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Social Norms Research on School Violence in England: Another Look at Misperceived Peer Norms as the Biggest Bully of All

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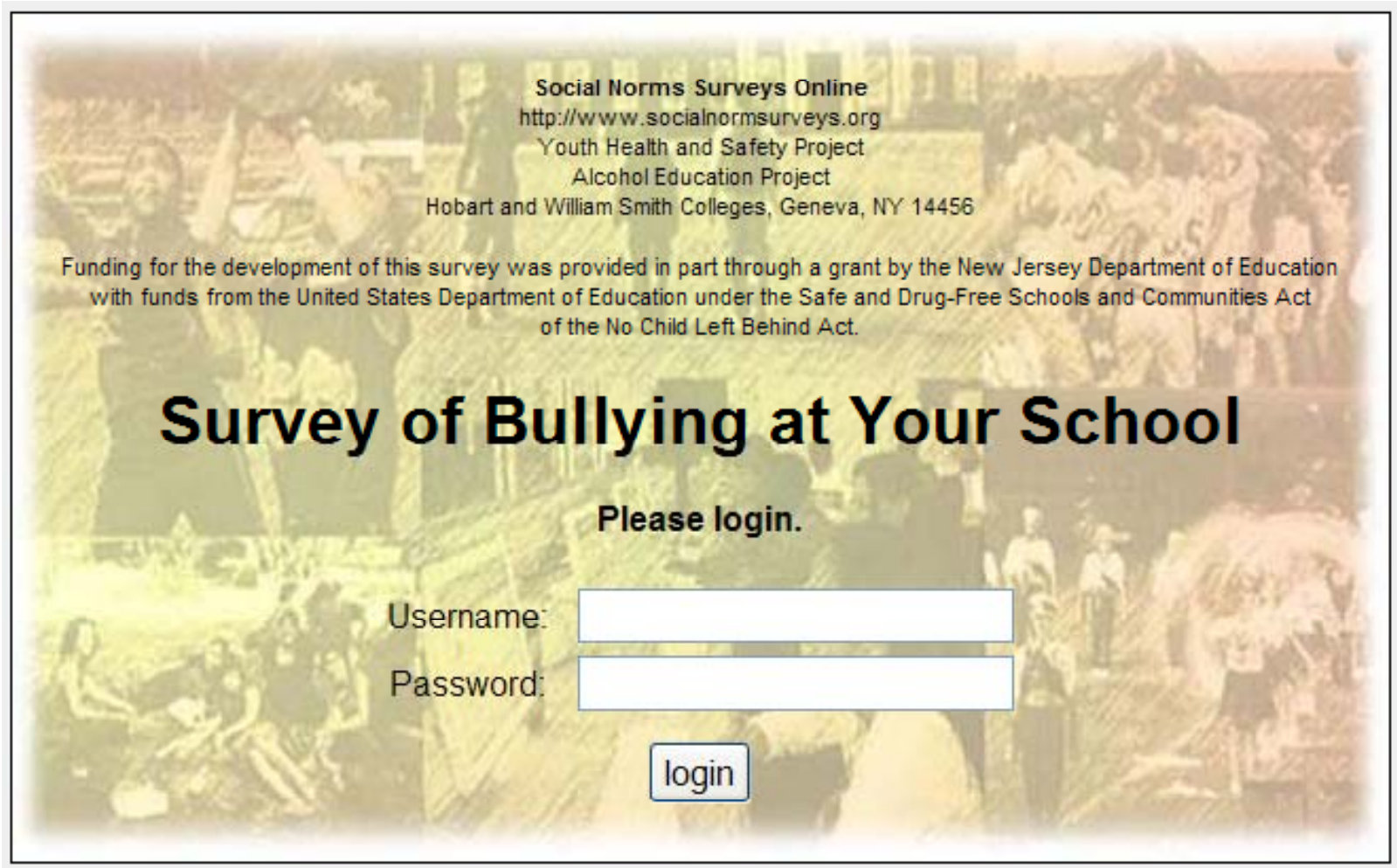
Abstract

An online survey has been developed for use in assessing bullying in UK secondary schools and for conducting social norms interventions. The survey reveals attitudes about bullying, incidence levels of bullying, and perceived norms regarding peers. Results from 2,745 students attending 17 schools in the Greater London area in 2006 show that while bullying is substantial, it is not the norm. The most common (and erroneous) perception is that the majority engage in and support such behavior. This pattern of massive misperceptions is found across school settings with varying sizes, age distributions, and ethnic composition. These misperceptions are confirmed as the strongest predictor of personal bullying behavior and more influential than actual school-wide norms in the local school setting.

