as “I never felt confident saying anything more than work stuff to any of my colleagues” (bullying experience). This appeared to emanate from the distrust which had developed due to betrayals the target had experienced. Finally, the four narratives which demonstrated the theme of Opposite of Caring/Help were all written by people who were describing bullying which they had observed. These individuals reported wishing that they had not done something or perhaps done more than they had, particularly intervening sooner.

I thought to stand up for that guy but my analytical side (which I thoroughly hate) kicked into motion and convinced me that there was nothing that can be done for egomaniacs like that manager. I still regret my actions to this day for that poor guy. (bullied bullying observation)

It can be seen that the experience of doing nothing when a bystander to an event had profoundly impacted on the individual, including on the self-perception of his own identity.
9.3.3. Redemption and Contamination Sequences

The narratives were also coded for both redemption and contamination sequences, according to the guidelines set down by McAdams and colleagues at the Foley Center for the Study of Lives (FCSL; 1998, 1999). A sequence which had a clear positive direction, in that it moved from a bad situation to a good resolution, resulted in that narrative being coded for a redemption sequence. Similarly, if the narrative contained a sequence with a clear downward direction, moving from a generally positive state to a clearly negative one, this was coded for a contamination sequence. Redemptive sequences which also referred to some growth, in terms of increased agency, or communion, or a greater awareness of spiritual or existential issues (ultimate concerns), were also identified as such. According to the coding system, redemptive scoring should be additive, in that a narrative which had a redemptive sequence and where this involved enhanced agency, would therefore score +2 (FCSL, 1999). However, as the data did not have sufficient variation on this point, only the two dichotomous variables of presence/absence of a redemption sequence and of a contamination sequence were used. The number and percentage of narratives that included either a redemption or contamination sequence are presented in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4

Percentage of Participants Whose Narratives Included Redemption and Contamination Sequences, Grouped by Narrative Question Responded to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Question</th>
<th>Redemption</th>
<th>Contamination</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Experience (n=40)</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Observation (n=23)</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Acts Experience (n=12)</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral (n=14)</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All categories</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=89;
A substantial minority of the accounts contained redemption (32.6%) or contamination (31.5%) sequences, though few (9.0%) contained both (see Table 9.4).

9.3.4. Research Question 3: Do workplace bullying narratives contain redemption sequences?

There were many examples of redemptive sequences. In some, the individual did not report a particular good coming about as a result of the bullying, but simply that the bullying was resolved to their satisfaction. For example, a week after resigning, a participant “felt as if a weight had been lifted” (bullying experience). Just as many accounts indicated a lack of self mastery, a common theme in redemptive sequences involved feeling that the ability to protect the self in the world had been developed by the experience. Therefore, participants mentioned gaining self mastery as a result of being bullied. For example, “So far, I haven't encountered another situation like this, but I know that if I did I'd be stronger for what happened to me previously and be able to stand up for myself.” (bullying experience). Another common redemptive sequence involved participants who had discovered qualities about themselves which they respected: “I learnt that I had more internal resources than I had known and that I could handle more complex tasks than I had thought I could.” (negative acts experience).

9.3.5. Research Question 4: Do workplace bullying narratives contain contamination sequences?

Contamination sequences were also evident in the narratives. Some of the contamination sequences which were reported were all-encompassing, “I lost my house, career, and ended up Bankrupt”. (bullying experience) The participant who reported this had experienced an extreme threat to life and reported being diagnosed with PTSD as a result of this experience. It was much more common, however, for the contamination sequence to refer to a specific aspect of life (often work or career). These could be a negative view of the organisation, “It also left me with a lot of negative feelings towards the organisation and management’s treatment of its employees for an extended period.” (bullying experience) or of working life generally “The experience changed me totally in my working life. I had always said you could put up with anything for a short time. I now believe you can't.” (neutral).
Combination of redemption and contamination. Contrary to expectations, there were narratives which included both contamination and redemption sequences in the same account. Often, the contamination sequence would relate to one aspect of experience whereas the redemption would deal with another. For example, participants might report that they learned they had hitherto unknown internal resources, but that their view of other people had been tainted by the experience. Two of the 15 neutral experiences contained both contamination and redemption sequences. Similarly, four of the 32 participants who reported feeling subjectively bullied indicated both types of sequence.

9.3.6. Hypothesis 1: Individuals whose narratives contain contamination sequences would report higher PTSD symptomatology in relation to the experience than those whose accounts did not contain such sequences.

The lack of distinction between the types of situations described by participants in each of the different categories of bullying experience (see Chapter 7) indicated that it would not be helpful to distinguish the groups for the testing of the hypothesis that individuals whose narratives showed redemption and contamination sequences would differ from those whose did not on levels PTSD symptomatology. Because narratives with redemption and contamination sequences were not mutually exclusive, hypotheses one and two were tested using two separate t-tests. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the levels of PTSD symptomatology as measured by the overall score on the IES-R (Weiss & Marmar, 1997), between individuals whose narratives included contamination sequences and those whose did not. The IES-R scores for those whose narratives contained contamination sequences ($M = 0.70, SD = 0.80, n = 28$) did not significantly differ from those did not $[M = 0.46, SD = 0.69, n = 61]$; $t(87) = 1.48, p = .14]$, indicating the first hypothesis was not supported.

9.3.7. Hypothesis 2: Individuals whose narratives contain redemption sequences would report lower PTSD symptomatology in relation to the experience than those whose accounts did not contain such sequences.

This hypothesis was not supported. An independent samples t-test indicated that the IES-R scores for participants whose narratives did contain redemption sequences ($M = 0.40, SD = 0.79, n = 29$) and those whose did not ($M = 0.60, SD = 0.70, n = 60$) did not differ significantly $[t(87) = 1.25, p = .22]$. 
9.3.8. **Hypothesis 3**: There would be a difference in the presence of redemption sequences between accounts describing behaviour the narrator viewed as bullying and those the narrator did not view as bullying.

As previously discussed, participants who answered either the bullying experience or bullying observation question were describing events which they perceived to be bullying. Using this criterion, 33% of participants who described the event as bullying gave narratives which contained redemption sequences, compared to 31% of those who did not describe the event as bullying. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine this relationship between redemption sequence and interpretation as bullying. The relation between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 89) = 0.06, p = .81$, indicating a lack of support for the third hypothesis.

9.3.9. **Hypothesis 4**: There would be a difference in the presence of contamination sequences between accounts describing behaviour the narrator viewed as bullying and those the narrator did not view as bullying.

There was no support for the hypothesis that the presence of contamination sequences would differ between those who identified the behaviour as bullying and those who did not. Thirty-three percent of participants who described the event as bullying gave narratives which contained contamination sequences, compared to 27% of those who did not describe the event as bullying. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine this relationship between contamination sequence and interpretation as bullying. The relation between these variables was non-significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 89) = 0.35, p = .55$.

9.4. **Discussion**

9.4.1. **Summary of Results**

**Research questions.** Themes of Agency were identified in participants’ narratives, and also themes of the absence or opposite of these constructs. While the negative Agency themes were also found in almost a third of the narratives, they were not as helpful in describing the data as the opposite of Agency themes. Particularly dominant was the theme around not having self-mastery. Polimeni (2004) had also found the use of “opposite of” themes to be useful when describing difficult life experiences.

The results show a similar pattern for Communion as Agency, in that McAdams’ (2001a) Communion themes were present in the narratives, as were
the opposites of these. McAdams’ (1985) negative Communion themes were also present. Overall, Communion themes were not as widely reported, with 57% of participants reporting these themes compared with 71% of participants reporting Agency themes.

Contamination and redemption sequences (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001) were present in all the different categories of experience. The presence of a contamination sequence did not preclude the presence of a redemption sequence, and vice-versa. When both sequences were present, they often were in two different domains of experience, such as having gained confidence in one’s own inner strength, while having lost faith in others’ good intentions.

**Hypotheses.** The hypotheses were unsupported by the present study. The hypotheses that participants with narratives containing redemption and contamination sequences would differ on levels of PTSD symptomatology were not supported. No significant differences were found between accounts displaying the presence or absence of redemption sequences nor between those displaying the presence or absence of contamination sequences.

The hypotheses around the presence of redemption and contamination sequences in accounts of narrator-labelled bullying versus accounts not labelled as bullying were similarly unsupported. The relationships among the variables were not found to be significantly different to that suggested by chance.

9.4.2. Implications for Future Research

**Usefulness of Agency and Communion themes in describing workplace bullying narratives.** Agency and Communion themes are often identified in identity-relevant micronarratives, including those of difficult experiences (e.g., Polimeni, 2004). Workplace bullying or a similarly stressful workplace situation would appear to be such a difficult experience, with themes of Agency and Communion present within the narratives. Like Polimeni, the present study found that coding for the opposites of Agency and Communion was more useful than the negative Agency and Communion themes that McAdams’ (1985) earlier identified.

**Usefulness of redemption and contamination sequences in investigating workplace bullying narratives.** Redemption and contamination sequences were found within narratives of workplace bullying and similar
stressful situations. These were useful for qualitative examination, particularly for describing the ways participants interpreted successful and unsuccessful outcomes. However, the use of the constructs of redemption and contamination sequences was not found to be helpful in quantitative analysis for comparing either posttraumatic stress symptomatology or the impact of labelling of the experience.

**Use of an internet questionnaire to collect narrative data.** Previous studies described in this thesis into workplace bullying and also narrative processing have made use of paper surveys or interviews to collect data. The use of an internet survey in the present study resulted in much less labour-intensive data entry, but also allowed for the collection of data, particularly stories, from individuals who might otherwise be disinclined to respond. The stories collected were of varying degrees of narrative complexity but complex, candid narratives were able to be collected via this mechanism. The present study demonstrated that narrative analysis is possible from data collected using an online questionnaire.

