

OUR WORK, OUR LIVES CONFERENCE
3rd National Conference
Women and Industrial Relations
August 12 - 13

'They wouldn't dare do it to a man'
Women managers' experiences of workplace bullying

Dr Jacquie Hutchinson
Consortium for Diversity at Work
Business School M261
University of Western Australia
Hackett Drive
Crawley Western Australia 6009

61 2 86488 1434

jacquie.hutchinson@uwa.edu.au

**‘They wouldn’t dare do it to a man’
Women managers’ experience of workplace bullying**

Gender remains overlooked in the mainstream literature on workplace bullying. Most scholars represent workplace bullying as gender-neutral and attribute bullying exclusively to organizational power on the basis that both men and women are targets of bullying, and both men and women act as bullies. However, this perspective is unable to provide satisfactory explanations for why more women than men are reported as targets of bullying, why women and men experience bullying in different ways or why feminised industries and occupations such as health and education are likely sites for bullying. Moreover, recent studies that reveal that women managers are at greater risk of bullying than male colleagues further challenge the idea that workplace bullying and organisational power are gender-neutral.

This paper focusses on the workplace bullying experiences of women managers in Australian public sector organisations. It draws upon selected findings from a study of workplace bullying policy that involved interviews with male and female policy actors from three groups: senior managers, policy implementors and employee advocates. While advocating and defending gender-neutral representations of workplace bullying, many interviewees referred both explicitly and obliquely to the bullying of women managers. In reconciling this contradiction, explanations reflected the gendered nature of organisational power both in terms of who occupies managerial positions and the gendered assumptions and practices that frame and represent the process of leadership. The study highlights how gender shapes the way that work is distributed and organized and how key organisational themes such as competence, leadership, effectiveness, performance and authority interact with the practicing of gender in ways that differentially affect women and men. When women occupy the masculine role of leader, the feminine is brought into sharp relief, generating resistance and backlash in forms that can be categorised as bullying. This behaviour, not only reinforces the masculinity of leadership and the men performing it, but also creates disincentives for women to aspire to and become leaders.

Key words: workplace bullying, women leaders, masculine resistance

References

- Acker, J. (1990) ‘Hierarchies, Jobs and Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations’, *Gender and Society*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 139-58
- Bacchi, C. (1999) *Women, Policy and Politics: the construction of policy problems* (London: Sage).
- Jones, C. (2006) ‘Drawing Boundaries: Exploring the relationship between

sexual harassment, gender and bullying', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29, pp. 147-158.

Lee, D. (2002) 'Gendered workplace bullying in the restructured UK Civil Service', *Personnel Review*, 31, pp. 205-227.

McCarthy, P. (2001) 'Women's experiences of bullying', paper at the *Office of the Status of Women seminar on violence*, Canberra, August 2001.

McGinley, A. (2007) 'Creating Masculine Identities: Harassment and Bullying 'Because of Sex'. *University of Colorado Law Review*, Research Paper No. 07-01.

Introduction

The majority of research literature theorises workplace bullying as gender-neutral. Yet, there is significant evidence within this same body of research that suggests that gender is an important aspect of workplace bullying or at least requires further analysis. On examining existing literature, certain questions arise such as: why are women more likely to be bullied than men and why are women-dominated industries recurring sites of bullying? However, few scholars have sought explanations to these questions, ignoring the substantial evidence that the organizational context in which workplace bullying arises is profoundly gendered.

This article challenges the gender-neutral representation of workplace bullying by examining the bullying of women managers by their subordinates. This situation runs counter to the prevailing theorisation that individualises the problem and attributes the power differential required for workplace bullying to hierarchical organizational position. This perspective easily accounts for managers being cited as the largest group of perpetrators. However, it provides little insight into the bullying of women managers by subordinate workers a situation which tests the narrowness of a functional framing of power.

