

# YOU SAY TOMATOE AND I SAY TOMATO: CAN WE DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING AND OTHER COUNTERPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOURS?

Sara Branch

## ABSTRACT

Despite the recent increase in focus on workplace bullying by both researchers and practitioners, there is still considerable confusion as to how workplace bullying is similar or different to other counter-productive behaviours in the workplace. However, in order for researchers and practitioners to be able to research, prevent and address workplace bullying, it needs to be identified clearly and differentiated from other counterproductive behaviours. Within this paper we explore the similarities and differences between the concept of workplace bullying and alternative terms like incivility and harassment. We argue it is the persistency of the inappropriate behaviours is the primary difference between workplace bullying and other counter-productive behaviours. This paper contributes to the discussion of 'Can we differentiate workplace bullying?' by adapting Andersson and Pearson's (1999) model of antisocial behaviours. Findings from an interview study are also used to further clarify these definitional questions. We propose that this model could form part of a comprehensive antisocial behaviour policy, which outlines and explains the similarities and differences between workplace bullying, harassment, workplace violence and aggression as well as incivility. With the intended outcome to clarify the dimensions of workplace bullying as a phenomenon and thereby assisting employees and Management to identify negative behaviours early so that they can take appropriate action and stop the negative spiral and impact of such behaviours.

**Keywords:** Workplace bullying, antisocial behaviours, definitions

In recent years, the topic of workplace bullying has received increasing interest from researchers and practitioners from around the world. Despite this increased focus on workplace bullying, there is still considerable confusion for employees as to what workplace bullying is and how it is different from or similar to other forms of counter-productive behaviours in the workplace. Furthermore, a variety of terms have been used to describe workplace bullying, adding to the confusion. For instance, Einarsen (2000) used the terms bullying, harassment and victimization synonymously with mobbing in his review of workplace bullying research. Concern has been raised however, against labelling all negative social behaviour at work as workplace bullying (Zapf, 2004). We argue that it is necessary to investigate the definition of workplace bullying for the benefit of researchers, practitioners and employees. As researchers we must strive for rigour in definitions so that the phenomenon can be isolated, analysed, and understood. Practitioners will then be better informed to make more accurate diagnosis and assess the methods to prevent and redress workplace bullying. More importantly is that this process may assist employees to be able to identify workplace bullying hopefully avoiding or minimising the potential for the behaviour to spiral out of control and reduce the potential harmful impacts. If workplace bullying is to be effectively addressed by practitioners, HR managers and researchers, it needs to be

---

Sarah Branch ([s.branch@griffith.edu.au](mailto:s.branch@griffith.edu.au)) is a Research Fellow at Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, Griffith University, QLD 4111

identified as inappropriate behaviour and differentiated from other counterproductive behaviours.

Arguing that workplace bullying is an identifiable phenomenon, this paper will explore the similarities and differences between the concept of workplace bullying and alternative terms like incivility and harassment. In doing so, the crossover between the different concepts will be identified. As a result, an integrative model developed by Andersson and Pearson's (1999) on antisocial behaviour and the relationships between workplace violence, aggression and incivility will be drawn upon throughout this paper. Furthermore, findings from an interview study investigating upwards bullying as a type of workplace bullying will be referred to clarify definitional aspects of workplace bullying. Within this study 15 managers (aged between 30 and 60 years approximately; 5 males, 10 females) who worked within a range of medium to large public and private organizations (for example, transport, health, education, IT and welfare) and experienced upwards bullying were interviewed. Those interviewed came from differing managerial levels, including three supervisors, five middle managers, six senior middle managers and one senior manager. The managers interviewed also had varying degrees of experience in the role of manager with two of the managers new to a managerial position (one year of experience), 11 with more than five years managerial experience, and two with more than ten years managerial experience. In presenting the results of this study considerable caution was exercised to protect the identity of participants. Pseudonyms as well as limited contextual and specific identifying material was used in reporting the findings.

## **DEFINING WORKPLACE BULLYING**

Recently a group of international researchers defined workplace bullying as:

“harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied activity, interaction or process it 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”. (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, p. 15)

This definition was chosen as an exemplar because it demonstrates particular characteristics that are found frequently in definitions of workplace bullying. First, workplace bullying behaviours are usually defined as inappropriate or unreasonable behaviours (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Gorman, 1999; Hoel & Cooper, 2001; McCarthy, 1996; McCarthy, Sheehan, & Kearns, 1995). Examples of such behaviours include ridiculing people, keeping a constant eye on another’s work, questioning another’s professional ability, spreading damaging rumours, and explosive outbursts and threats (Bassman, 1992; Rayner & Hoel, 1997; Zapf & Einarsen, 2001). While specific negative consequences for the recipient are assumed (Randall, 1992), this element is not considered a necessary condition for inclusion in a definition of workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000) and is implied rather than stated in the above definition.