**9.5. Summary of Chapter and Focus**

The study described in the present chapter identified the narrative elements of Agency and Communion themes as well as redemption and contamination sequences within narratives provided by participants in the study, regardless of the type of stressful situation they were describing, or how they appraised it. The Opposite of Agency and Communion themes were more often expressed than the Negative Agency and Communion themes. Redemption and contamination sequences were found to be useful in qualitatively describing the data. However, these sequences were not found to predict levels of posttraumatic stress reactions. Lower levels of distress, as measured in Study Three by posttraumatic stress reactions, is one way to define wellbeing. Chapter 10 describes a study investigating bullying narratives from another perspective of wellbeing, eudemonic wellbeing in the form of posttraumatic growth.
Chapter 10. Study Four: Posttraumatic growth from stressful workplace situations

10.1. Introduction

Following on from the investigation of workplace bullying and similar situations as traumatic experiences presented in Chapter 8 and analysis of narrative elements in Chapter 9, Study Four explores the narrative aspects of the experience in relation to posttraumatic growth.

As introduced in Chapter 3, reactions to trauma can include development as an individual, or posttraumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Trauma in the context of posttraumatic growth is defined as a disruption to the life narrative, dividing a person’s story into “before” and “after” the event (Neimeyer, 2006). This narrative focus lends itself to an analysis of posttraumatic growth by means of narrative analysis (Pals & McAdams, 2004).

If trauma can be viewed as a disruption to the life story, then posttraumatic growth can be viewed as the process of rewriting the life narrative. Pals and McAdams (2004) called this identity processing. Pals (2006) demonstrated through the analysis of 81 narratives of women’s difficult life experiences that narrative identity processing consisted of 2 distinct components. First, exploratory narrative processing involves acknowledging the full extent to which an individual’s life has been affected by the event. Second, coherent positive resolution encompasses the conceptualisation of the story of the experience as somehow being resolved in a positive manner. Pals found that these two elements predicted posttraumatic growth, or positive self-transformation arising from the experience.

The purpose of Study Four was to replicate elements of Pals’ (2006) research using narratives of bullying and other stressful situations in the workplace. This was achieved first by analysing the narratives to investigate whether posttraumatic growth experiences were present.

Research Question 1: Do accounts of stressful situations in the workplace demonstrate evidence of posttraumatic growth from the experience?

Following this, it was hypothesised that Pals’ (2006) finding that the two elements predicted posttraumatic growth would be supported.
Hypothesis 1: Exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution would predict positive self-transformation.

These were investigated using a mixed-method approach making use of narrative techniques.

10.2. Method

10.2.1. Participants

Study Four drew on the participant group from the previously-described three studies. The participants are described in detail in Chapter 6.

10.2.2. Collection and Coding of Narratives of Stressful Situations in the Workplace

Chapter 6 described the process by which narratives of stressful situations in the workplace were gathered with Figure 6.1 depicting the process flow. The questions which were used to elicit the narratives were described in detail in Chapter 7. Although participants were asked one of four questions based on their experiences (see Table 7.1).

The narratives were examined by two judges, who coded the narratives on the seven dimensions used in the current study. This was achieved through an iterative process, of coding a selection of accounts separately before discussing the scores and reaching agreement then moving on to the next selection. The reliability thus achieved was assessed using the interjudge agreement as measured by the correlation between the two judges’ scores on each of the elements.

10.2.3. Indicators of Exploratory Narrative Processing and Coherent Positive Resolution

Pals (2006) measured exploratory narrative processing, the full acknowledgement of how much has been changed by the event, and coherent positive resolution, the development of a meaningful and positive ending to the story, by coding for the following six components.

Richness/complexity of narrative elaboration. Narratives were coded on this 5-point scale from 1 (very closed to narrative richness/complexity) to 5 (very open). Interrater reliability on the cross-coded narratives on this variable was calculated using Pearson’s Correlation ($r = .99, p < .01$).

Open-exploratory versus closed-minimising approach to coping. This scale also ranged from 1 (very closed) to 5 (very open). Interrater reliability on
the cross-coded narratives on this variable was calculated using Pearson’s Correlation \( r = .98, p < .01 \).

**Ending coherence.** The coherence of the ending was coded on a 4-point scale, where a score of 4 was given to narratives that had a well-defined completion, including a final, concluding statement. Interrater reliability on the cross-coded narratives on this variable was calculated using Pearson’s Correlation \( r = .99, p < .01 \).

**Positive ending.** Whether the ending was positive was scored on a 3-point scale, where the ending could either be not positive (1), somewhat positive (2) or positive (3). Interrater reliability on the cross-coded narratives on this variable was calculated using Pearson’s Correlation \( r = .98, p < .01 \).

**Negative ending.** Whether the ending was negative was scored on a 3-point scale, where the ending could either be not negative (1), somewhat negative (2) or negative (3). Interrater reliability on the cross-coded narratives on this variable was calculated using Pearson’s Correlation \( r = .99, p < .01 \).

**Emotional resolution.** This 4-point scale measured the extent to which the respondent had resolved his/her feelings about the event. Scores ranged from very unresolved through somewhat unresolved and somewhat resolved to very resolved. Interrater reliability on the cross-coded narratives on this variable was calculated using Pearson’s Correlation \( r > .99, p < .01 \).

### 10.2.4. Scale Construction

The intercorrelations of the six identity processing variables are presented in Table 10.1. These variables were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS. Prior to performing PCA the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .67, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974) and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance \( p < .001 \), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

Principal components analysis revealed the presence of two components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 41.4% and 27.5% of the variance respectively. An inspection of the screeplot revealed a clear break after the second component. Using Catell’s (1966) scree test, it was decided to retain two components for further investigation. To aid in the interpretation of these two
components, Varimax rotation was performed. The rotated solution is presented
in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1

*Intercorrelations and Component Loadings for Narrative Identity Processing
Dimensions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Richness/complexity of narrative elaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Open-exploratory vs. closed minimising coping</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ending coherence</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Positive ending</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative ending</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Emotional resolution</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Component Loadings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory narrative processing</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherent positive resolution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N=89; **p<.01; Note: Component Loadings are based on Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation*

It can be seen from Table 10.1 that the rotated solution was approaching simple structure, with both components showing strong loadings, and all variables loading substantially on only one component. The two factor solution explained a total of 68.9% of the variance.

The interpretation of the two factors was mostly consistent with Pals’ (2006) findings. However, Table 10.1 shows that, contrary to Pals, Ending Coherence loaded on Exploratory Narrative Processing rather than Coherent Positive Ending. In Pals’ study, a high cross-loading on this variable was noted, which was not evident in the present study. Similarly, Pals proposed a “good story effect” to explain the correlation between the two components. In the present study, the two components were only weakly positively correlated (*r* = .28, *p* < .01). This suggests that the “good story effect” may be present in this one
variable, as a coherent ending would tend to be a part of a coherent overall story. The removal of this variable from the analysis was considered, however its clear position as a part of the first component led to the decision to retain this variable, albeit in a different component to Pals. Because there was little overlap between the two dimensions in the present study, the scores were not subjected to any further manipulation.

10.2.5. Positive Self-Transformation.

Posttraumatic growth was conceptualised by Pals (2006) using the construct of positive self-transformation. The degree to which participants described being positively transformed by the experience was measured by coding on a 5-point scale. A score of 5 indicated a narrative that showed “a well-developed description of positive self-transformation that was causally connected to the difficult experience and central to identity” (Pals, 2006, p.1093). Interrater reliability on the cross-coded narratives on this variable was calculated using Pearson’s Correlation ($r = .99, p < .01$).

10.3. Results

10.3.1. Research question 1: Do accounts of stressful situations in the workplace include evidence of posttraumatic growth?

This question was investigated using thematic analysis of the narratives to identify themes relating to posttraumatic growth.

There were narratives that contained evidence of gaining something from the experience, such as “I feel though, that I'm also stronger as a result. I would pick the warning signs a lot earlier next time, and would do something about it earlier. I didn't want to gain strength this way though”. Others, with the benefit of perspective, had quite definite ideas about how their identity had changed as a result of the experience.

It was hard to think like that at the time, but looking back on the experience, it was a tough way to start out on my career path but now as I supervise people, I am conscious of how they are treated and the feedback they are given. I hope I am a much more positive role model for people than this bully …
10.3.2. Hypothesis 1: Exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution would predict positive self-transformation.

In order to test the hypothesis that exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution would both predict positive self-transformation, a standard multiple regression analysis was performed with exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution as the independent variables, and positive self-transformation as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 10.2.

Table 10.2
Standard Multiple Regression of Exploratory Narrative Processing and Coherent Positive Resolution on Positive Self Transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>PST (DV)</th>
<th>ENP</th>
<th>CPR</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$sr^2$ (unique)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.64***</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPR</td>
<td></td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R$^2$=.41
Adjusted R$^2$=.40
R=.64***

$N=89$; Note: *** $p<.001$ ** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$; ENP – Exploratory Narrative Processing, CPR – Coherent Positive Resolution, PST – Positive Self-Transformation.

It can be seen from Table 10.2 that the hypothesis was supported, with both exploratory narrative processing ($\beta = 0.54, p < .001$) and coherent positive ending ($\beta = 0.22, p < .01$) significantly predicting positive self-transformation.

10.4. Discussion

10.4.1. Summary of Findings

Posttraumatic growth is the phenomenon of becoming a better person in the aftermath of a traumatic experience. It was outlined in Chapter 4 that Pals (2006) proposed that identification of posttraumatic growth requires a full acknowledgement of how much life has been changed by the experience (exploratory narrative processing) and some type of uplifting conclusion to the experience (coherent positive resolution). Elements of posttraumatic growth were
identified in 16% of the narratives. The hypothesis that exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution in the narratives would predict positive self-transformation was supported. In contrast to Pals (2006), the coherence of the narrative ending was included within the exploratory narrative processing dimension rather than coherent positive resolution, suggesting that it is the valence of the ending rather than the coherence which is relevant.