Web-based Survey Instrument



http://www.socialnormsurveys.org/bullyA_UK
(Enter test for the username and password)

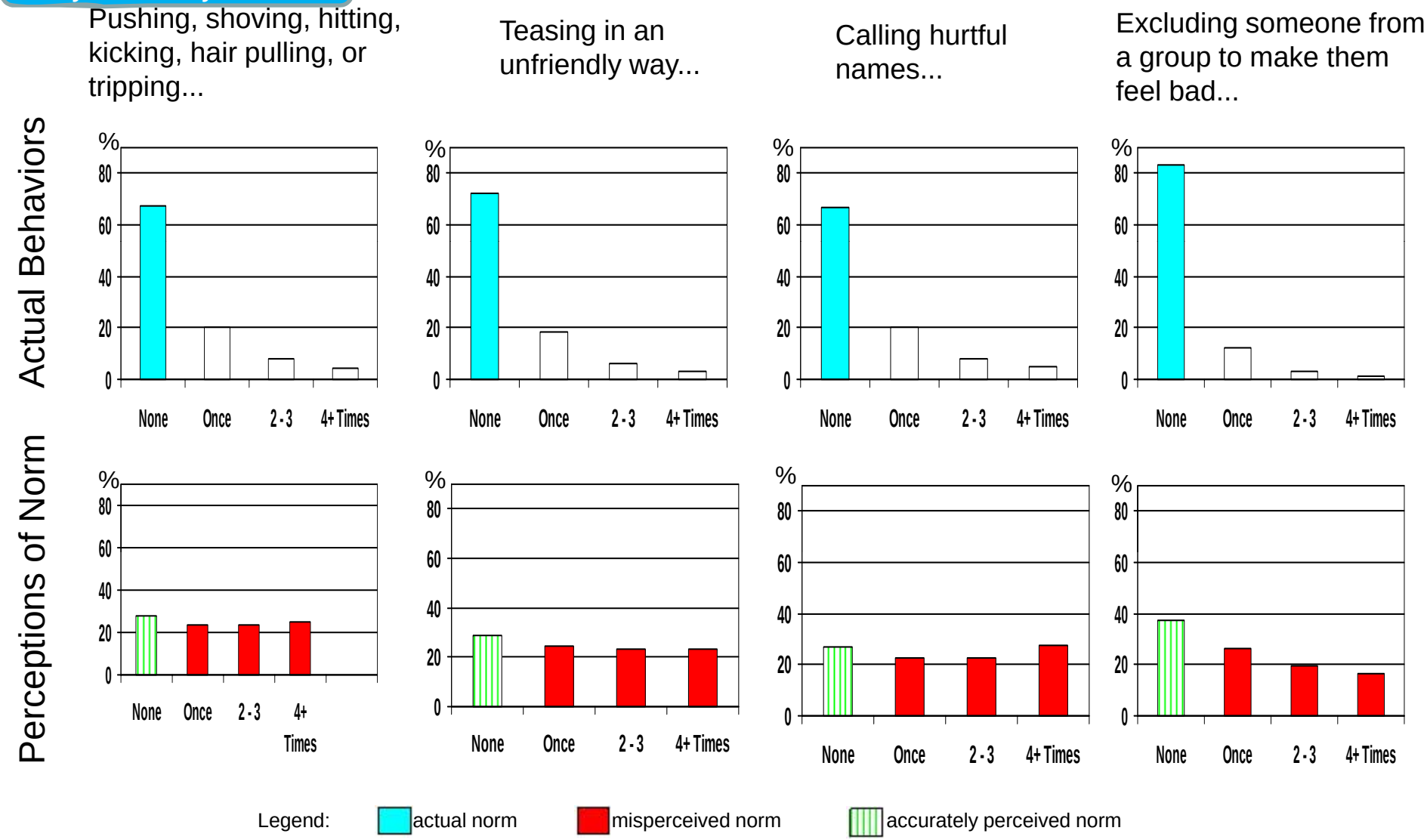
UK School Sample Demographics

School Characteristics			
Number of Schools			17
School Size - mean (range)			482 (77 – 1,049)
Sample Sizes from Target Grades - mean (range)			162 (18 – 750)
Cohort Response Rate - mean (range)			73% (26% – 100%)
Respondent Characteristics			
Number of Respondents			2,761
Females / Males - %			57% / 43%