Second, definitions of workplace bullying emphasise that inappropriate behaviours occur persistently (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hoel, 1997; Smith, 1997) over a period of time (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hoel, 1997; Smith, 1997). According to Hoel and Cooper (2001), “the long-term nature of the phenomenon is one

of the most salient features of the problem” (p. 4). However, an important variation of the concept of persistent behaviour is the notion of ongoing threat. As Zapf (2004) stated in his keynote address to the *Fourth International Conference on Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace*, situations may occur in which a single event induces an ongoing threat to the target, and therefore could also be defined as workplace bullying. For example, a verbal attack on someone may induce a long-lasting fear that it could re-occur. Rigby’s (2001) research into schoolyard bullying supports Zapf’s assertion by stating that “a one-off act of bullying is certainly possible and the threat of its recurrence can stay with some children for a long time” (p. 53). Certainly, managers in the interview study recounted behaviours or threats that persisted for various periods of time, for example, a few months, 1 year, and up to 3 years. Third, the definition reflects the escalating nature of workplace bullying, both the intensity of the attacks and the negative effects on the target increase over time (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002).

Fourth, the existence of a power imbalance between the two parties (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003) is often regarded as an essential definitional component. Thus, when two parties have an equal balance of power the conflict would not be considered workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003; Hoel & Cooper, 2001; Rayner et al., 2002). Indeed, the majority of managers interviewed reported feelings of powerlessness to address their situation. As Brad stated: *I couldn't move forward, I could see that we hadn't really done anything wrong, we'd tried to follow the process, but how to move on?* In addition, managers also indicated feeling powerlessness within themselves. For example, Brenda stated that: *I started to feel like a victim.* Annie expressed her feelings of powerlessness in the following way:

*I started looking for other jobs, but because I got in a space where I felt so completely useless, I actually got to the point where I didn't think there was anything else that I could do, and that, I felt very trapped, trapped in a situation that I couldn't change, and that nothing I was doing was making it any better. I couldn't think of a way out.*

Similarly, Lena described her feelings of being powerlessness:

*...it tended to cause me to feel quite distressed because I felt somewhat powerless in dealing with the situation...there were all those sorts of fears that made me powerless to deal with the situation. I felt as if he was in control and had all the power and there was nothing I could do.*

Interestingly, Sally (Group 3) expressed how she perceived the staff members power in relation to her:

*...[he] was feeling empowered or was operating as though he was feeling empowered and the threats that I felt became more acute. I don't know whether that's because I got more vulnerable or he got stronger I don't know.*

Thus despite being in a position of authority managers were feeling powerless to address a staff members inappropriate behaviour which resulted in them feeling as if they could not defend themselves. Certainly, Einarsen (2000) suggests the inability of the target to defend themselves is a core characteristic of the workplace bullying definition. Clearly, a person would not allow themselves to be bullied if they had the ability to defend themselves (Niedl as cited in Einarsen, 2000), as demonstrated by the statements of managers presented previously. Dependency on the part of the target is cited as the key reason for how the

inability to defend oneself is created. A number of managers interviewed indicated how the staff member being critical to the functioning of the workplace created a dependency on that staff member. For instance, Sally who had a prolonged situation with a staff member who was very reluctant to accept an organisational restructure, said: *I can see him as an asset because of his skills and he tends to perform at a high level with so much history and knowledge that I wouldn't like to lose that.* Another manager referred to the range of personal power that one staff member had that made them critical to the workplace:

*As he is the one who negotiates with management it gives him control over only pursuing the issues that affect him, it also gives him a certain status among some of the staff and allows him to control the flow of information and influence the points of view.*  
(Brad)

It was also expressed that dependency on staff made some of the managers reluctant, at first, to do anything when the staff member demonstrated inappropriate behaviour. As one interviewee said: *by that time he had become somewhat critical to a project that he was working on...it's really expensive to replace someone once they've achieved that level of familiarity* (Lena).

As demonstrated by these comments the target's inability to defend themselves could be due to the formal and informal power structures in which they operate, or as a result of the perpetrator's inappropriate behaviours (Einarsen, 2000). Therefore, a power imbalance can either occur as a result of organisational structures or the bullying behaviour itself. Thus in summary, a power imbalance between two parties makes it difficult for targets of workplace bullying to defend themselves and is therefore an essential component of the definition of workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000).

In addition, there has been considerable discussion of a number of other elements that could be considered salient to the definition of workplace bullying. Generally, definitions of workplace bullying tend not to focus on the intentions of the perpetrator (Sheehan, Barker, & McCarthy, 2004) instead they focus on the perceptions of the target (Mayhew et al., 2004). Indeed one manager interviewed who described a situation where she had experienced repeated covert and overt behaviour and a grievance including an accusation of bullying against her by a male staff member explains why perceptions are so important to the concept of workplace bullying.

*I said to him [my senior manager] I feel bullied what's there for me and he goes disciplinary action—You're the manager your response to someone bullying you is to take full disciplinary action and I said was it?—it's different cause when you read all the policies and everything it's not that same perceptual issue. If you look at the codes of bullying...it's about how the person receives it—it might not be something that you think is harassing it's about how the receiver is [perceiving it]. It really makes you think of how's that person feeling or responding to it, as opposed to the disciplinary action which is rules.* (Sally)

Indeed, Sally raises a significant issue here: there is a difference between disciplinary action and a grievance based on bullying. While a grievance based on an accusation of bullying relates to how the target perceives the behaviours, disciplinary action is based on the rules of the organisation. Essentially, within Sally's case her feelings of being bullied by a staff member were not considered, placing her in a vulnerable and isolated position.