Thus, this article draws attention to the need to 'develop analyses that can begin to reflect and comprehend the multiple, shifting but

tenacious nature of gendered power regimes as they characterize diverse workplaces' (Collinson and Hearn (1996: 73). The article accomplishes this by applying a gender analysis to workplace bullying theorisations and qualitative data gathered from 32 policy actors in Australian public service administrations. The analysis points to more dynamic ideas of power relations to satisfactorily explain the bullying of women managers.

The article begins with a review of the literature on workplace bullying and gender, gendered organization theory and gender and leadership. By using these frameworks, the paper is able to show that while defending a gender-neutral representation of workplace bullying, policy actors' accounts of women managers being targeted by subordinate perpetrators, in fact point to a gendered dimension to workplace bullying that transcends the traditional theorisations of power.

Literature Review

Several critics have charged the workplace bullying literature with failing to provide a satisfactory analysis of gender (Simpson and Cohen 2004; Jones 2006; McGinley 2007). Many researchers not only ignore gender but actively maintain that sex and gender have minimal relevance to bullying. Such scholars narrowly define gender by 'focusing on the biological sex of the perpetrators and the victims' (McGinley 2007: 14). Therefore, while the majority of studies identifies men as bullies and

women as targets (Hoel *et al.* 2001; Salin 2001), researchers fail to either identify this as an issue or to actively seek explanations.

An examination of these studies reveals marked differences between men and women. For example, men are more likely to be bullied by other men, while women are also bullied largely by men but also by women (Einarsen 2000). Those industries and organizations where there is a predominance of women, such as education and health, are consistently identified as high risk working environments (Thompson 2002; Di Martino *et al.* 2003; Keashly and Jagatic 2003). In addition, a number of researchers have pointed to women in senior management roles experiencing higher levels of bullying from supervisors, colleagues and subordinates, than their male peers (Salin 2001; Tehrani 2004; Jones 2006). Further, there is a growing body of evidence that there are different types of workplace bullying directed towards women and men (Mayhew and Chappell 2001b; Salin 2001; Simpson and Cohen 2004). For example, women are more likely than men to be subjected to what Cortina *et al.* (2002) describe as 'gender incivility'. These behaviours include public disparagement and condescension that is often sexist in nature such as calling women 'honey' or 'sweetie'. Men, however, rarely report this type of personalised behaviour.

It is true that the more recent conceptualizations of workplace bullying provide greater opportunities to understand workplace bullying as a product of more than personal characteristics or personal interaction. Much of the recent research and commentary is prepared to attribute workers' enhanced powerlessness and increased vulnerability to workplace bullying, to a range of organizational and social factors. However, while many researchers identify that '...race and ethnicity are visible markers of potential vulnerability ...' they conclude that '... there is little evidence that gender influences the likelihood of non-sexual bullying' (Hodson *et al.* 2006: 386 - 387).

Simpson and Cohen (2004) challenge this simplistic notion that 'gender' is only associated with 'sexual bullying' and point to the need for gender to be a central aspect of the analysis of workplace bullying. They write:

While sexual harassment is 'overtly' gendered, bullying also needs to be seen as a gendered activity — although at a different, and perhaps more deep-seated level. Bullying, therefore, needs to be put in a gendered context in order to further our understanding of this behaviour (Simpson and Cohen 2004: 183).

This exclusion of gender as a source of power that contributes to, and interacts with, organizational processes results in a yawning gap in the literature on workplace bullying and fails to acknowledge the well-developed theory of gendered organizations (West and Zimmerman 1991; Acker 1990; Walby 1990) which has provided the framework for the dialogue between organizational and feminist theorists and has been supplemented to integrate the sociological dimensions of class and race.