Grade Levels			
5	20%	9	10%
6	18%	10	15%
7	12%	11	11%
8	13%	12-13	1%
Race/Ethnicity			
White			42%
Asian			15%
Black			23%
Mixed Race			12%
Other			8%
Age – mean (range)			12.0 (7 – 19)
Geographic Area			
Urban			17%
Suburban			63%
Urban/Suburban			20%

UK Bullying Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms

(N=2,761)

Norm is not to bully but only a minority know it!



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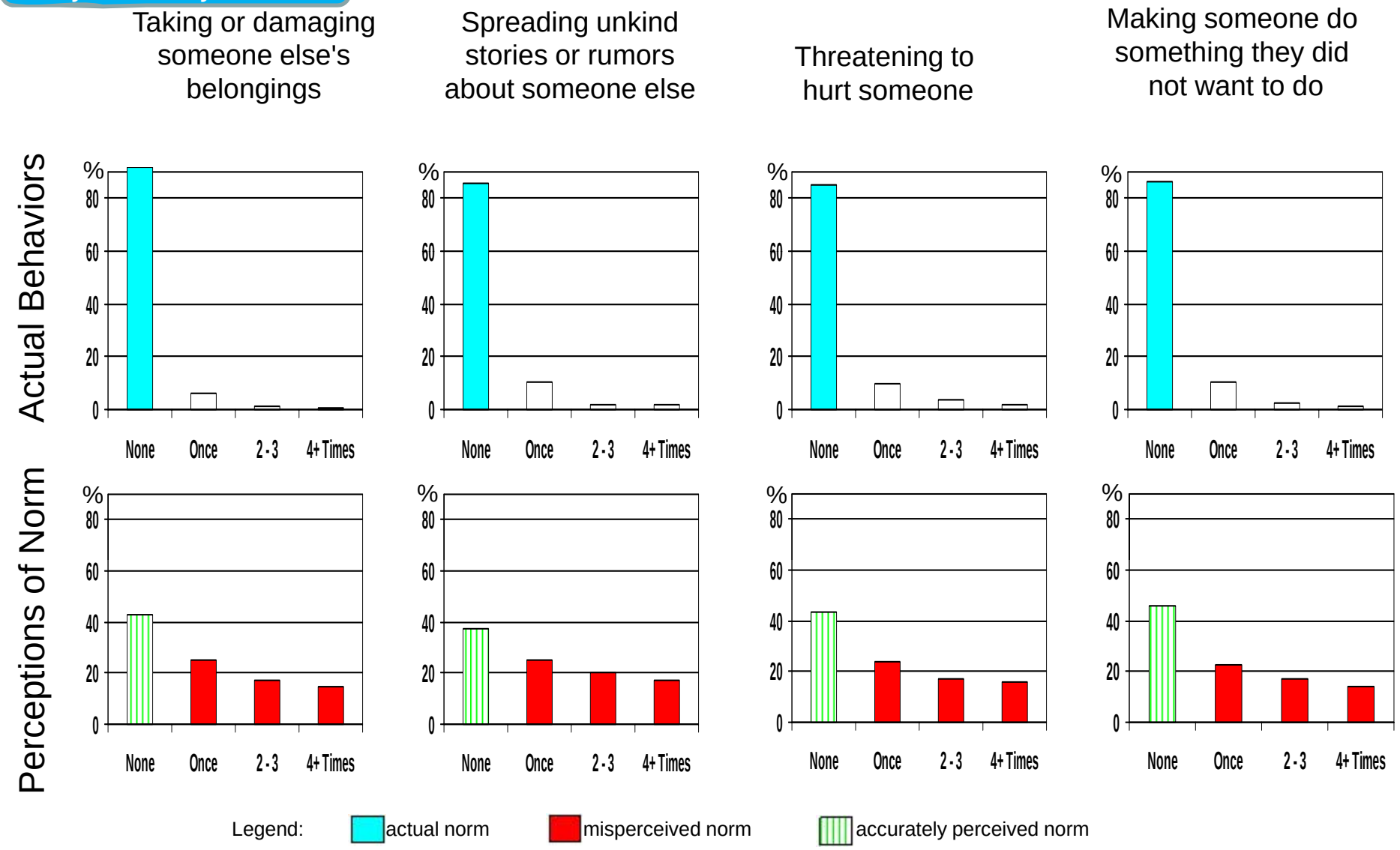