10.4.2. Implications for Further Research

The application of the concept of posttraumatic growth to the field of workplace bullying had the benefit of allowing investigation of homogenous traumatic experiences which are, unfortunately, quite common in the general working population. The significant findings, which were generally consistent with Pals (2006), suggested that this technique can be helpful even when the importance of the event is ascribed by the researcher rather than by the person who experienced the event.

10.4.3. Implications for Therapeutic Practice

In situations where a psychologist is treating a person who has experienced workplace bullying, the potential for posttraumatic growth suggests that interventions which promote this may be effective. Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006a) make recommendations about how to work with trauma in order to foster post-traumatic growth. An important factor in this is to allow the client to move at his/her own pace through the identity processing. As far as findings from the present study are concerned, making use of a narrative to explore the experience may be helpful. Similarly, encouraging the client to reflect, and gently trying to redirect rumination on the content of the situation to considering the meaning of the experience may also assist the client to structure the story in a way which is helpful, and to begin to process the event in a way which maximises posttraumatic growth (Lindstrom et al., 2011).

10.4.4. Future Directions

The findings of Study Four indicated that workplace bullying and similar situations may lead to posttraumatic growth in some cases. The necessity of working to eliminate all workplace bullying is acknowledged; however, unfortunately this experience is common to a large proportion of the population. A larger study might enable the component structure of the identity processing elements to be confirmed.
10.5. Summary of Chapter and Focus

Results reported in the present chapter identified the narrative elements of posttraumatic growth within narratives provided by participants in the study, regardless of the type of stressful situation they were describing, or how they appraised it. Positive self-transformation was found to be predicted by exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive ending. This finding of posttraumatic growth builds on the findings of Chapter 8 regarding the appraisal of workplace bullying as a traumatic experience and other narrative elements within bullying narratives examined in Chapter 9. Chapter 11 investigates the ways in which organisations and individuals respond to the stressor of workplace bullying.
Chapter 11. Study Five: Coping Responses to Workplace Bullying

11.1. Introduction

While Study Four, described in Chapter 9, investigated the narrative aspects of the workplace bullying experience, the present chapter explores the ways in which organisations and individuals respond when confronted with workplace bullying.

Chapter 5 presented previous studies and recommendations about responses to bullying at the organisational and individual levels. The purpose of Study Five was to explore both organisational and individual responses, from the perspective of targets and observers.

It was explained in Chapter 5 that countries around the world, including Australia, have policies about how organisational representatives should deal with workplace bullying complaints when they are brought to their attention. However, data about actual practice has been largely limited to anecdotal evidence such as that of Ferris (2004), based on personal experience as a counsellor of targets of workplace bullying. Ferris proposed a typology of organisational responses that consisted of the three categories of excusing the behaviour, characterising the situation as a personality conflict between two individuals who are equally to blame, or labelling the behaviour as damaging and taking action accordingly.

An aim of the present study was to facilitate the quantitative investigation of organisational responses to bullying by exploring how organisations are perceived to react when faced with reports of bullying.

Research Question 1: What strategies are utilised by organisations in response to workplace bullying?

Chapter 5 also discussed some of the efforts to quantitatively measure differences in how individuals cope with workplace bullying, in particular the coping scale developed by Olafsson and Johansdottir (2004). This scale was specifically aimed at coping behaviours in response to being bullied in the workplace. A further aim of the study described in the current chapter was to identify ways in which individuals cope when experiencing workplace bullying.
Research Question 2: What strategies are utilised by individuals in response to workplace bullying?

Therapeutic responses to workplace bullying after the fact were also discussed in Chapter 5. An important aspect of individual counselling of workplace targets (Tehrani, 2011) as well as inpatient treatments in a group setting (Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011) is sometimes an understanding of the target’s own contributions to the situation, and can be achieved by investigating his/her own perspective of how the situation came into being.

Research Question 3: What causes do individuals attribute to workplace bullying and other stressful situations in the workplace?

The final aim of the study was to make use of the coping scale developed by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) to replicate aspects of their studies concerning gender, age and exposure to bullying, as well as to extend this research to include the subjective levels of exposure to bullying. Olafsson and Johannsdottir found that men made more use of assertive and less use of avoidance and seeking help strategies than women.

Hypothesis 1: Men and women would make different decisions about the coping strategies they utilised.

It was also found (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004) that older individuals were more likely to make use of strategies that amounted to doing nothing.

Hypothesis 2: There would be a variation in use of strategies with increasing age.

Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) also found that individuals who had been bullied according to objective measurement were more likely to make use of avoidance strategies.

Hypothesis 3: Increased experience of negative acts would lead to differences in the coping strategies chosen.

It was further hypothesised that this difference in strategies chosen would also be reflected in how individuals viewed their subjective experiences of bullying.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals with different exposures to bullying (e.g., subjective or objective) would differ in the types of strategies they would make use of.
The current chapter describes how these research questions and hypotheses were investigated making use of mixed-methods analyses involving both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

11.2. Method

11.2.1. Participants

Study Five made use of the same data as Studies One to Four. The participants are described in Chapter 6.

11.2.2. Measures

The measures were combined into an internet questionnaire, a full copy of which is available as Appendix B. The measures used for testing the research questions and hypotheses in the current study are described below.

Organisational and individual responses to workplace bullying. It was explained in Chapter 6 that participants were asked to describe different situations depending on their responses to previous questions. The specific questions were described in Study One and listed in Table 7.1. Content analysis of all the narratives received was performed to identify organisational and individual responses to workplace bullying and other stressful situations in the workplace. This involved reviewing the text of the narrative and highlighting instances where the participant mentioned action or inaction being taken in response to the bullying, either by the organisation (for example, “they gave me a laptop and told me to work from home”) or the target (for example, “I ignored it”).

Attributions of causality. The narratives were thematically analysed to identify whether participants made causal attributions about the situation. Instances which were highlighted were where the participant offered an explanation of cause, such as “he was under a lot of pressure from management”. Where attributions were made, the nature of these attributions was identified.

Objective experience of bullying. Chapter 6 described how an objective measure of the extent of bullying was achieved through the use of the Negative Acts Questionnaire, Revised (NAQ-R; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009).

Subjective and objective appraisal of bullying experience. The grouping of participants based on their objective (as determined using the NAQ-R) and subjective appraisal of bullying was determined in the same way as Study One. The method for this determination was described in Chapter 7 and the four resulting categories were pictured in Figure 7.1.
Coping Strategies. The Coping Scale developed by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) provides a measure of whether participants have used or would use various strategies to deal with workplace bullying. The 16-item scale contains strategies such as “Ask colleagues for help”. Participants responded on a 5-point scale (1=’I have done it’; 2=’I would do it’; 3=’I would probably do it’; 4=’I would probably not do it’; 5=’I would never do it’). The dimensions of the scale were Seek Help, Avoidance, Assertiveness and Do Nothing. As discussed in Chapter 5, although Olafsson and Johansdottir found only low to moderate internal reliabilities for the four factors (α = .71, .64, .47 & .60 respectively), the scale was used as it was a the only coping scale which was specifically targeted at coping with workplace bullying. In the present study, the internal reliabilities for Seek Help (α = .70) and Avoidance (α = .73) were moderate. However, in addition to having low reliabilities, Assertiveness (α = .34) and Do Nothing (α = .30), violated the reliability assumptions and were therefore not able to be used as scales in further analyses.

11.3. Qualitative Results for the Research Questions

11.3.1. Research Question 1: What strategies are utilised by organisations in response to workplace bullying?

The narratives were analysed as described in section 11.2.2 for any description of steps taken by organisations to deal with the situation. They were then grouped into Ferris’ (2004) suggested typology of three organisational responses: treating the behaviour as acceptable, as a personality conflict (blaming the target as much as the perpetrator) or as unacceptable. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1 shows that there were examples of strategies which used each of the categories identified by Ferris (2004), as well as some strategies which did not fit into any of the three categories. Some of the specific responses are explained below.

The behaviour is viewed as acceptable. In addition to responses such as direct persecution of targets by organisational representatives who were supposed to be responding to the complaint, there was also emotional pressure put on targets to drop the behaviour, such as “I was basically told that if I complained officially … it would impact on my line manager - and I didn't want him to be in that situation”. (neutral group) and attempting to justify the actions of
perpetrator, “saying the (other employees) get stressed on public holidays” (monthly negative acts group). Perhaps the best example of treating the behaviour as acceptable was by minimising the target’s complaint, like comments suggesting the target “should develop a thicker skin” (bullied group).

Table 11.1

Organisational Responses to Workplace Bullying as Reported by Participants, Grouped according to Ferris’ (2004) typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persecute target (2)</td>
<td>Transfer target (2)</td>
<td>Formal investigation (1)</td>
<td>Ignore the situation (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the perpetrator (1)</td>
<td>Tell target to resolve (1)</td>
<td>Discipline or fire perpetrator (4)</td>
<td>Pressure target to be silent (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally pressure target to drop (1)</td>
<td>Individual counselling to both parties (1)</td>
<td>Mediation for whole office naming target (1)</td>
<td>Reassure target without taking action (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justify perpetrator’s actions (1)</td>
<td>Reframe issue as communication problem (2)</td>
<td>Arrange meeting where target is unsupported (1)</td>
<td>Transfer complaint to a lower level, with perpetrator investigating (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimise target’s complaint (2)</td>
<td>Allow target to work from home (1)</td>
<td>Request target to articulate desired resolution (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transfer perpetrator (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Acceptable – Behaviour is acceptable, Personality – Situation viewed a personality conflict, Action – Behaviour is unacceptable and action is taken; Numbers in parentheses indicate number of participants who reported this organisational response
The behaviour is conceptualised as a personality conflict. Actions such as transferring the target or offering individual counselling to both parties suggested that the target was at least partially to blame. Some targets expressed frustration that organisational representatives they complained to “tried to position it as a communication breakdown and that we needed to work on our relationship” (bullied observer group). Individual counselling was described as having limited success in some situations, when performed by the manager of both parties, “… changed the situation to the extent that the verbal abuse stopped but the exclusion continued for many months, in fact the person concerned hardly spoke to me again until (retirement).” (bullied group).