Twenty years ago, Joan Acker (1990) identified five sets of processes through which organizations are gendered (Acker 1990). The first is the construction of gendered divisions of work, such as the segregation of occupations and masculinisation of upper management, all of which dictate acceptable behaviours, allocation of resources and distribution of power. These divisions are linked to and actively reinforce gendered divisions that are present within the family, the state and the labour market. The second set of processes relates to the construction and dissemination of symbols and images that reinforce, communicate and occasionally challenge the divisions of work. Many of these representations are reinforced and shaped by media and popular culture and include images of organizational leaders i.e. managers as embodying strong masculine attributes. The third set of processes contributes to gendered relations between women and women, women and men and men and men. These interactions encompass power relations and reflect

the social roles of men as being active doers and women as passive supporters and consumers. The fourth group of processes contributes to the gendered nature of an individual's identity and is influenced by how gender is represented in an organization through processes such as occupational choice, clothing, language and the aligning of one's self with the gendered norms of the organization. Acker's final set of organizational processes is concerned with the 'ongoing processes of creating and conceptualising social structures' (Acker 1990: 147).

Acker's theory has been widely used for understanding how an organization is gendered and to counter the production of gender inequalities. However, Acker herself puzzles that even when the gendered organization is represented empirically '...why is it so difficult to make organizational changes that will continually generate gender equity in work organizations?' (Acker 2000: 625). In answering this question, a number of researchers have developed further theoretical approaches such as the 'gender lens' (Kolb and Merrill-Sands 1999: 196) to extend our view beyond the visible organizational policies and processes to consider the less visible gender dynamics that produce the inherent inequalities between women and men and produce gendered power relations. While the visible structural barriers to equity may have been removed, a 'gender lens' allows us to concentrate on problems that remain invisible and subtle. As Meyerson and Fletcher (2000: 127) state:

‘Most of the barriers that persist today are insidious – a revolution couldn’t find them to blast away’.

The second salient feature of a gender lens approach is that it provides a practical framework by which people in an organization develop ‘...new ways of understanding and talking about gender equity, norms and work practices in the organization’ (Kolb and Merrill-Sands 1999: 9). Thus, applying a ‘gender lens’ to workplace bullying in general, and, in particular, the bullying of women managers by subordinates, provides a way to consider how gendered power relations shape the concepts and practice of organizational leadership.

Gender and Leadership

The study of leadership, like workplace bullying, has produced a considerable body of literature (Grint 1997) much of which represents leadership as a gender-neutral activity. Rather than being a gender-neutral activity, however, leadership is embedded in a variety of social interactions in which ‘doing gender’, ‘doing power’ and ‘doing leadership’ are linked in complex ways’ (Fletcher 2003: iii).

Leadership in organizations intersects with gender in a variety of ways that have the potential to produce the power relations that contribute to workplace bullying. First, the way in which leadership is produced and exercised within organizations can encourage negative behaviour that is harmful to women. Further, such power, used

negatively, can be coercive. Second, women's general exclusion from leadership roles and the attendant authority and rewards mean women are relegated as a group to the less influential and more commonly subordinate positions.

Leadership is produced through a relationship between leaders and followers that is sustained by ongoing enactment and legitimation (Sinclair 1998; Sjostrand *et al.* 2001). According to Sinclair (1998:13) '...leadership is always accomplished. Leadership is produced in words and actions, in images and artefacts, and it requires constant demonstration to be sustained'. Leadership, therefore, is akin to gender in that it is an effortful and ongoing process. Leaders and followers are part of a social process within which certain forms of leadership are constructed and reproduced over time (Sandberg 2001). Consequently, leadership is not a trait to be possessed but rather it is a structural asset exercised through a social network. The social nature of leadership means that it is dependent on the reactions of those who assess and engage with the leader's actions (Wajcman 1999).

Leaders are makers of meaning who use cultural symbols and meaning to achieve organizational outcomes (Bryman 2004). Thus, given the gendered nature of organizations, the demonstration and embodiment of leadership is masculinised (Collinson and Hearn; 2000;

Schein *et al.* 1996; Sinclair 1994; 1998; Wahl 2001). Leadership archetypes are masculinised. They frame what is normative leadership identity, and within this frame feminine attributes are not considered to be desirable (Eveline 2005). Masculinity in organizations is constructed as behaviours that include aggression, independence, objectivity, logic, analysis and decision-making which are seen as focused on tasks and achievement of outcomes. Femininity on the other hand is represented by behaviours including sensitivity, expressiveness, intuition and emotionality which are seen as relationship orientated (Trinidad and Normore 2005). When women occupy leadership roles they are often vulnerable to bullying behaviours because of these gendered assumptions and expectations (Eveline 2005). When women exhibit those behaviours associated with masculinised leadership, they can be seen as aggressive or bullying, while men might be described as assertive and decisive. Calas and Smircich (1991: 595) remind us that:

...where women's differences/no differences are assessed under standards assumed to be neutral it is seldom mentioned that the 'standards' were defined by the original 'inhabitants' of managerial ...positions...who were not women.