The intention of the perpetrator remains an unclear definitional aspect of workplace bullying (Keashly, 2001; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). However, some researchers suggest that bullying or mobbing involves a clear intent to harm the target (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005). Concern over including the concept of intent in definitions of workplace bullying specifically lies with the practical implications of doing so. In essence, if someone accused of workplace bullying states it was not their intent to bully this could mean they may not be held accountable for their actions (Rayner et al., 2002). The intention of the perpetrator, however, is important when interventions for addressing workplace bullying are being considered (Rayner et al. 2002).

Additionally, most definitions of workplace bullying vary in the degree of importance they place on the contextual features of the environment (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003) and they are not made explicit in the present definition. Thus, the important and widely accepted defining characteristics of workplace bullying appear to be the persistent use of inappropriate behaviours (with recent discussion referring to on-going threat), and the inability of the target to defend themselves due to a power imbalance (Einarsen, 2000).

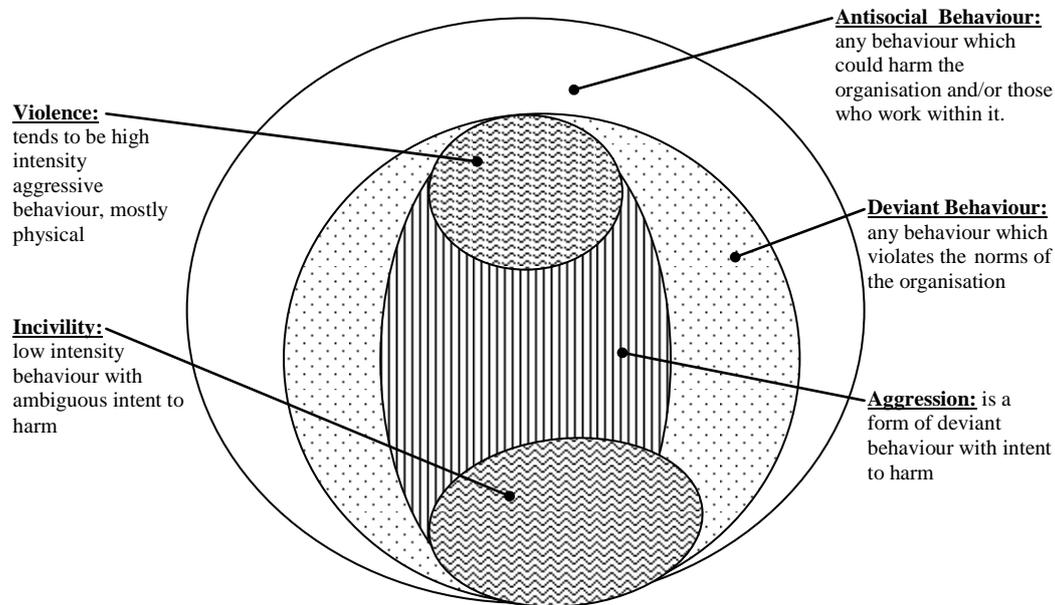
## **DIFFERENTIATING WORKPLACE BULLYING FROM ALTERNATIVE TERMS**

Confusion about the definition of workplace bullying has been exacerbated by the variety of terms used to describe the phenomenon. A review of the literature suggests that a range of terms have been used in reference to negative social behaviour at work, including mobbing, workplace bullying, workplace aggression, workplace incivility, workplace harassment, workplace deviance, social undermining, emotional abuse, abusive supervision, and antisocial behaviour (Zapf, 2004). The term workplace bullying has been described as an umbrella term, as it can incorporate harassing, intimidating, and aggressive or violent behaviours (Fox & Stallworth, 2004). Similarly, in a review of the research into workplace bullying, Einarsen (2000) used the terms bullying, harassment and victimisation synonymously with mobbing. In Scandinavia, the term ‘mobbing’ was introduced by the late Heinz Leymann (1990), who referred to mobbing as a psychological phenomenon where repeated incidents, that are often minor, result in significant negative impacts for the target. As a result, the term mobbing is commonly used within Scandinavian countries in place of workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000; Rylance, 2001). In the United States researchers often encompass bullying behaviours in the term ‘emotional abuse’ (Keashly, 1998, 2001), which is often characterised as a persistent and enduring form of ‘workplace aggression’ (Baron & Neuman, 1996, 1998). Researchers within Australia and Great Britain (namely, Hoel & Cooper, 2001; Rayner & Cooper, 2003; Sheehan et al., 2004) tend to use the term ‘workplace bullying’.

Given the range of terms used to describe workplace bullying, McCarthy and Mayhew (2004) suggest that ‘bullying at work’ has become “a new signifier of distress that has acted as a solar collector of resentments” (p. xv). Zapf (2004) however, warns against labelling all negative social behaviour at work as workplace bullying. Following Zapf (2004), we argue that although workplace bullying is closely related to the concepts of antisocial behaviour, workplace harassment, workplace violence, workplace aggression, and incivility, it can be differentiated from these counter-productive behaviours. Indeed, if workplace bullying has become a ‘catch all term’ to describe any form of negative behaviour at work this has practical implications for Human Relations/Resources Managers, strategies to address counter-productive behaviours and policy. An integrative model developed by Andersson and Pearson (1999) on antisocial behaviour and the relationships between workplace violence,

aggression and incivility (see Figure 1) will be drawn upon throughout this paper to explain the similarities and differences between workplace bullying and other related concepts so as to distinguish workplace bullying from these other behaviours (also see Figure 2).