The behaviour is viewed as harmful and inappropriate and action is taken. Identifying the behaviour as unacceptable and taking action did not equate to the situation being successfully resolved for a number of participants. Organising a discussion between the parties concerned and their manager would appear to acknowledge the situation needs to be resolved, and is taking action, but could be counterproductive as the following excerpt demonstrates.

I raised the issue with the (head of the company) as I was extremely disappointed with the response. The (head of the company) arranged a meeting between (the parties concerned and two layers of management above). The meeting was horrible. They completely abused their power and told me that I should never have made a complaint and started to pick on me and break me down and I was told to keep quiet in future. The manager of the department did not even want to hear what I had to say. I soon found out that they were all close friends and known for sticking together to cover up mistakes. (bullied group)

Mediation was not always described as helpful, if handled badly. “It was supposed to be private and confidential with staff as to who had started the … process; however, the mediator named me in front of everyone.” (bullied group). Taking action could be helpful if all parties were respected, “… listened to the history of our issues, and said for me to (communicate) what I needed for this situation to be resolved. I went home and wrote a letter suggesting (the person
undertook training in) people management and conflict and negotiation skills.”,
but if left until the situation had been ongoing, “5 months”, the target was still left
“with a lot of negative feelings towards the organisation and management's
treatment of its employees for an extended period” (self-perceived group).

Other. It can be further seen from Table 11.1 that a number of strategies
did not really fit into any of Ferris’ (2004) typology. Some of these amounted to
doing nothing – not supporting the bully or excusing their behaviour but simply
failing to respond to complaints. Others acknowledged the behaviour to be
unacceptable but did not take action, such as “I decided to take the situation to the
(head of the company, who) agreed that I had been treated badly but didn't take
any action.” (bullied group).

Covert nature of organisational response. A theme which emerged from
the analysis of this research question was the preference for some organisations to
hide the process which was being undertaken in response to the allegation of
bullying. One respondent reported being instructed to work from home after
raising the issue of feeling threatened, but also told “not to talk to anyone at work
about what is happening so they got annoyed at me for working at home so
much.” (bullied group). A number of participants reported feeling pressured to
withdraw their complaints, or to not lodge incident reports about workplace
hazards and injuries.

11.3.2. Research Question 2: What strategies are utilised by individuals in
response to workplace bullying?

To answer the research question about what strategies individuals make
use of when coping with workplace bullying, content analysis was undertaken to
identify attempted coping strategies (whether successful or unsuccessful) in the
narrative accounts of the event or time period. The general groupings suggested
by this analysis are shown in Table 11.2. The individual statements of specific
coping strategy used are included as Appendix B.

The general groupings shown in Table 11.2 cover a selection of specific
strategies. Exemplars of some of these are provided below.

Make behaviour overt without accusing. Some participants indicated
that they had dealt with the behaviour by calmly discussing the situation with the
perpetrator, “I spoke to the (person) concerned and was very clear on what I
would say. I asked her not to enter the … area while I was (working) as I felt it
was disruptive. She was not happy about this but I stayed firm on my request for her not to be present. After this conversation she refrained from this behaviour.” *(self-perceived group)*, while others spoke to superiors in an indirect manner. For example, “I did make a comment to the manager above” *(bullied group)*.

Table 11.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>No of Participants Reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make behaviour overt without accusing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive self-talk</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge individual incidents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect own interests at work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek external advice or assistance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let out emotion away from work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put work in perspective</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor the person</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for work without quitting job</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenge individual incidents.** “I challenged individual incidents - such as not being shown the meeting minutes” *(self-perceived group)*.

**Seek external advice or assistance.** In addition to speaking to unions, participants mentioned approaching Worksafe/Workcover for advice or assistance, getting guidance from family and friends, and asking external supervisors (such as university supervisors for placement students) to come and view their work.

**Put work in perspective.** Comments such as “I shall concentrate on my (studies) and endeavour to put the whole experience behind me and will not let it destroy my future” *(weekly negative acts group)* and “I take my work day seriously but am better at finding balance in my life” *(bullied group)* indicated participants learnt to prioritise their lives, giving work a lower status than previously.

**Let out emotion away from work.** A number of participants mentioned “venting” to family and friends, as well as crying at home.
Protect own interests at work. Some participants found it helpful to ensure they “demonstrated the soundness of our work” (neutral group) so that the effect of the negative comments about them was minimised, while others ensured they always had witnesses present in meetings or kept records of incidents.

Monitor the person. A few participants mentioned they would avoid the specific person concerned, which necessitated monitoring the whereabouts of the individual. One respondent went so far as to match behaviour to the emotional state of the individual of concern, making statement “Over my course of employment there I learned to avoid him when I felt he was in a bad mood.” (neutral group).

Learning from the experience about ineffective coping strategies. A number of participants indicated that, while they had used a particular strategy in response to bullying, they would be unlikely to use the strategy in future. Different reasons were given for this, from finding the strategy to be ineffective, “I was young and didn't deal with it as well as I would have now - now I would demand a better resolution” (neutral group), to a belief that the personal toll of using the strategy was too great, “I think in future I would just quit my job as no job is ever worth that amount of stress. When you put yourself out there to correct a situation for your clients and colleagues, despite being told you are supported … you are not.” (bullied group).

11.3.3. Research Question 3: What causes do individuals attribute to workplace bullying and other stressful situations in the workplace?

This research question was investigated using thematic analysis of the narratives as described in section 11.2.2.

Attributions towards target. Some respondents, including targets, made attributions about the bullying being due to something about the target. However, these were to do with aspects of themselves they were unable to readily change, such as gender, age and physical features. Some felt perpetrators were “threatened” by them, either because they were younger, or because they were “someone with a degree, which (the perpetrator) did not have, and probably could not have completed” (self-perceived group). Other targets remained mystified as to what had prompted them to be singled out “… from my first day had it in for me and to this day I do not know why” (bullied group).
Attributions towards perpetrator. Some participants indicated that they felt the perpetrator was to blame for the bullying because of personality flaws, such as having “mood swings” (neutral group) or being “nasty” (self-perceived group). Others expressed a belief that the behaviour was a means to an end, such as “I suspect her primary target was our boss and she was quite effective … in driving him out of his job.” (self-perceived group) or that it was “Better to get someone to leave than to pay a redundancy” (self-perceived group). There were those who acknowledged that people engaging in unreasonable behaviour may have had other influences on their behaviour than personal flaws, as demonstrated by “I can surmise (in retrospect) that there were possibly personal issues, certainly financial problems and, I think, finally a delayed reaction to (demotion due to organisational restructure)” (self-perceived group).

Attributions towards the organisation. Organisational upheaval was mentioned by a number of participants as a strong factor in the reason the bullying had occurred. However, there were those who spoke as if the organisation was the bullying entity. For example, “a sick organisation … entrenched bullying culture here. A bully in the management structure gets on an interview panel and they select people that have a style that matches their own preference, another bully. This has been going on for so long the joint is riddled with them.” (bullied group) and reference to a management group that “accept the revolving door principle in this case, utilising trainees on lower wages and probation to minimise … costs” (bullied observer).

Life events for the individual target. A theme which emerged in the course of investigating this research question was that a number of targets were going through some type of upheaval in another aspect of their lives at the time the bullying occurred. Examples included relationship breakdown, death of family or friends, illness and financial stress. This was not usually mentioned as being a reason why the bullying occurred, although some targets felt this weakness had been exploited by the perpetrator. Others mentioned it as a reason they did not assert themselves as in retrospect they wish they had.
11.4. Quantitative Results for the Hypotheses

The hypotheses regarding individual differences in chosen strategies for coping with workplace bullying were tested using two separate regressions with the independent variables of participant gender, age and NAQ-R. The dependent variable for the first regression analysis was the coping strategy of Seeking Help and for the other analysis was Avoidance. As discussed in section 11.2.2, the coping strategies of Assertiveness and Do Nothing violated assumptions and were not able to be used. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 11.3.

Table 11.3

Standard Multiple Regressions of Gender, Age and NAQ-R on Coping Strategies of Seeking Help and Avoidance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>NAQ-R</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>sr² (unique)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeking Help</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.90***</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAQ-R</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R²=.19***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusted R²=.16</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R=.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoidance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAQ-R</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R²=.27***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjusted R²=.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R=.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=88; Note: *** p < .001
11.4.1. Hypothesis 1: Men and women would make different decisions about the coping strategies they utilised.

It can be seen from Table 11.3 that there was a significant gender difference in scores on the coping strategy of seeking help. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that women ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.79$) reported a stronger intention to seek help than men ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 0.58$).

11.4.2. Hypothesis 2: There would be a variation in use of strategies with increasing age.

Age was retained as a variable although the Do Nothing subscale, which Olafsson and Johansdottir (2004) found to be related to age was not able to be used due to violation of the reliability assumptions. It can be seen from Table 11.3 that participant age was not correlated with either of the coping strategies able to be tested.

11.4.3. Hypothesis 3: Increased experience of negative acts (objective bullying) would lead to differences in the coping strategies chosen.

Table 11.3 shows that this hypothesis was supported, as increased scores on NAQ-R predicted higher scores on the Avoidance coping scale.

11.4.4. Hypothesis 4: Individuals with different exposures to bullying (e.g., subjective or objective) would differ in the types of strategies they would make use of.