Bullying Behavior at School in Last 30 Days: Comparison of UK to US Actual Prevalence and Perceived Norms

(UK N=2,761 US N=10,586)

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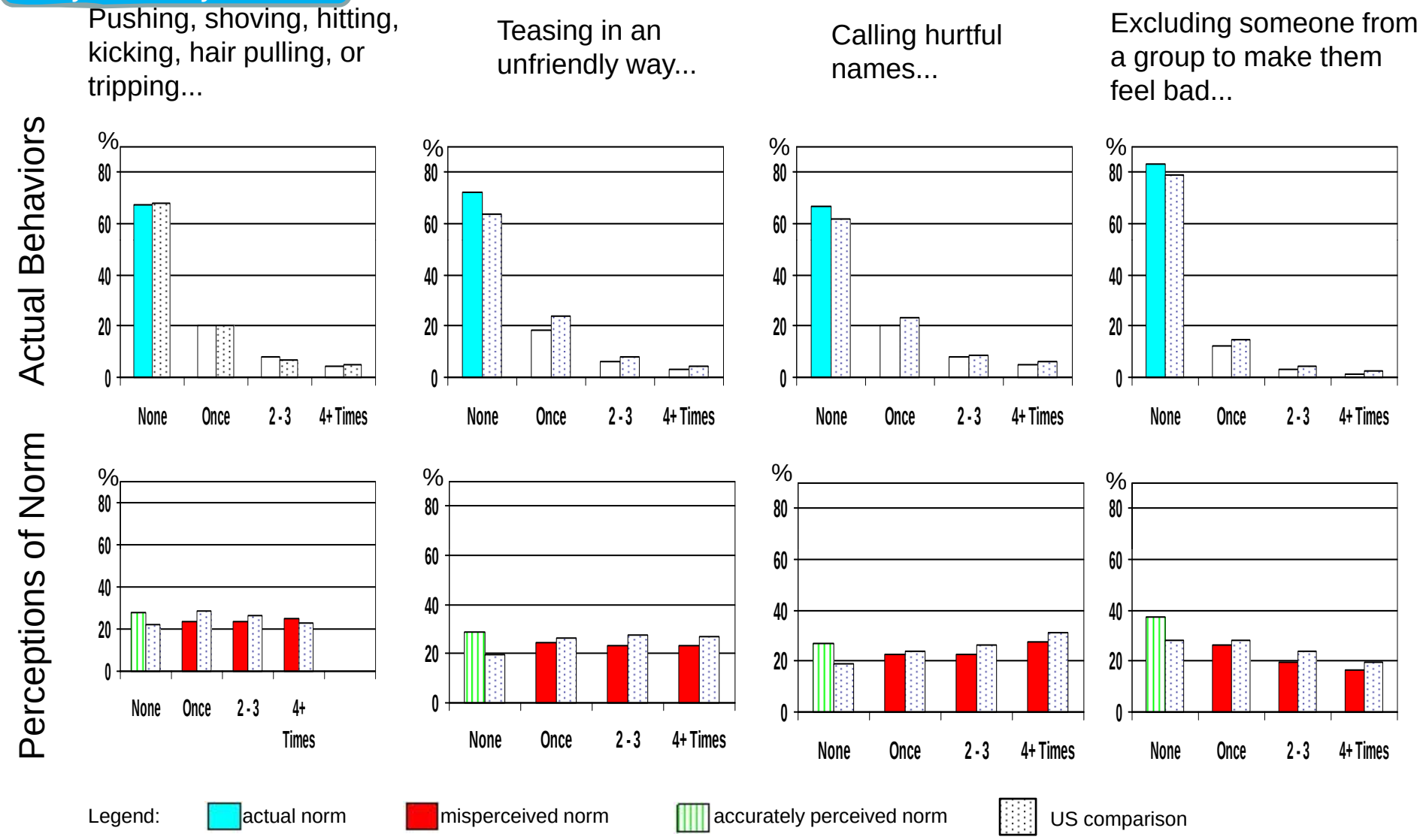