FIGURE 1. Incivility and other forms of antisocial behaviours in organisations



*Source:* Andersson and Pearson, 1999, p. 456

### *Antisocial Behaviours*

Workplace bullying has been linked to the concept of antisocial behaviour, a broad term which includes behaviours that result in harm, or incidents where harm was intended to either an individual, or group of targets, or the organisation (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997). Included as forms of antisocial behaviour in the literature are workplace violence, workplace aggression, employee aggression, organisation-motivated aggression, dysfunctional workplace behaviour, workplace victimisation, and workplace incivility (Sinclair, Martin, & Croll, 2002). According to O’Leary-Kelly and Newman (2003), antisocial behaviour encompasses overt physical and verbal aggression and violence, as well as more subtle behaviours, such as social undermining. Any behaviour which has the potential to result in either physical, emotional, psychological or economic harm can therefore be seen as antisocial behaviour (Aquino & Douglas, 2003).

In an important integrative theoretical review of incivility, Andersson and Pearson (1999) presented a model of antisocial behaviour and the relationships between workplace violence, aggression and incivility (see Figure 1). As the figure illustrates, Andersson and Pearson (1999) included deviant behaviour as a form of antisocial behaviour. We would suggest that deviant behaviour is also a broad term which, because of the ambiguity of the behaviour, is not directly related to workplace bullying. However, deviancy could increase a person’s

vulnerability to workplace bullying due to variance from the accepted values or behaviours of the particular workplace. In other words a person who exhibits deviancy may be seen as an outsider and potential target (Einarsen et al., 2003).

According to Andersson and Pearson (1999), workplace aggression can occur either in the form of workplace violence (high end aggression) or incivility (low end aggression). Interestingly, they did not include workplace bullying in their model (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Workplace bullying, however, can also be seen as a form of antisocial behaviour because it can result in physical, emotional, psychological or economic harm to the target and the organisation (Aquino & Douglas, 2003; Einarsen, 2000; Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997). Therefore, workplace bullying can be conceptualised as a specific form of antisocial behaviour that can encompass overt behaviours, such as harassment, workplace aggression and violence, as well as subtle behaviours like incivility. Each of these behaviours will be discussed in more depth in the following sections.

### ***Workplace Harassment***

Workplace harassment is a term that can be considered a form of antisocial behaviour, although Andersson and Pearson (1999) did not include it in their model of antisocial behaviours. Harassment “can be verbal, physical or sexual and it can have a racial or disability overlay, that is the physically or mentally disabled or those of minority races (compared to the dominant culture) are targeted more than others” (Gilmour & Hamlin, 2003, p. 81). Therefore, harassment can encompass behaviours that repeatedly and persistently frighten and intimidate the target (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). Workplace harassment behaviours range from physical violence to verbal abuse, insults, ridicule, withholding information and social exclusion (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). One example of harassment behaviours that has attracted considerable research over the past 25 years is sexual harassment: “sexual harassment encompasses unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” (Richman et al., 1999, p. 89). In this case, the form of workplace harassment focuses on sexual factors. While harassment and workplace bullying behaviours may appear similar, specific forms of harassment are related to a characteristic of the target as the main focus of the harassment. For instance, racial harassment would centre on the target’s race. While this distinction between harassment and workplace bullying seems reasonable, the areas can be somewhat blurred with a number of researchers having indicated that ‘general’ harassment can be considered a form of workplace violence or workplace bullying.

For instance, Barron (1998) considers sexual harassment as a particular form of workplace violence. Similarly, in Scandinavia, sexual harassment is seen to be a specific form of workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000) in which sexuality is the focus of the bullying behaviour (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994). Thus, although similar to general harassment in terms of behaviour, workplace bullying does not tend to focus on an intrinsic attribute or identifiable characteristic of the target, as is the case with sexual harassment and other forms of harassment. This is in part recognised in the suggestion that organisations have separate but related workplace bullying and harassment policies (Richards & Daley, 2003). As a result, we would suggest that general harassment, and not sexual or racial harassment, may be subsumed under the concept of workplace bullying (Hadikin & O'Driscoll, 2000). Indeed, the Workplace Bullying Taskforce (Queensland Department of Industrial Relations, 2002) formed by the Queensland Government in Australia to investigate the phenomenon of workplace bullying resolved to use the term ‘harassment’ instead of ‘workplace bullying’,

---

acknowledging that the term harassment is more widely recognised within organisations, and that its use would more easily raise awareness of the phenomenon within the workplace. They however differentiated between harassment and sexual harassment in their definition of workplace bullying or harassment.