The hypothesis that individuals with different levels of exposure to bullying would differ in the types of strategies they would make use of was tested using a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The same four dependent coping strategy variables were used. The independent variable was the group to which participants belonged in terms of their subjective and objective appraisal of being bullied. One participant was removed from the analysis as a multivariate outlier. The means and standard deviations of the groups are shown in Table 11.4.
Table 11.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>NN (n=37)</th>
<th>NS (n=18)</th>
<th>OS (n=22)</th>
<th>ON (n=12)</th>
<th>F(3,85)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seek Help</td>
<td>M 1.90 SD 0.62</td>
<td>M 1.97 SD 0.80</td>
<td>M 2.33 SD 1.03</td>
<td>M 2.08 SD 0.16</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid</td>
<td>M 1.18 SD 0.63</td>
<td>M 1.69 SD 1.08</td>
<td>M 2.36 SD 0.83</td>
<td>M 1.42 SD 0.83</td>
<td>9.83***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 89; Note: NN – Neither objectively nor subjectively bullied; NS – Subjectively but not objectively bullied; OS – Objectively and subjectively bullied; ON – Objectively but not subjectively bullied; *** p < .001

Seek Help violated the assumption of equality of variance. Due to this violation, Pillai’s Trace was used. Results showed there was a statistically significant difference between the categories on the combined dependent variables: $F(6,170) = 9.83, p < .001$; Pillai’s Trace = .27, partial eta squared = .14.

When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, the only difference to reach statistical significance using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .03, was Avoidance: $F(3,85) = 4.41, p < .001$, partial eta squared = .26.

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the subjectively and objectively bullied group was significantly different from the mean score of participants had neither been objectively nor subjectively bullied ($p < .001$) and also from the mean score of participants who had been objectively bullied but had not subjectively self-labelled in this way ($p = .01$). There were no other significant differences among the groups. Examination of the mean scores shown in Table 11.4 indicated that participants who had been objectively bullied and also self-labelled themselves as bullied indicated a stronger intention to use avoidance strategies than participants who did not self-label themselves as bullied, whether or not they had objectively experienced bullying.
11.5. Discussion

11.5.1. Summary of Findings

The present study identified a variety of organisational responses to workplace bullying, most of which were experienced as invalidating by the target. Individual responses were also identified with varying degrees of perceived success and some participants reporting they would not use the same response in the future. There was limited support for the hypotheses based on Olaffson and Johannsdottir’s (2004) study, as women were more likely to make use of Seeking Help Strategies than men, and increased experience of negative acts was associated with more use of Avoidance strategies.

**Research Questions.** It should be noted that any results generated from the present study with regards to organisational responses are, by their nature, extremely subjective. The data were generated from individual accounts of how participants perceived the situation they described. The organisational responses reported, therefore, are unlikely to contain the whole of the response, as there may well have been actions taken of which the participant was not aware or the accounts may be distorted by other unknown factors. In regards to the first research question as to how organisations respond to workplace bullying, these responses were commonly experienced by the target as invalidating and disempowering. In addition to the responses categorised by Ferris (2004), of viewing the behaviour as acceptable, blaming the target and viewing the behaviour as unacceptable leading to taking action, two other categories were identified. These were complete failure to acknowledge the existence of an issue and acknowledgement that the behaviour was unacceptable but failing to act.

Similarly, the investigation of the research question of what strategies individuals use indicated these were by no means limited to those suggested by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) in the coping scale. Additional strategies included looking for work, without committing to quitting the current job before a new one is found, reducing the importance of work in overall life, dealing with the specific behaviour in a non-confrontational way and working hard to maintain the quality of one’s own work to reduce the possibility of others seeing the bullying as justified.
Strategies used were not always effective and sometimes were ultimately detrimental to well-being, so some participants indicated they would make use of a different strategy if they found themselves in a similar situation again.

The final research question was to investigate the causes individuals attributed to stressful situations. In general, where participants made attributions about the causes of the situation described, there was a tendency to describe either attributes of the bully or organisational factors. Where target attributes were indicated, these were attributes which were an inherent aspect of the individual, such as age or gender, rather than contributions the individual may have made to the bullying scenario. These findings support the contention of Schwickerath and Zapf (2011) that individuals who have been exposed to bullying will more readily identify organisational and perpetrator contributions to the situation than their own. The additional theme which emerged from the investigation of this research question, that is participants relating other life events which coincided with the experience, suggests that information about targets’ own contribution is available, however in a less-readily accessible state.

Hypotheses. The hypotheses were only able to be tested for two of the four categories of coping strategies, due to violations of the reliability assumptions for the Assertiveness and Do Nothing scales. The hypothesis that women would make use of different coping strategies to men was supported as women were more likely than men to make use of Seeking Help strategies. This finding was partial confirmation of the findings of Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004), who also found that women would make more use of seeking help but additionally that they would make more use of avoidance and less use of assertive strategies.

One possible explanation for the lack of gender differences was the comparatively low reliabilities of subscales in both studies. While Seeking Help had a moderate reliability in both studies, where a consistent finding was found, Avoidance had a low reliability in Olafsson and Johannsdottir’s (2004) study and moderate in the present study. The Assertiveness subscale was not able to be used due to its very low reliability.

The hypothesis that there would be a variation in use of strategies with increasing age was not supported, as there was no significant correlation of age with any of the coping scale variables in the analysis. The most likely explanation
for this was that Do Nothing was not found to be a usable scale in the present study. The previous study had found that strategies that amounted to doing nothing were more likely to be used the older a participant was (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004).

The hypothesis that increased experience of negative acts would be associated with an increased tendency to use Avoidance strategies was supported. The hypothesis that individuals with different exposures to bullying would make use of different strategies was supported, with individuals who had experienced both subjective and objective bullying being more inclined to make use of avoiding strategies compared to participants who did not identify themselves as having experienced bullying. This was the case both for those who had and had not been objectively bullied.

11.5.2. Integration of Results

The quantitative results regarding coping with workplace bullying should be viewed with caution because of problems with the reliability of Olafsson and Johannsdottir’s (2004) coping scale which have been discussed, but also because of a further finding which emerged in the investigation of the narratives. A number of participants indicated that, while they had used a particular strategy in response to bullying, they would be unlikely to use the strategy in future. Different reasons were given for this, from finding the strategy to be ineffective to a belief that the personal toll of using the strategy was too great. This finding has implications for the Olafsson and Johannsdottir scale, as the 5-point response scale interprets “I have done it” as bearing the strongest likelihood that the strategy would be used in future. The findings of the present study suggest that this is an incorrect assumption.

11.5.3. Implications for Research Methodology

Suggested modifications to the coping scale. Two fields of enquiry are suggested to try to improve the reliability and validity of the coping scale developed by Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004). The first, which was suggested by the authors of the original scale, was to add more items to the scale and investigate the psychometric properties to determine whether any of the new items improve the internal reliabilities of the subscales. Future researchers are directed to Appendix B for suggested future items indicated by the narratives in the present
study. A future large-scale study could incorporate these into the coping questionnaire and determine the psychometric properties.

Another further investigation, suggested by the present study, is in the scoring of Olafsson and Johannsdottir’s (2004) scale. The way the scale is presented potentially masks information about future intent. As discussed in the present chapter, an implicit assumption of the current scoring of the scale is that if a person indicates they have tried a particular strategy in the past they will therefore use that strategy in the future, with an even greater likelihood than if they have indicated they would definitely use the strategy. However, as described in Chapter 10, the narrative responses to the present study revealed that, at least in some cases, this is an incorrect assumption. That is, some people who indicated they had tried a particular strategy in the past also indicated that they would not use the same strategy again. This was either because the strategy was unsuccessful, or because the consequences were too harmful, or both. It is therefore recommended to decouple these two questions (“Have you tried this before?” and “How likely are you to use this strategy if confronted with bullying in the future?”) in future studies. By presenting the information in this way, it would still be possible to calculate the score on the original scale, but there would be no loss of information about future intended behaviour. It would be interesting to investigate whether this change improves the internal reliability of the subscales.

The question remains as to whether such a specific coping scale is warranted, given the modifications which have been suggested. As discussed in Chapter 5, studies which make use of more general coping strategies without referencing workplace bullying have not provided meaningful data on coping styles (e.g., Dehue et al., 2012). This suggests that Olafsson and Johannsdottir’s (2004) contribution is a valuable one, and that enhancement of their scale may allow it to be used to yield results which are helpful in determining which strategies for coping with bullying are found to be effective and conducive to well-being.

**Development of an organisational response scale.** The potential for developing a quantitative scale for investigating the way organisations respond to workplace bullying has been opened up by the present study. A number of strategies were identified and presented in the current chapter. It should be noted,
however, that because the present study was based on the point of view of targets or observers, the strategies identified should not be considered an exhaustive list. Prior to developing a new scale for use in research, it is recommended that an exploratory investigation be conducted which asks for responses from HR departments and leaders of companies. This could be used to generate more items to be used in setting up the original scale.

11.5.4. Implications for Therapeutic Practice

Attributions about the causes of bullying. The findings about where participants attributed the contributions to the bullying scenario agreed with those observed when treating targets of workplace bullying in an inpatient setting (Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011) and also with the experience of counsellors (Tehrani, 2011). These results were also consistent with attribution theory (Jones & Nisbett, 1972) in that participants more readily identified external impacts on their own behaviour and often attributed the bullying to a personality flaw in the perpetrator. Differences in the present study compared with previous research were that some participants were able to view external factors which were impacting on the perceived perpetrator at the time, and others to begin to consider factors about themselves (albeit often unchangeable traits) that may have contributed to the situation.

This awareness of external impacts on the perpetrator and limited awareness of factors internal to the self would be helpful in the therapeutic process of developing the dysfunctional model (Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011). The process of developing the dysfunctional model involves the steps of exploring the organisation’s contributions, exploring the contributions of the bully and finally exploring the client’s own contributions. Once this final stage has been reached, the dysfunctional model is created by investigating the client’s contributions in detail, exploring the whole of the client’s experience in terms of feelings, thoughts, bodily reactions and behaviour, as exemplified in Figure 11.1.