Leadership identity is shaped by organizational myths and stories that give rise to the leader as ‘...a heroic and transformative leader’ (Clark and Salaman 1998:137 in Olsson 2000). The heroic principles of stoicism, independence, resilience, physical presence and toughness define the dominant leadership identity in Australian organizations and remain remarkably resistant to change (Sinclair 1998; Olsson 2000, 2002). In this representation of leadership, women are expected to be the handmaidens of the (male) hero, rather than being heroes themselves. Many women are not recognised by others, or themselves, as possessing the necessary heroic attributes required in a leader (Evans 1995). In this context, leadership remains a contested space where women’s presence is noted and notable because they are not male (Eveline 2005; Olsson 2002). Therefore, women who occupy leadership positions represent an aberration of sorts. They are:

...exceptional women in an atypical context. They inhabit a corporate world that is very male dominated, and they are inevitably disruptive to the status quo. When a woman occupies a position traditionally filled by a man, the significance of her sex, for both how she operates and how she is treated, is subjected to a scrutiny in a way that the ‘normal’ hierarchical order is not (Wajcman 1999: 2).

As a consequence of their entry into what is the masculinised world of leadership (Eveline 2005) many women managers experience various degrees of hostility from peers and subordinate workers. An important dimension of this masculinised leadership world is that it is culturally active in resisting women who seek to enter and rejecting those who do (Kanter 1977; Maddock and Parkin 1993; Marshall 1984; Simpson 1998). Often this resistance can be subtle and take the form of exclusion from knowledge, networks and formal positions of authority. Instead, these opportunities are vested in those people who fit the model of the ideal leader and denied to those who are 'out of place here' (Cockburn 1991: 65).

Organizational power is gendered both in terms of who occupies managerial positions and in the gendered nature of the assumptions and practices that guide and represent the process of management (Collinson and Hearn 2000; Simpson and Cohen 2004). In the context of the New Public Management environment of the Australian public sector, the notion that managerial prerogative gives an individual the right to make decisions alone is part of a masculinised discourse based on power and control (Brewis 1999; Collinson and Parkin 2000; Davies and Thomas 2002b). Gender is present in aggressive management approaches that underpin many bullying activities and situations as well as in structural arrangements that legitimise the power of

individuals to control others through performance reviews, non-tenured employment and work intensification (Thornton 2004; Eveline 2005). McCarthy (2001) suggests that bullying leadership behaviour contributes to the 'glass ceiling' in that women who seek to overcome career barriers need to adopt these masculinised behaviours rather than identify with more consensual and less adversarial styles of leadership.

However, the same behaviours expressed by women and men in organizations can be viewed very differently as can the same behaviours expressed in the family or social setting and repeated in the workplace. Behaviour that is considered to be aggressive in women may be identified as decisive in men. How behaviours and feelings are expressed, perceived and interpreted in organizations continues to entrench gendered notions of 'appropriate' behaviour. For example, being overtly passionate about something can be seen as a positive attribute in male managers but a sign of excess emotionality in women managers (Wajcman 1999: 61).