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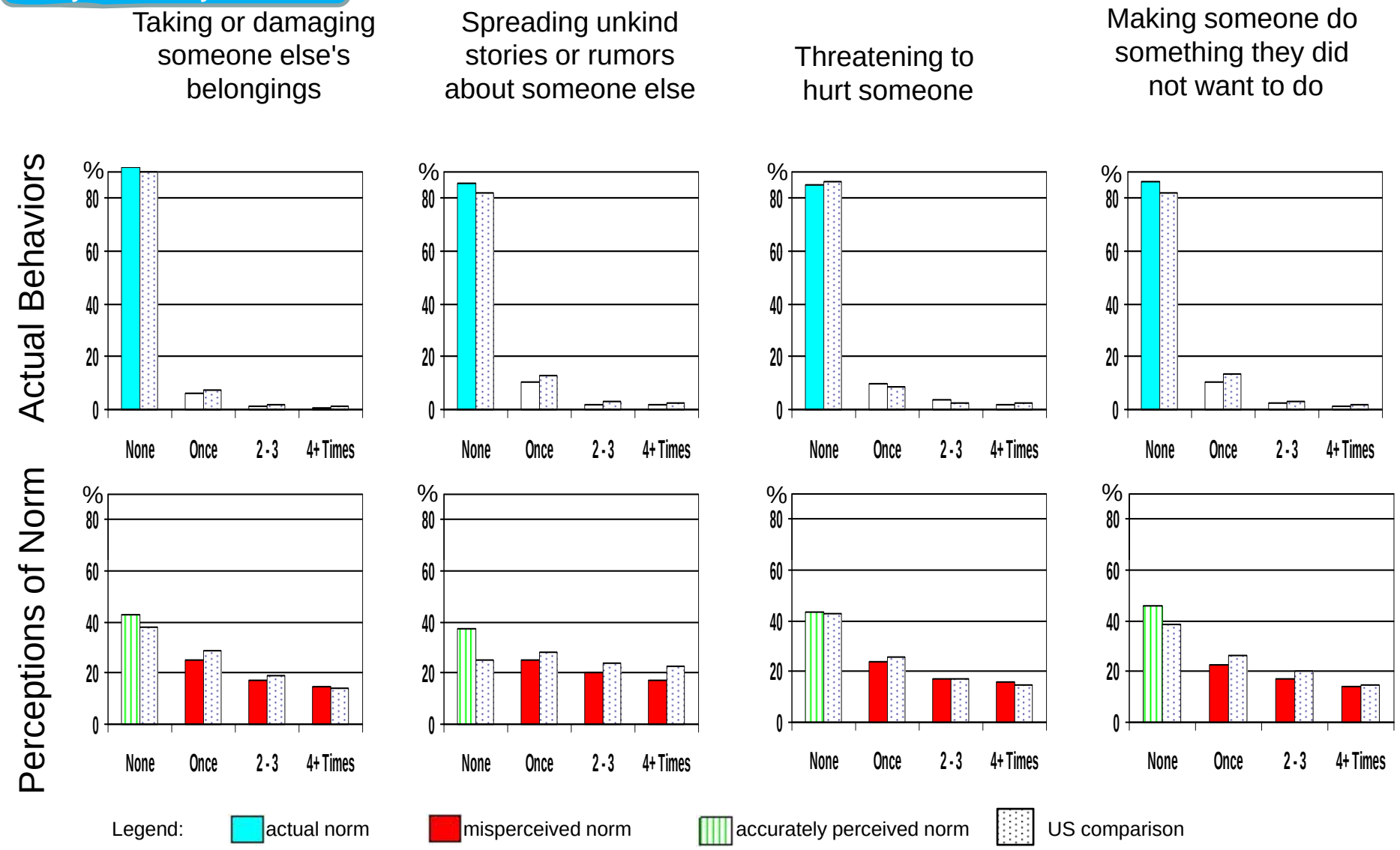
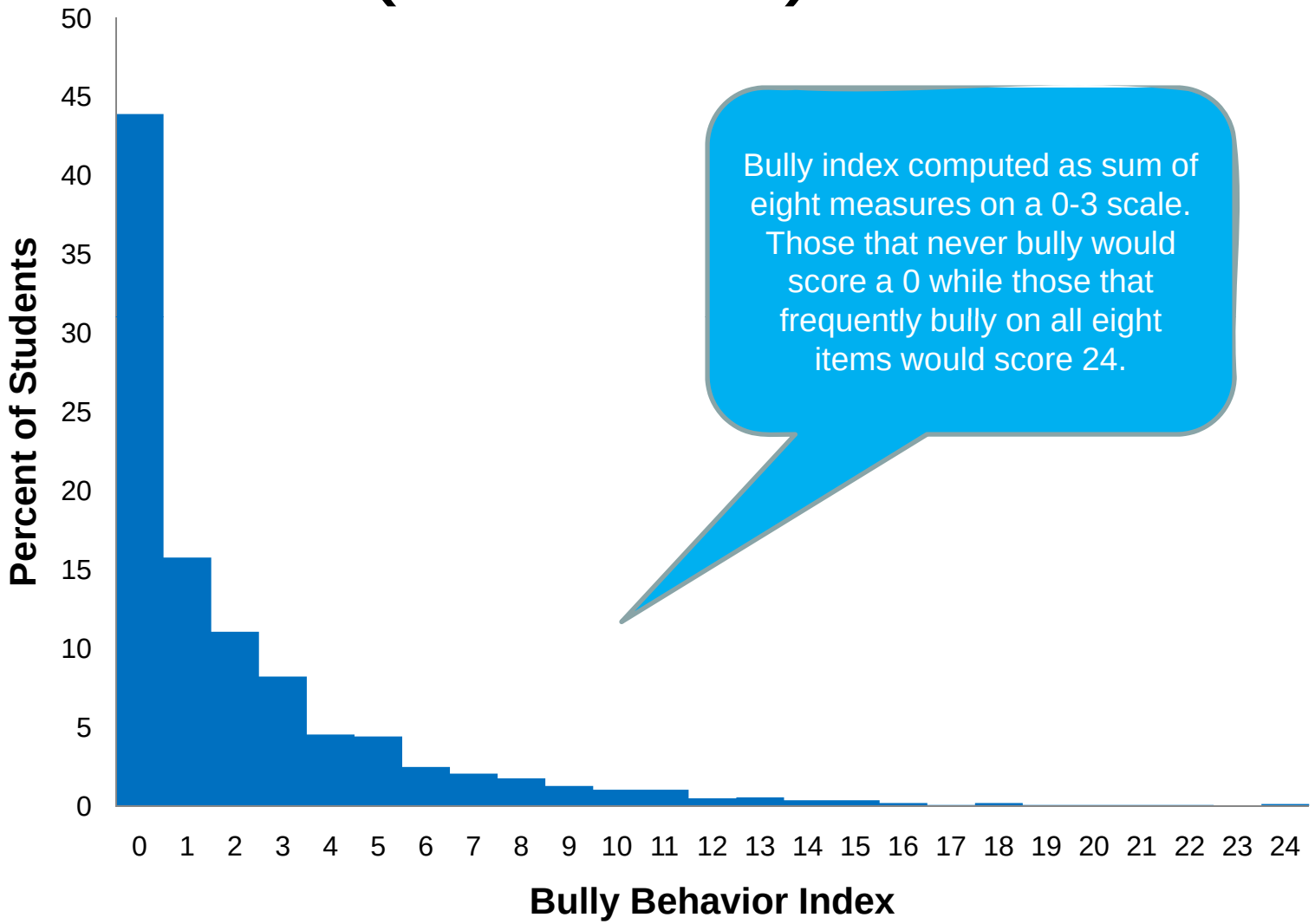