The implications of the findings of the present study for therapeutic practice include that clients may be capable of identifying the external influences on the perceived bully. This would allow them to move more rapidly through the stages of developing the dysfunctional model in Schwickerath and Zapf’s (2011) treatment programme.
Use of narrative in treatment. A further finding in relation to the investigation of how the client may have contributed to the bullying scenario was the presence in the narratives of information about other events in respondents’ lives at the time the bullying occurred. That is, when participants were invited to tell the story of their experience of workplace bullying, many chose to refer to influences in their lives outside of work that coincided with the stressful workplace situation. Despite limited causal connection being drawn between the events, participants recognised a narrative link. This suggests therapeutic interventions which seek to uncover ways in which the client can be empowered to recognise and address difficulties they may experience in relationships or coping skills (e.g., Schwickerath & Zapf, 2011; Tehrani, 2011) might be benefited by making use of narrative techniques.

Organisational responses. The finding that organisations can respond to instances of workplace bullying or other stressful work practices in often dysfunctional ways impacts on individuals and the therapists who work with them. An awareness of the potential for harm to come from the invalidating response of the organisation is essential when counselling a client through the decision of how to respond if he/she is currently experiencing workplace bullying. This secondary trauma was described by a number of individuals as more...
damaging than the bullying itself. Clients should be prepared for the possibility, even probability, of a damaging response before they raise their concerns. It is recognised that this may not be a practical suggestion for therapists as often seeking professional therapeutic help is an avenue which is explored after formal complaint procedures have been tried and found to be unsuccessful and/or damaging. However, it is important that therapists be aware of the context in which the client is operating.

11.5.5. Implications for Organisational Practice

Importance of responding to all reports in a respectful manner. The findings in relation to organisational response should be viewed with caution, as the nature of data collection was that the organisational responses were participants’ subjective analysis of these responses. It is unlikely that participants would have been aware of the entirety of the actions and investigations being undertaken in response to a complaint. However, the subjective perceptions will influence employees’ behaviour whether these perceptions are correct or incorrect. The feelings of invalidation reported by many participants suggested that a particularly damaging organisational response was to ignore the complaint or to hide the behaviour. The study also suggested that many organisations continue to respond in this way.

Prevention is more effective than response. While the vast majority of organisational responses reported by participants were perceived as dysfunctional and invalidating, there were some which were respectful and effective. Nevertheless, even participants who reported these few more positive responses still expressed a reduced engagement in their companies and an intention to leave at some future time. This suggests that the costs to the company begin as soon as the bullying or other unwelcome behaviour begins, and that promoting a culture where such behaviour cannot occur is the only way of completely avoiding the impacts. This supports the risk management approach advocated by Caponecchia and Wyatt (2011), which conceptualises workplace bullying as a psychological hazard within the workplace.

Does the definition of workplace bullying matter? The discrepancies around the definition of workplace bullying, while frustrating from a research perspective, are informative in terms of organisational practice. A key finding was that the organisational impacts of workplace bullying, including increased
turnover and reduced loyalty to the company, were not limited to situations which met the definition of workplace bullying. While clearly a strict definition is necessary for legal purposes, as well as research, the question of whether the behaviour is or is not strictly workplace bullying according to a strict definition may not be particularly meaningful for organisational representatives.

**Vulnerable people and workgroups.** Times of change for the organisation, for the target and for the perpetrator were mentioned by participants as precipitants for bullying or other acts of workplace aggression. This finding indicates useful points of pro-active intervention. Points of intervention indicated by organisational change include when a new person enters the company, and times of organisational restructure. Some form of effective and monitored mentoring arrangement might be useful in the former case, and respectful and participative change management in the case of the latter. The findings further suggested that times of change in the personal lives of employees also increase the chances of bullying occurring, whether the individual experiencing the personal changes becomes a target or perpetrator of workplace aggression.

The question remains as to how an organisation can address these issues when it is often unrealistic to identify external stressors on every individual in the workplace. Employee Assistance Programmes, which are counselling services offered to employees of a company, and sometimes also to family members of employees, could help to address this need. Employees who make use of Employee Assistance Programmes typically do so for personal issues, family issues or work issues (Spetch, Howland, & Lowman, 2011). This provides a clear opportunity for individuals within an organisation to self-select as requiring assistance to address aspects of change in their lives. However, it should be noted that a number of barriers have been identified to use of Employee Assistance Programmes, particularly for contract staff and those whose work conditions are time-based (Nobrega, Champagne, Azaroff, Shetty, & Punnett, 2010). It is therefore imperative that organisations make such programmes available to their staff and ensure they are accessible and clearly understood by individuals within the organisation.
11.6. Summary of Chapter and Focus

The present chapter presented the findings about the ways in which individuals and organisations respond to workplace bullying, as well as the attributions individuals make about the causes of the bullying. In addition to investigating the research questions and hypotheses, two additional themes emerged. The first was that individuals sometimes stated that, having tried a particular coping strategy in the past, they would not handle similar future situations in the same way. The other emerging theme was that targets of bullying and similar behaviour often had life stress in areas of their lives away from work.

The present chapter described the final study of the thesis. Chapter 12 integrates relevant findings of the five studies and discusses further implications for research as well as clinical and organisational practice.
Chapter 12. Discussion

12.1. Introduction

The thesis has described five concurrent studies investigating workplace bullying from a variety of perspectives. As described in Chapter 6, the five studies were conducted using the same data set. Study One, “Definition of workplace bullying” investigated how individual accounts of bullying compare with each other and with formal definitions, while Study Two, “Workplace bullying as a trauma”, analysed whether workplace bullying could be described as a traumatic experiences. Narrative analysis was used in Study Three, “Narrative components in accounts of workplace bullying”, looking at the stories as identity forming experiences, and also in Study Four, “Posttraumatic growth from workplace bullying” which looked at whether positive self-transformation could be attributed to workplace bullying. The final study, Study Five, “Responses to workplace bullying” looked at how individuals and organisations cope with workplace bullying when it occurs. Each of these studies has been presented and the implications discussed in preceding chapters. The present chapter summarises the studies and provides a general discussion integrating the results of the five studies.

12.2. Summary of Component Studies

12.2.1. Study One: Definition of Workplace Bullying

“it's hard to pinpoint the way you could with someone shouting loudly at you.”

The main finding of Study One, which was described in Chapter 7, was the great variation between individuals’ definitions of what did and did not constitute workplace bullying. Similar events were described by participants who did and did not label the behaviour they were describing as bullying. Furthermore, many individuals who described behaviour they labelled as bullying were describing single events, which do not satisfy either the research or legal definitions of workplace bullying. A secondary finding was that women were more likely than men to report workplace bullying, and individuals higher on neuroticism were more likely to report having been bullied in the workplace.
12.2.2. Study Two: Workplace Bullying as a Trauma

“my need was to survive”

Chapter 8 described Study Two, which investigated workplace bullying as a trauma from the perspective of Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) theory of shattered assumptions as well as from the perspective of a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The study found that the shattered assumptions conceptualisation of trauma was more helpful than the physical threat implied by the PTSD diagnosis. This shattered assumptions perspective indicated that workplace bullying as well as similar stressful situations in the workplace could indeed be experienced as traumatic by individuals exposed to them.

12.2.3. Study Three: Narrative Components in Accounts of Workplace Bullying

“felt as if a weight had been lifted”

The narrative aspects of accounts of workplace bullying were investigated in two separate studies, the first of which was Study Three, described in Chapter 9. Themes of Agency and Communion, as well as the opposites of these, were found in narrative responses to all four questions, as were redemption and contamination sequences. While these were useful in describing the data, they were not helpful in predicting wellbeing as quantified by posttraumatic stress symptomatology. A conclusion of the study was that neither the themes nor the sequences were useful when analysing workplace bullying narratives.

12.2.4. Study Four: Posttraumatic Growth from Stressful Situations in the Workplace

“stronger for what happened to me previously ... able to stand up for myself”

The investigation of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008), which was conducted in Study Four and described in Chapter 10, was more fruitful. Study Four supported the contention that posttraumatic growth involves the two distinct elements of fully exploring the impact of the event, as well as a positive ending to the story. It also demonstrated that themes of posttraumatic growth and its elements are distinguishable in narrative accounts of workplace bullying and similar situations. This suggests further research into posttraumatic growth following bullying experiences should be undertaken.

The findings also suggested that the coherence of the ending might belong more naturally to the narrative exploration element rather than the positive resolution element. For therapists working with targets of workplace bullying, the study indicates the
potential of a therapeutic approach designed to facilitate posttraumatic growth (e.g., Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). A further recommendation suggested by the results is the importance of allowing the client to move to a growth perspective in their own time, due to the predominance of Exploratory Narrative Processing in contributing to posttraumatic growth. In conclusion, the results support the usefulness of a narrative approach to therapy.

12.2.5. Study Five: Responses to Workplace Bullying

“I think in future I would just quit … no job is ever worth that amount of stress”

The quantitative findings with regard to coping with workplace bullying were limited due to limitations with the Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) coping scale used. However, an important qualitative finding was that some participants indicated they would not use the same strategies they had used in the past. This had implications for research and for improving the scale, which were discussed in Chapter 11.

12.3. Integration of Findings

12.3.1. What is Workplace Bullying?

The finding that there was little difference between the different categories of bullying experience in terms of the details of the stories produced has implications for many of the other research questions. These questions looked at how people in the various groups differed. The homogeneity of the experiences described across the groups suggested there were unlikely to be differences between the groups, which was the case. The non-significant findings around PTSD symptomatology, which did not significantly differ among the participant groups, and coping strategies, of which only Avoidance strategies were found to differ between the groups, may be, in part, due to the aforementioned finding.

12.3.2. Posttraumatic Growth

Several studies’ findings had implications for the field of posttraumatic growth. Study Four, which focused on posttraumatic growth, found opportunities for posttraumatic growth were evident from the narratives and the presence of two dimensions of posttraumatic growth, narrative exploratory processing and coherent positive resolution, were supported.