Workplace Harassment is repeated behaviour, other than behaviour that is sexual harassment, that is directed at an individual worker or group of workers; and is offensive, intimidating, humiliating or threatening; and is unwelcome and unsolicited; and a reasonable person would consider to be offensive, intimidating, humiliating or threatening for the individual worker or group of workers. (Queensland Department of Industrial Relations, 2002, p. 28)

### ***Workplace Aggression and Violence***

Andersson and Pearson (1999) in their paper refer to workplace aggression as any “injurious or destructive behaviour, in violation of social norms” (p. 455). Alternatively workplace violence is often seen as a high-intensity form of aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Baron & Neuman, 1996). The United Nations’ International Labour Organisation’s (2003) *Code of Practice on Workplace Violence in Services Sectors and Measures to Combat This Phenomenon* defines workplace violence as: “any action, incident, or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work” (p. 4). Therefore, workplace aggression can be seen as behaviours that include vandalism, sabotage, harassment and physical abuse (Andersson & Pearson, 1999); while workplace violence tends to be more severe form of assaults, including homicide (Hegney, Plank, & Parker, 2003). Alternative terms used for workplace violence have included bullying, horizontal violence, aggression and harassment (Hegney et al., 2003). However, not all forms of aggression are considered as harassment or workplace bullying.

While aggression and violence can be one off and are often physical, in fact Mayhew et al. (2004) suggests “it is the *perception* by the recipients that they have experienced *repeated* diverse negative acts and circumstances that differentiates” workplace bullying from physical violence (p. 120). Indeed Job Watch from WorkSafe Victoria also makes this differentiation between workplace violence and bullying. According to Job Watch (2005) workplace violence is “*any incident where an employee is physically attacked or threatened in the workplace*” while they define workplace bullying as “*repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed toward an employee, or group of employees, that creates a risk to health and safety*” (p.3). Therefore, unlike workplace bullying, workplace aggression and violence can be a single incident although aggression and violence can also be ongoing and persistent (Barron, 1998). Importantly in order for aggression to be considered harassment or workplace bullying it needs to be repeated and the target needs to be defenceless in some way (Kaukianinen et al., 2001). Thus, aggressive and violent behaviours can fulfil the definition of workplace bullying if the behaviours were repeated, or induced an on-going threat, and the target finds it difficult to defend themselves (Einarsen, 2000).

### ***Incivility***

Incivility was the focus of the Andersson and Pearson (1999) theoretical paper. Uncivil behaviour can be characterised as “rude and discourteous” behaviours that display “a lack of regard for others” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Unlike workplace aggression and

---

violence which are more overt, incivility refers to “milder forms of psychological mistreatment in which intentionality is less apparent” (Cortina, Magley, Hunter-Williams, & Day-Langhout, 2001, p. 64). Andersson and Pearson (1999) suggest that individuals may behave uncivilly “as a reflection of intent to harm the target, or one may behave uncivilly without intent (e.g., ignorance or oversight)” (p. 456). In addition “the instigator may intend to harm the target, yet he or she may not even be conscious of such intent” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 456). Thus, for incivility, the intention of the perpetrator is often ambiguous. In comparison, the intention of the perpetrator, as a definitional aspect of workplace bullying, remains unclear (Keashly, 2001). Due to the ambiguity of the perpetrator’s intention, Andersson and Pearson (1999) viewed uncivil behaviour as a form of employee deviance (a subset of antisocial behaviour). However, if the uncivil behaviours are intentional they can also fall within the definition of workplace aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). Therefore, uncivil behaviour can be conceptualised as a form of aggression (although not as intense) and also a form of deviant behaviour (refer to Figure 1) (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

In a study into students’ uncivil behaviours towards faculty, Luparell (2004) found that the behaviours described as uncivil ranged along a continuum of severity. The behaviours included disrespectful retorts, arguing with faculty with respect to grading and teaching techniques, nonverbal gestures which were aggressive or hostile in nature, and angry and aggressive confrontations (both verbal and non-verbal) using intimidation and threats to the personal safety of the faculty member, or their significant others. While it was not clear as to how regular the behaviours occurred, the actions described in Luparell’s (2004) study appear similar to workplace bullying behaviours (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003). The effects of uncivil behaviour on faculty were similar in some cases to those of workplace bullying, in that faculty experienced physical and psychological impacts. Some of the faculty even voiced concern “that their job security, reputations, or physical possessions would be damaged by the encounter as well” (Luparell, 2004, p. 63), suggesting an inability to defend themselves. Therefore, there appear to be strong links between uncivil behaviours and workplace bullying.

Within their conceptualisation of incivility, Andersson and Pearson (1999) noted that incivility can occur in an upwards spiral, with both parties sometimes including the target, behaving inappropriately. Often this spiral ends with coercive, and sometimes violent, behaviour on the part of the perpetrator. This spiral from uncivil towards more violent behaviour indicates the perpetrator’s persistence, as well as the escalation of the intensity of behaviour, similar to the escalating process of workplace bullying. Similarly, uncivil behaviour may induce the feeling of an ongoing threat which could also fulfil the definition of workplace bullying (Zapf, 2004). Thus, we argue that incivility when it begins to spiral overlaps with the construct of workplace bullying.