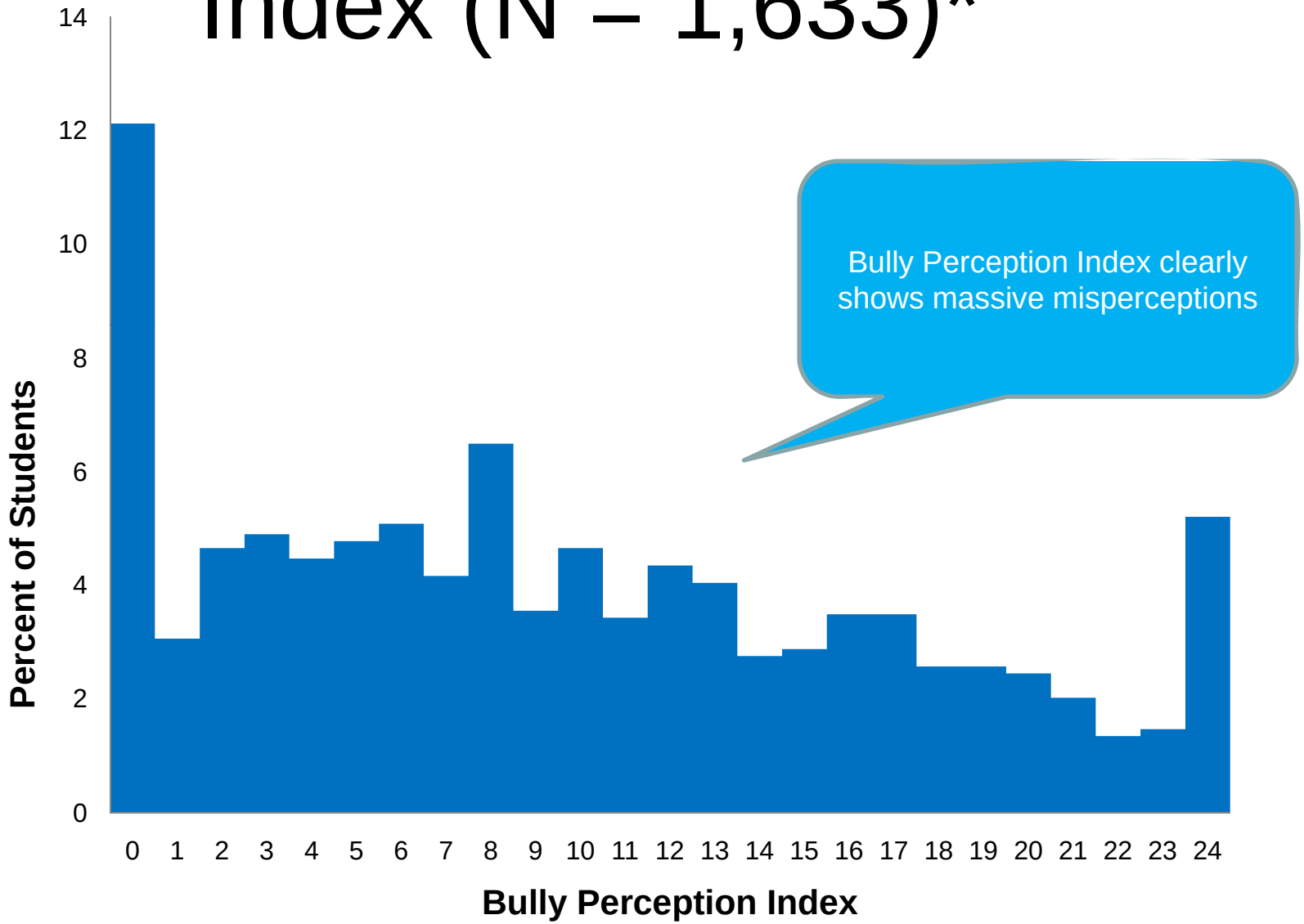