In addition, the findings of Study Two around trauma and posttraumatic symptomatology supported the conclusion that workplace bullying can be an experience which leads to posttraumatic growth. Although the experience of workplace bullying was not described by most participants in terms which met the DSM-IV definition of
trauma, a number of participants identified the shattering of one or more fundamental assumptions, which suggests that it was experienced as traumatic (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This shattering of assumptions is considered essential to post-traumatic growth, as it is only through processing the disruption to identity that growth can be achieved (Janoff-Bulman, 2006). Furthermore, the ruminative quality to targets’ intrusions, also noted in Study Two, suggests that post-traumatic growth might be facilitated by this impact. Ruminating about what happened can be damaging and unhelpful. However, rumination about why the experience happened can lead to a search for meaning in which people form a narrative about what has been gained from the experience and how they have been positively transformed (Lindstrom, Cann, Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2011).

The finding in Study Five that individuals expressed a determination not to use certain coping strategies in the future, despite having used them in the past, indicated a valuable learning experience was gained from the situation. Study Three suggested that, particularly in the domain of self-mastery, participants described themselves as stronger and better able to care for themselves in the future. This was another indication of positive self-transformation arising from the experience of workplace bullying.

12.4. Implications of Research

Each of the studies had implications for research, organisational policy or therapeutic practice. These were discussed within the study reports and are briefly summarised below.

12.4.1. Implications for Research

A major finding with implications for research which was present in all the studies was the lack of clarity around what was viewed as bullying. Single acts of workplace aggression, particularly, were viewed by some participants as workplace bullying. Furthermore, these single acts were experienced as traumatic by participants who did and did not interpret them as bullying. This opens the door for research of narratives which are more common than those which meet the research definition of bullying. Narratives of workplace aggression are more readily available and the present research suggested these can be just as informative as those of behaviour which is more strictly defined as bullying.

The findings of the last three studies had implications for narrative research. The most important was that rich narratives were able to be collected making use of an anonymous internet survey and that they could be analysed using a number of different methods. This opens the door to much larger scale studies when data entry does not...
have to be as time intensive as research techniques which make use of interviews or pen and paper questionnaires. There were further findings in relation to the specific narrative analysis techniques used, including the usefulness of “Opposite of” Agency and Communion themes compared with “Negative” themes when describing narrative experiences, as well as the reconsideration of the elements of posttraumatic growth.

12.4.2. Implications for Organisational Policy

The implications for organisational policy have been discussed in the individual studies, predominantly Studies One and Five. The main implication was the importance of responding to all reports of bullying in a respectful manner, as even acts which do not fit the definition still have similar consequences such as high turnover and decreased engagement. If the response is not respectful, many participants experience the organisational response as also bullying. There were also some findings which indicated there are times of particular vulnerabilities for bullying to occur, including times of change in the organisation or in individuals’ personal lives. This indicates that a potential for intervention is in the provision of an Employee Assistance Programme, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 11. The finding in Study One that individuals who report experiencing bullying are higher in neuroticism should be viewed with caution, as some researchers and practitioners have indicated that the trauma of workplace bullying can lead to changes at the level of personality, therefore this may be a result rather than a cause of the experience.

12.4.3. Implications for Therapeutic Practice

PTSD did not appear to be an appropriate diagnosis for most participants from the evidence of the present research but workplace bullying and similar situations did appear to be experienced as a traumatic experience by some. This means that therapy which takes a trauma perspective may be helpful. Study Four demonstrated that posttraumatic growth is possible when the individual is allowed to explore the impact of the event. The finding in Study Two that some individuals had a tendency to ruminate about their experience is also indicative of the potential for posttraumatic growth, if these ruminations can be carefully redirected from the content of the situation to the meaning of the experience (Lindstrom et al., 2011).

The findings of Studies Two and Four, in particular, show that the mere process of telling the story in a narrative form can allow for these themes to be identified. Other revelations within the narratives were identified in Study Five, including an analysis of the way individuals had responded to the situation, and how they would behave in
future, as well as narrative links between the bullying and other stressful events in participants’ lives at the time of the bullying or similar stressful workplace situations. The present research indicates that the telling, or even writing, of the details of the event as a structured story could be a beneficial part of the therapeutic process.

A further important implication of the present research was awareness that organisations can handle things very badly and that the formal complaint process existing in some workplaces can be as or more traumatic than the initial event. An awareness of the potential for harm to come from the invalidating response of the organisation is essential when counselling a client through the decision of how to respond if he/she is currently experiencing workplace bullying. This secondary trauma was described by a number of individuals as more damaging than the bullying itself. Clients should be prepared for the possibility, even probability, of a damaging response before they raise their concerns. It is recognised that this may not be a practical suggestion for therapists as often seeking professional therapeutic help is an avenue which is explored after formal complaint procedures have been tried and found to be unsuccessful and/or damaging. However, it is important that therapists be aware of the context in which their clients are operating.

12.5. Limitations of the Research

The limitations of the research have been identified in the studies describing the individual chapters and are summarised in the current section. The small sample size affected the power of some analyses. Possible reasons for the response rate include the effort of completing a narrative response or the technical difficulty discussed in Chapter 6. The technical issue also impacted the decision to distribute the survey to a wider audience, as this was delayed until the issue was resolved. Resolution of the issue took around twelve months by which time further distribution was impractical.

Chapter 8 discussed how the workflow design of the questionnaire impacted on the statistical analyses which were able to be performed through the number of participant groups which were created. A larger sample size could have reduced much of this impact but options for improving the survey have been discussed.

Other limitations are related to the choice of scales. Some had psychometric properties that were not ideal, while others were not included in the study in order to keep the survey at a manageable length. A balance needed to be found between robustness and practicalities. However, this provides opportunities for future directions, as discussed in the next section.
12.6. Future Directions

Future directions have been suggested in each of the separate studies. A number of these included large-scale studies to investigate specific aspects of the workplace bullying experience in more detail and with more power. In addition to the greater power provided by a larger participant sample, focusing on specific aspects of the experience of workplace bullying and similar situations would allow more thorough investigation. Because the research described in the present thesis covered a number of aspects of workplace bullying, a number of scales had to be omitted in the interests of parsimony. Examples of the decisions which impacted on the level of detail which was able to be studied include the decision to use a short personality measure and the omission of quantitative scales to measure constructs such as fundamental attributions and growth following a difficult experience. Such constructs could be studied more comprehensively if research focused on particular aspects of the bullying experience.

One large-scale study which has been recommended was to further investigate the elements of posttraumatic growth which were explored in Study Four. Attention is beginning to be given to resilience within workplace bullying (Jackson et al., 2007; Van Heugton, 2013) and, while resilience and growth are not the same construct, the findings of Study Four in particular support other observations that resilience can be the outcome of growth from workplace bullying (Van Heugton). The findings of Study One that there was a relationship between neuroticism and workplace bullying are of interest in light of the findings of Lilgendahl and colleagues (Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Lilgendahl et al., 2013) around the link between positive processing and neuroticism. This suggests that a large-scale study with stronger scales for examining personality factors and making use of the study design of Lilgendahl et al. would be useful when applied to the phenomenon of bullying and similar experiences in the workplace. The observed capacity for an online survey to yield rich and meaningful data able to be analysed narratively makes such a study a viable proposition.

Research is recommended to improve Olafsson and Johannsdottir’s (2004) scale for measuring coping with workplace bullying. Two major modifications were suggested by the results of Study Five. The first was the addition of new items based on the descriptions participants gave of the ways they had dealt with workplace bullying. The new individual coping responses identified by Study Five are reported in Appendix B, and analysis of the psychometric properties of a scale which includes these items is suggested. The second modification indicated by the findings of Study Five is at the
basic structural level of the scale. Chapter 11 explained the need to distinguish between past behaviour and intended future behaviour. This was based on the finding that some participants indicated that while they had attempted a particular strategy for dealing with the situation, their experience had been so damaging they would not use the same strategy in the future. As discussed in Chapter 11, a study to investigate the impact of separating out the question of whether the participant has tried a strategy in the past from how likely the strategy would be to be used in the future, would be valuable.

The need to investigate how organisations respond to bullying is becoming recognised, with valuable contributions on how this could be achieved (e.g., Ferris, 2004; Fredericksen & McCorkle, 2013). Chapter 11 also suggested a number of potential designs for investigating organisational responses to workplace bullying, using the responses reported by participants and targets as a starting point but also making use of focus groups and organisational interviews.

12.7. Conclusion

The present research has provided insights into subjective perceptions of workplace bullying held by the general public. Participants’ definitions of workplace bullying differed from research and legal definitions, particularly by describing single acts of aggression as bullying. There were also differences between participants, with similar behaviour being described as bullying by some respondents and not bullying by others. The traumatic nature of exposure to workplace aggression was investigated, with limited evidence that workplace bullying meets the clinical criteria for trauma. However, being targeted by workplace aggression can be experienced as traumatic in terms of the shattering of fundamental assumptions, particularly the meaningfulness of the world and, as such, can provide an opportunity for posttraumatic growth. Many and varied responses to workplace bullying on the part of individuals and organisations were identified, and participants described varying degrees of success with these. Implications of the findings for research, therapeutic and organisational practice were described. The present research has contributed to research into posttraumatic growth from difficult life events, as well as indicating that narrative therapeutic interventions might be useful when working with targets of workplace bullying and other stressful situations in the workplace.
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Appendix A. Survey distributed to participants.

Consent Information Statement
Student Researcher: Ms Shelley Connell
Supervisor: Associate Professor Ann Knowles

You are invited to participate in a postgraduate student research project conducted by Shelley Connell and supervised by Associate Professor Ann Knowles of Swinburne University. The aim of the study is to investigate how we cope with stressful situations at work. Your participation will help us to explore the many factors which may explain individual differences in the way work stress impacts us.