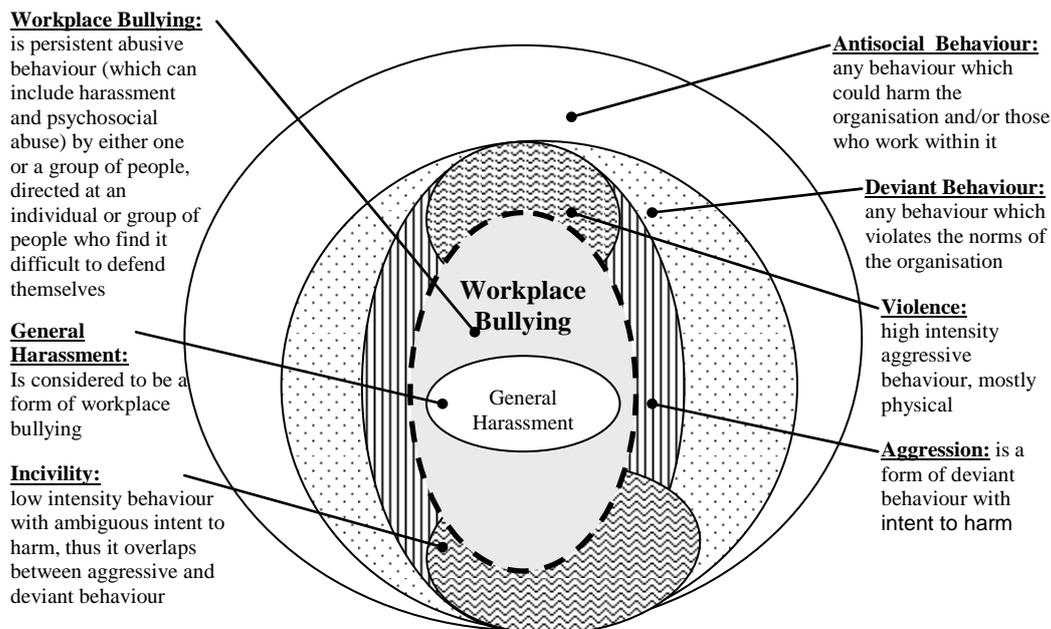
### *Adapting the Model*

The analysis of definitions of workplace bullying and other counterproductive behaviours attempted in this paper leads us to reconceptualise Andersson and Pearson’s (1999) model of antisocial behaviours (refer to Figure 2). Workplace bullying has been added to the model as a subset of antisocial and deviant behaviour that encompasses some low intensity behaviours termed incivility, to higher intensity aggressive behaviours that may result in physical violence. By placing workplace bullying across these behaviours, the similarities of workplace bullying to these behaviours is recognised. In addition, it is also acknowledged that, in order for the behaviours to be defined as workplace bullying, they need to occur

---

persistently over a period of time or have an element of on-going threat. Thus, some forms of incivility, workplace aggression and violence lie outside the realm of workplace bullying, as can be seen in Figure 2. Furthermore, general harassment (as shown in Figure 2) has been included within the workplace bullying area as it could be seen as an alternative term to workplace bullying. In summary, workplace bullying is a form of antisocial behaviour, which can include low level behaviours, similar to incivility, that can escalate into higher levels of aggression and even violence.

FIGURE 2. Model of workplace bullying in the context of antisocial behaviours



**Source:** Adaptation of Andersson and Pearson, 1999, p. 456 to include workplace bullying and general harassment

### CAN WE DEFERENTIATE WORKPLACE BULLYING?

This paper has contributed to the discussion of related phenomena by adapting Andersson and Pearson's (1999) model of antisocial behaviours. The adapted model depicts workplace bullying spanning from low intensity behaviours termed incivility, to higher intensity aggressive behaviours that are characterised by physical violence. In other words, workplace aggression and violence is seen as a specific form of workplace bullying, only if the physical and aggressive behaviour is repeated (or induces an on-going threat) and the targets finds it difficult to defend themselves (Einarsen, 2000). In addition, workplace bullying was found to be strongly linked to the term harassment. Harassment is considered by some (for example, Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Einarsen, 2000) as a specific form of workplace bullying. Therefore, we surmise that workplace bullying is closely related to the counterproductive behaviours discussed in this paper, in terms of the nature of behaviours and the impact on the target with regards to defencelessness. Alternatively, what differentiates workplace bullying from these similar concepts appears to be the persistency of the behaviours over a period of time.

Critics may argue that debates over definitions represent semantic exercises that excite academics. To the contrary, definitional preciseness is an essential prerequisite for researching, preventing and redressing workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is more than just kids play, it can have severe impacts on those who experience and witness it (Einarsen,

2000; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Rayner, 1999). Despite this it appears that the media, employees and Management alike can confuse workplace bullying with minor schoolyard behaviours. Similarly, Pearson et al. (2005), in a chapter that seeks to differentiate incivility to other counter-productive behaviours, suggests that the term workplace bullying is often confused with incivility by Human Relations/Resource Management media, policy and practice. Indeed, workplace bullying appears to be often misunderstood, especially by the individuals it impacts upon the most, employees. This is due perhaps, to the range of behaviours and terms that are often linked to workplace bullying. For instance, the term workplace bullying is related to a plethora of concepts about behaviour that treats colleagues, managers, supervisors, clients or suppliers in an inappropriate manner (see Einarsen, 2000). Indeed, the majority of those interviewed reported feelings of being bullied, harassed, intimidated, or threatened. For many of them they considered the term harassment appropriate to describe their experience. For instance: *Just after certain staff placed a grievance against me there was a proliferation of graffiti on the toilet walls targeting myself....I feel this was just another attempt to try and harass us* (Brad); and: *I did read the definitions of bullying and I guess it is bullying, I guess I would have called it harassment more than anything, or verbal abuse* (Margaret). Importantly, it needs to be clearly articulated to employees and Management that workplace bullying, while at times the behaviours may seem minor, like harassment, workplace aggression and violence in the workplace needs to be considered as serious and not tolerated.