Women often experience a level of discomfort when trying to fit into cultural based on masculine values and interests (Kolb and Meyerson 1999; Simpson 2000). 'Fitting in' becomes even more difficult when, in an attempt to preserve their privileged sense and place in the world,

many men, consciously and unconsciously, work to build and maintain work cultures that exclude women (Hearn 1992; 1998). This is particularly true for women entering male dominated industries and occupations such as the military, police and engineering, as well as women aspiring to positions of leadership (Eagly and Carli 2003; Kakabadse and Kakabadse 1999). In a study of women managers who had left organizations, Marshall (1995) found that, despite investing considerable effort into building constructive relationships with predominately male colleagues, women encountered high levels of hostility and attacks on their credibility and authority. Such hostility is evidenced in high profile legal cases, such as the multi-million dollar *Rich v. Price Waterhouse Coopers* case in which it was claimed that there was a 'culture of discrimination, harassment and bullying' (Kazi 2005: 25). Itzen (1995) has described gendered cultures as 'hierarchal, patriarchal, sex-segregated, sexually divided, misogynist, resistant to change and as encompassing gendered power structures' (in Bagilhole 2002:115).

In Australian public and private sectors, women's presence diminishes in correlation with higher levels of authority. This is also the case in the United States, the United Kingdom and other developed countries, with the notable exception of Scandinavia, where women occupy more senior positions in the public sector (EOWA 2008). This

under-representation of women in senior management levels in Australia and internationally has been well documented and theorised to explain how gender power relations contribute to these outcomes (Connell, 2006). In fact the absence of women leaders itself is identified as one of the visible indicators of an organizational culture that is hostile to women (Simpson 2000), and hostile organizational climates are cited as one of the reasons women leave organizations (Kazi 2005). Some of this hostility towards women has been categorised as workplace bullying (Cox 1987; Mayhew and Chappell 2001; Quine 1999; Simpson and Cohen 2004). Such research reinforces the need to explore gender as a dimension of workplace bullying.

Method

This paper draws material from a larger study into workplace bullying in Australian public sector administrations (author 2008). Rather than develop conclusive evidence, the study aimed to expand knowledge about workplace bullying by building themes and strands of meaning.

The term 'public sector administration' refers to that aspect of each public sector jurisdiction that is concerned with how government policy is executed. The central issues for public service administration include the efficiency and effectiveness of public service operations, covering all aspects of employment (Jaensch and Teichmann 1984). These agencies

were chosen as the site for this study for two reasons. First, although limited, much of the Australian research into workplace bullying has focussed on public sector organizations (Omari 2003; McCarthy 2000; Mayhew and McCarthy 2005). Second, all public sector jurisdictions around Australia have introduced workplace bullying policies. In order to understand how workplace bullying is constructed within the social policy setting context of an organization, semi-structured interviews with 32 policy actors were undertaken. The group comprised people working in agencies from four Australian states, one Australian Territory and the Commonwealth. All interviewees have played some role in the development and implementation of workplace bullying policies in public sector agencies, and thirteen were women.

The interviewees comprised three groups: eleven senior managers, ten employee advocates and eleven policy implementors. Senior managers are people who occupy first or second tier management positions in an agency. Employee advocates are union organisers or people from independent workers' advocacy centres. Policy implementors are professionals drawn from either human resources, industrial relations, occupational health and safety or equity contexts. The interviews were face-to-face and conducted over an eight month period. As a means of identifying the informants yet ensuring anonymity, each person was allocated a pseudonym plus an occupational descriptor.

Findings

'Don't mention the G word'

Twenty-eight interviewees explicitly denied the relevance of gender to workplace bullying. They were uninterested in exploring the possibilities of gender as a dimension of the power imbalances that produce bullying. Although many interviewees acknowledged that women, in comparison to men, were less likely to hold managerial positions, attract the same wages and conditions and be employed on a full-time permanent basis they rarely linked these signs of lower status and organizational vulnerability to gendered power relations. Instead they sought to discount gender as a contributing factor in workplace bullying, by focusing on representations of workplace bullying that relied on sex differences. For example, Charlie, a policy implementor, rationalised that because men are more likely to be in positions of power and authority than women, '...it is only natural that men come out as greater bullies than women'. While at a simple level, Charlie's view is defensible, he offered no insights into how the absence of women from manager roles might itself be a product of gendered power relations.