In the following questionnaire, you will be asked to think about particularly stressful times at work. This may be very difficult. Should any of these questions cause distress or raise issues of concern you are urged to seek referral to a psychological professional. The Swinburne Psychology Clinic on (03) 9214 8653 operates on a low-cost fee-for-service basis. Lifeline on 13 11 14 is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to people living in Australia. Free, online, self-directed programmes are available on www.anxietyonline.org.au for assisting with anxiety issues.

Your privacy will be protected as there is no section of this survey that asks for information that would identify you in any way. If you choose to save your responses so you can return to the questionnaire at a later time, you will be asked for an email address. This is simply for the purpose of allowing you to return to the questionnaire later, and is in no way associated with your responses when they are submitted after you complete the questionnaire.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time. Only completed and submitted questionnaires will be utilised in the study. The submission of a completed questionnaire will be taken as your consent to participate. The results of this study will be submitted for a Doctor of Clinical
Psychology thesis. In addition, they may be submitted for publication. However, only group results will be reported so your anonymity is protected.

If you would like further information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact Associate Professor Ann Knowles (Attention Shelley Connell)
Swinburne University of Technology, PO Box 218, HAWTHORN  VIC  3122
Tel (03) 9214 8205 or +61 3 9214 8205 or aknowles@swin.edu.au

This project has been approved by Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of this project you can contact

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68)
Swinburne University of Technology, PO Box 214, HAWTHORN  VIC  3122
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au

Thank you in anticipation of your support
Shelley Connell and Associate Professor Ann Knowles
What is your age? ___ years
Are you … Male Female
What is your country of origin? Australia Other ____
What is your current country of residence? Australia Other ____
Which best describes your current employment status? Full-time Part-time Unemployed/home duties/studying
For participants who reported either being full-time or part-time employed
What type of workplace are you currently employed in (for example, school, bank)?
Is your current workplace…
Entirely male/Mostly male/About half male half female/Mostly female/Entirely female
Is management in your current workplace…
Entirely male/Mostly male/About half male half female/Mostly female/Entirely female
Is your current direct supervisor
Male/Female/I don’t have a direct supervisor
How many people are in your workplace?
In the organisation <5 6-20 21-50 51-100 >100
In your department <5 6-20 21-50 51-100 >100
In your team <5 6-20 21-50 51-100 >100
How long have you worked in this type of workplace? ____ years
Have you ever experienced any of the following behaviours in the workplace?
Please indicate the frequency of the behaviours at the time.
Never/Now&then/Monthly/Weekly/Daily
Someone withholding information which affects your performance
Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work
Being ordered to do work below your level of competence
Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks
Spreading of gossip and rumours about you
Being ignored or excluded
Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes or your private life
Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger
Intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way
Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job
Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes
Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach
Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes
Having your opinions ignored
Practical jokes carried out by people you don’t get along with
Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines
Having allegations made against you
Excessive monitoring of your work
Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)
Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm
Being exposed to an unmanageable workload
Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse
Have you ever experienced or observed bullying in the workplace?

_ Experienced bullying in the workplace  _ Observed bullying in the workplace
The following questions ask you to describe a potentially stressful situation in the workplace in detail. The purpose is to understand the subjective experience from your point of view. To preserve the confidentiality of the study responses, please do not include any information which would allow the identification of anyone concerned. This includes, but is not limited to, surnames or the name of the company involved.
[For those who answered Yes to having experienced workplace bullying]
Please think about the time that you were bullied. Please describe the events in as much detail as you can. It may help to focus on a particular instance, or you may prefer to talk about the experience over a period of time. Please be specific. We would like to know what happened, who was there, how it felt, what you were thinking, and how (if at all) the experience changed you.

[For those who answered No to having experienced but Yes to having observed workplace bullying]
Please think about the time that you observed someone being bullied. Please describe the events in as much detail as you can. It may help to focus on a particular instance, or you may prefer to talk about the experience over a period of time. Please be specific. We would like to know what happened, who was there, how it felt, what you were thinking, and how (if at all) the experience changed you.

[For those who answered No to both experiencing and observing bullying but who reported experiencing any negative acts on a monthly basis or more often]
You have mentioned experiencing a number of negative behaviours at work on a monthly basis or more often. Please think about one or more of those experiences. Please describe the events in as much detail as you can. It may help to focus on a particular instance, or you may prefer to talk about the experience over a period of time. Please be specific. We would like to know what happened, who was there, how it felt, what you were thinking, and how (if at all) the experience changed you.

[For all other participants]
Please think about a time when someone in the workplace did something you disapproved of. Please describe the events in as much detail as you can. It may help to focus on a particular instance, or you may prefer to talk about the experience over a period of time. Please be specific. We would like to know what happened, who was there, how it felt, what you were thinking, and how (if at all) the experience changed you.
How was the situation you have just described resolved/concluded? Please describe the events in as much detail as you can. Please be specific. We would like to know what happened, who was there, how it felt, what you were thinking, and how (if at all) the experience changed you.
How long ago did the events you have just described occur? ___ years

What type of workplace did the events occur in (for example, school, bank)?
Entirely male/Mostly male/About half male half female/Mostly female/Entirely female

Was the workplace at the time…
Entirely male/Mostly male/About half male half female/Mostly female/Entirely female

Was management in the workplace at the time …
Entirely male/Mostly male/About half male half female/Mostly female/Entirely female

Was your direct supervisor at the time…
Male/Female/I didn’t have a direct supervisor

How many people were in the workplace?

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<th>&lt;5</th>
<th>6-20</th>
<th>21-50</th>
<th>51-100</th>
<th>&gt;100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In your department</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In your team</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the bully</td>
<td>The supervisor of the person being bullied</td>
<td>A peer of the person being bullied</td>
<td>A subordinate of the person being bullied</td>
<td>It’s complicated …_________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Below is a list of difficulties people sometimes have after stressful life events. Please read each item, and then indicate how distressing each difficulty has been for you DURING THE PAST SEVEN DAYS with respect to the events you have just described. How much were you distressed or bothered by these difficulties?

Not at all/A little bit/Moderately/Quite a bit/Extremely

Any reminder brought back feelings about it
I had trouble staying asleep
Other things kept making me think about it
I felt irritable and angry
I avoided letting myself get upset when I thought about it or was reminded of it
I thought about it when I didn’t mean to
I felt as if it hadn’t happened or wasn’t real
I stayed away from reminders of it
Pictures about it popped into my mind
I was jumpy and easily startled
I tried not to think about it
I was aware that I still had a lot of feelings about it, but I didn’t deal with them
My feelings about it were kind of numb
I found myself acting or feeling like I was back at that time
I had trouble falling asleep
I had waves of strong feelings about it
I tried to remove it from my memory
I had trouble concentrating
Reminders of it caused me to have physical reactions, such as sweating, trouble breathing, nausea or a pounding heart
I had dreams about it
I felt watchful and on guard
I tried not to talk about it
Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe you
Very inaccurate/Moderately inaccurate/Neither accurate nor inaccurate/Moderately accurate/Very accurate
Am the life of the party
Sympathize with others’ feelings
Get chores done right away
Have frequent mood swings
Have a vivid imagination
Don’t talk a lot
Am not interested in other people’s problems
Often forget to put things back in their proper place
Am relaxed most of the time
Am not interested in abstract ideas
Talk to a lot of different people at parties
Feel others’ emotions
Like order
Get upset easily
Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas
Keep in the background
Am not really interested in others
Make a mess of things
Seldom feel blue
Do not have a good imagination
How would you react if you were subjected to bullying in your workplace?

I have done it/I would do it/I would probably do it/I would probably not do it/I would never do it

Tell my boss
Take sick-leave
Wait and hope it stops
Answer back
See psychologist (or other) for counsel
Talk to union representative at work
Ask colleagues for help
Not let it affect me
Talk to the bully and ask him/her to stop
Feel helpless
Tell the HR director at work about it
Quit my job
Bully the bully myself
Ignore it and do nothing
Ask for transfer within the company
Go to my union
Appendix B. Individual coping responses reported by participants.

Table B.1

*Attempted Individual Coping Strategies not Listed in Coping Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask bully if we could start relationship over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge individual incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentrate on enjoyment or achievement outside of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact external supervisor (such as university supervisor) for validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Worksafe/Workcover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cry at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate soundness of my own work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss issues on both sides with bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss with boss about negative working culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in positive self-talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain to bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firmly state my requirements to the bully without making accusations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep a record of events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make an informal (or sometimes jokey) comment to a superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sure I have a third person present at all discussions with the bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor moods of bully and avoid when volatile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond calmly with logic and reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek guidance from family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek guidance from friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay emotionally detached from work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to a peer of the bully (not in my direct line of reporting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to psychologist/other available through the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to psychologist/other in private practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to the bully's boss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vent to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vent to friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C. Evidence of HREC Clearance.

[Please note: title change from “Today’s workplace …” to “An investigation of stressful situations in the workplace” was one of the modifications required by SUHREC and complied with to gain the attached approval]

Ann Gaeth
To Ann Knowles Hayley Mowat Resethics 3 Sep 2010
To: A/Prof A Knowles FLSS; Ms Shelly Connell (BC)
CC: Prof Glen Bates; Ms Hayley Mowat, Research Administration Assistant FLSS

Dear Ann and Shelly,

SUHREC Project 2010/176 Today's workplace: What is it and who is in it?
A/Prof A Knowles Ms Shelly Connell FLSS Prof Glen Bates
Approved Duration 03/09/2010 To 03/05/2012 [Adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol undertaken by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your response to the review, as e-mailed on 2 September 2010, were put to and approved by a SUHREC delegate.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project has approval to proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator.supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact me if you have any queries about the ethical review process, citing the SUHREC project number. Copies of clearance emails should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Ann Gaeth
for Keith Wilkins
Secretary, SUHREC

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