It may be that we can not clearly differentiate workplace bullying from similar counter-productive behaviours but by linking and explaining the similarities and differences between better known behaviours such as harassment, workplace aggression and violence organisations will be in a better position to educate employees and Management about what is workplace bullying. Models such as the reconceptualised Andersson and Pearson's (1999) model could be presented to employees and Management as a way of informing employees and Management exactly what is the range of antisocial behaviours and how they are similar and different. What is important here is not that employees and management use the correct terminology. Whatever you call these behaviours what is important is that employees and Management are able to identify the occurrence of counter-productive behaviour, hopefully avoiding or minimising the potential for the behaviour to spiral out of control. For instance, Zapf and Gross (2001) found that targets who successfully coped with workplace bullying were found to be better at recognising and avoiding escalating behaviour. If education of workplace bullying can assist employees and managers of what it is, and not, then they can label it as inappropriate and take the necessary action. Importantly, it is vital for employees and Managers to not dismiss workplace bullying behaviour as a small incident, rather taking appropriate action which may reduce the potential harmful impacts. As such, an education program could form part of a comprehensive antisocial behaviour policy that outlines inappropriate behaviours such as workplace bullying, harassment, workplace violence and aggression as well as incivility, with the intended outcome to demystify and clarify the different forms of counter-productive behaviours.

Furthermore, understanding how workplace bullying is similar and different to other antisocial behaviours will assist both researchers and practitioners to explore and implement programs to address workplace bullying. Importantly it is essential for researchers to develop clarity in definitions so that we can better understand the phenomenon under investigation. This paper has assisted in refining our understanding of workplace bullying definition through the reconceptualisation of Andersson and Pearson's (1999) model. Future research could continue to explore employees and practitioners understanding of the different terms

---

presented in this paper as a way to unlocking the question, what is workplace bullying? Similarly, practitioners will benefit from having the term workplace bullying differentiated from other similar antisocial behaviours. This will assist in developing informative education and training programs as well as accurate diagnosis of not just workplace bullying but other antisocial behaviours. It is intended that this reconceptualised model will assist in placing workplace bullying not as a separate issue to be dealt with by organisations and practitioners, but as one form of behaviours in a range of antisocial behaviours.

## REFERENCES

- Andersson, L. & Pearson, C. (1999). Tit for Tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 452-471.
- Aquino, K. & Douglas, S. (2003). Identity threat and antisocial behavior in organizations: The moderating effects of individual differences, aggressive modeling, and hierarchical status. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 90, 195-208.
- Baron, R., & Neuman, J. (1996). Workplace violence and workplace aggression: Evidence on their relative frequency and potential causes. *Aggressive Behavior*, 22(3), 161-173.
- Baron, R. & Neuman, J. (1998). Workplace aggression-The iceberg beneath the tip of workplace violence: Evidence on its forms, frequency, and targets. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 21(4), 446-464.
- Barron, O. (1998). Bullying at work: The distinction between workplace bullying and workplace violence and the ramifications for OHS. *Journal of Occupational Health Safety—Australia and New Zealand*, 14(6), 575-580.
- Bassman, E. (1992). *Abuse in the Workplace*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Bjorkqvist, K., Osterman, K. & Hjelt-Back, M. (1994). Aggression among university employees. *Aggressive Behavior*, 20, 173-184.
- Cortina, L., Magley, V., Hunter-Williams, J. & Day-Langhout, R. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: Incidence and impact. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6(1), 64-80.
- Einarsen, S. (2000). Harassment and bullying at work: A review of the Scandinavian approach. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 5(4), 379-401.
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D. & Cooper, C. (2003). The concept of bullying at work: The European tradition. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice* (pp. 1-30). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Einarsen, S. & Mikkelsen, G. (2003). Individual effects of exposure to bullying at work. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice* (pp. 127-144). London: Taylor & Francis Books.
- Einarsen, S. & Raknes, B. (1997). Harassment in the workplace and the victimization of men. *Violence and Victims*, 12(3), 247-263.
- Einarsen, S. & Skogstad, A. (1996). Bullying at work: Epidemiological findings in public and private organizations. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 185-201.
- Fox, S. & Stallworth, L. (2004). Racial/ethnic bullying: Exploring links between bullying and racism in the US workforce. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 66, 438-456.
- Giocalone, R., & Greenberg, J. (1997). *Antisocial behavior in organizations*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Gilmour, D. & Hamlin, L. (2003). Bullying and harassment in perioperative settings. *British Journal of Perioperative Nursing*, 13(2), 79-85.