Distribution of Bully Behavior Index (N=1,656)*



*Includes only schools where at least 79% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.

Distribution of Bully Perception Index (N = 1,633)*



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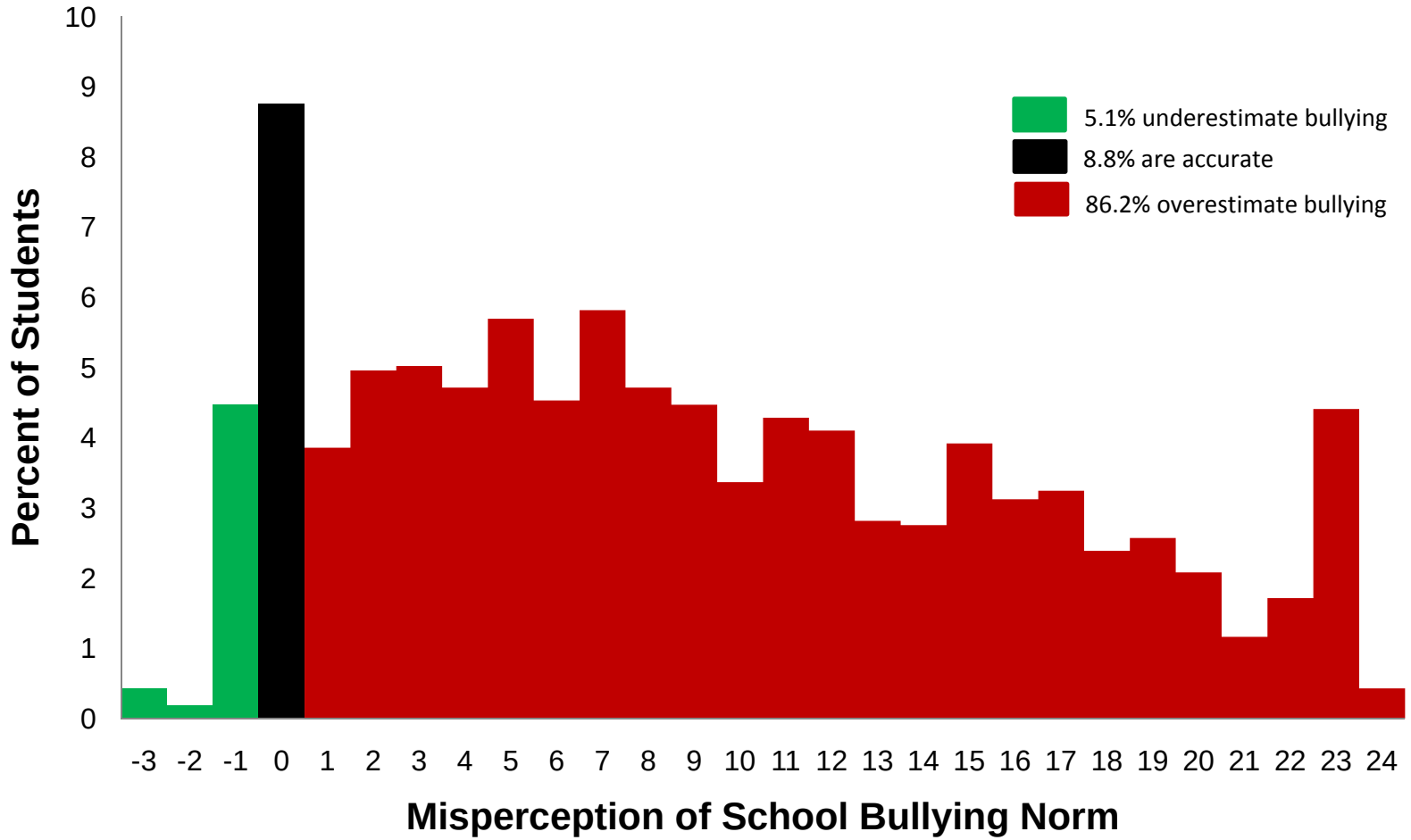
Distribution of Bullying Misperception (N = 1,633)*



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Standardized regression coefficients predicting bullying behavior in the last 30 days (N=1,432 [a])

Perception of bullying is strongest predictor of whether an individual will bully!

Independent Variables	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	
Perception of bullying (index)	.36	**
Actual bullying norm at school (index median)	.07	*
Gender (male vs. female)	.14	**
Age	.03	
Race (Asian/Chinese vs white)	-.03	
Race (Black vs white)	.06	*
Race (Other/mixed vs white)	.03	
School population size	-.05	
Socioeconomic status category of school[b]	-.02	

[a]Includes only schools where at least 79% of students responded overall from the grades surveyed.
[b]Subjective assessment of school administrator coded 1=below average, 2=average, or 3=above average.
* Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$: ** $p < .001$.