- Gorman, P. (1999, 2-3 July). *Bullying of victims by the present injustices in the system*. Paper presented at the Beyond Bullying Association Responding to Professional Abuse Conference, St. Johns College, University of Queensland.
- Hadikin, R. & O'Driscoll, M. (2000). *The bullying culture: cause, effect, harm reduction*. Melbourne: Books for Midwives.
- Hegney, D., Plank, A. & Parker, V. (2003). Workplace violence in nursing in Queensland, Australia: A self-report study. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 9, 261-268.
- Hoel, H. (1997). Bullying at work: a Scandinavian perspective. *Journal of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health*, 1, 51-59.
- Hoel, H. & Cooper, C. (2001). Origins of bullying: Theoretical frameworks for explaining workplace bullying. In N. Tehrani (Ed.), *Building a culture of respect: Managing bullying at work* (pp. 3-20). London: Taylor & Francis.
- International Labour Organisation. (2003). *Code of Practice on Workplace Violence in Services Sectors and Measures to Combat This Phenomenon*. Geneva: ILO.
- Job Watch. (2005). *Workplace Violence and Bullying*. Melbourne, Victoria: Job Watch and WorkSafe Victoria.
- Kaukianinen, A., Salmivalli, C., Bjorkqvist, K., Osterman, K., Lahtinen, A., Kostamo, A., et al. (2001). Overt and covert aggression in work settings in relation to subjective well-being of employees. *Aggressive Behavior*, 27, 360-371.
- Keashly, L. (1998). Emotional abuse in the workplace: conceptual and empirical issues. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 1, 85-116.
- Keashly, L. (2001). Interpersonal and systemic aspects of emotional abuse at work: The target's perspective. *Violence and Victims*, 16(3), 233-268.
- Keashly, L. & Jagatic, K. (2003). By any other name: American perspectives on workplace bullying. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice* (pp. 31-61). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Leymann, H. (1990). Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces. *Violence and Victims*, 5, 119-126.
- Leymann, H. & Gustafsson, A. (1996). Mobbing at work and the development of Post-traumatic Stress disorders. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 251-275.
- Luparell, S. (2004). Faculty encounters with uncivil nursing students: An overview. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 20(1), 59-67.
- Mayhew, C., McCarthy, P., Chappell, D., Quinlan, M., Barker, M. & Sheehan, M. (2004). Measuring the extent of impact from occupational violence and bullying on traumatised workers. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 16(3), 117-134.
- McCarthy, P. (1996). When the mask slips: Inappropriate coercion in organisations undergoing restructuring. In P. McCarthy, M. Sheehan & W. Wilkie (Eds.), *Bullying: From backyard to boardroom* (pp. 47-66). Alexandria: Millennium Books.
- McCarthy, P. & Mayhew, C. (2004). *Safeguarding the organization against violence and bullying*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- McCarthy, P., Sheehan, M., & Kearns, D. (1995). *Managerial styles and their effects on employees' health and well-being in organisations undergoing restructuring*. Brisbane: School of Organisational Behaviour & Human Resource Management.
- O'Leary-Kelly, A. & Newman, J. (2003). The implications of performance feedback research for understanding antisocial work behavior. *Human Resource Management Review*, 13, 605-629.
-

- 
- Pearson, C. M., Andersson, L. M. & Porath, C. L. (2005). Workplace incivility. . In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (pp. 177-200). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Queensland Department of Industrial Relations. (2002). *Report of the Queensland Government Workplace Bullying Taskforce*. Brisbane: Department of Industrial Relations.
- Randall, T. (1992). Abuse at work drains people, money, and medical workplace not immune. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 267, 1439-1440.
- Rayner, C. (1999). From research to implementation: Finding leverage for prevention. *International Journal of Manpower*, 20(1/2), 28-38.
- Rayner, C. & Cooper, C. (2003). The black hole in 'bullying at work' research. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making*, 4(1), 47-64.
- Rayner, C. & Hoel, H. (1997). A summary review of literature relating to workplace bullying. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 181-181.
- Rayner, C. Hoel, H., & Cooper, C. (2002). *Workplace Bullying: What we know, who is to blame, and what can we do?* London: Taylor & Francis.
- Richards, J. & Daley, H. (2003). Bullying policy: Development, implementation and monitoring. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Richman, J., Rospenda, K., Nawyn, S., Flaherty, J., Fendrich, M., Drum, M., et al. (1999). Sexual harassment and generalized workplace abuse among university employees: Prevalence and mental health correlates. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89(3), 358-363.
- Rigby, K. (2001). Bullying in Schools and in the workplace. In P. McCarthy, J. Rylance, R. Bennett & H. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Bullying: From backyard to boardroom* (2nd ed., pp. 1-10). Sydney: The Federation Press.
- Rylance, J. (2001). Bullying in the helping professions. In P. McCarthy, J. Rylance, R. Bennett & H. Zimmermann (Eds.), *Bullying: From backyard to boardroom* (2nd ed., pp. 23-33). Sydney: The Federation Press.
- Sheehan, M., Barker, M. & McCarthy, P. (2004). Analysing metaphors used by victims of workplace bullying. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making*, 5(1), 21-34.
- Sinclair, R., Martin, J. & Croll, L. (2002). A threat-appraisal perspective on employees' fears about antisocial workplace behavior. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 7(1), 37-56.
- Smith, P. (1997). Commentary III. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 249-255.
- Zapf, D. (2004). *Negative social behaviour at work and workplace bullying*. Paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace, Bergen, Norway.
- Zapf, D. & Einarsen, S. (2001). Bullying in the workplace: Recent trends in research and practice: An introduction. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10(4), 369-373.
- Zapf, D. & Einarsen, S. (2005). Mobbing at work: Escalated conflicts in organizations. In S. Fox & P. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Zapf, D. & Gross, C. (2001). Conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying: A replication and extension. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10(4), 497-522.
-