Interviewees emphasised 'natural' differences between the sexes. For example, the fact that lower numbers of men report being bullied was attributed to men's inherent reluctance to reveal that they had been targeted. Carrie, a policy implementor, said: 'Lots of men are embarrassed to admit that someone is having a go at them'. This view

was supported by Miguel, an employee advocate, who confided: 'It takes a lot for a man to say that he has been bullied because it's a sign of weakness.' In the same vein, Samantha, a policy implementor, hypothesised that women are more likely to be identified as the targets of bullying because women are more likely to speak up about inappropriate behaviour than men: 'Women find it easier to talk about these things than guys'. Similarly, Jennifer, an employee advocate, observed: 'Women provide each other with support when they are experiencing trouble at work'. Greg, a policy implementor, also subscribed to this line of thought suggesting that women 'have had more experience than men in dealing with things like harassment'. Again, looking to the assumptions that underpin these representations, we see a belief that women share a collective experience of 'trouble at work' (Jennifer, employee advocate), which equips them with empathy and confidence to discuss and identify bullying, support colleagues and to report bullying behaviour. When asked to describe what types of experiences prepared women in this way, twenty-five interviewees used the term 'sexual harassment'. Yet, unlike a number of researchers (McCarthy 2001; McGinley 2007), few of this group thought that because women were likely targets of sexual harassment, they might also be more vulnerable to other types of harassment, such as workplace bullying.

Overall, interviewees' representations of workplace bullying were underpinned by gendered assumptions about power. Generally, women emerged from the data as weak, vulnerable and victim-like, familiar with harassment and powerlessness, and, thus, equipped with certain survival qualities. Men, on the other hand, are assumed to be strong, authoritative and expected to exercise power in particular ways that represent stoic, tough and heroic leadership (Sinclair 1998). Men, therefore, were described as being ill-prepared for situations in which they are vulnerable and which may portray them as helpless and woman-like. Sean, a policy implementor, illustrated the point vividly:

Boys are chided when they fall over, not to cry and "be a girl".

Well, it's the same when we're adults. Who wants to own up as a man that you are weak, that you're actually a girl...if you know what I mean?

While few interviewees were able to explain their reluctance to consider gender as an aspect of workplace bullying, many were adamant in their belief that should workplace bullying be linked with gender, or more specifically with women, its seriousness as an organizational issue would be undermined (Lee 2002). Kate, a policy implementor, argued: 'If staff thought for a moment that this was a women versus men thing, we couldn't get any support for our policies'. In short, the political effect of

representing workplace bullying as gendered is that it is generally assumed to be about women. According to Sean, a policy implementor, the identification with women needs to be carefully avoided: 'The reality is that once you mention gender, everyone thinks you are talking about women so we don't draw attention to women at all'.

However, despite interviewees' arguments that workplace bullying was gender-neutral, there was a definite preoccupation with women managers as targets of workplace bullying.

'I'm not saying she asked for it.'

While the most common representations of workplace bullying in the data gathered for this study related to top down, manager bullying worker(s) situations, interviewees showed a growing recognition that managers were also becoming the target of workplace bullying. While acknowledging that these situations ran counter to the dominant theorisations of workplace bullying and functional concepts of power relations, policy actors identified certain working environments as 'ripe for bullying' (Paul, senior manager). These environments were permeated by competitiveness, job insecurity, and worker resistance to further organizational change. However, these conditions also gave rise to a situation described by Miguel (employee advocate) as 'the management sandwich'. On the one hand, managers were seen by some interviewees

as subject to similar pressures to their workers and therefore to achieve organizational objectives they were sometimes encouraged to use coercive bullying tactics. However, in some cases, workers' resisted in ways that interviewees described as workplace bullying and included failure to meet deadlines, withholding of information, gossip and in some extreme cases anonymous emails or public notices. Paul, a senior manager, explained:

The only way you can continue to meet on time, on budget objectives, is to have a staff that will go that extra mile. Some managers use a carrot if they have any, some a stick and sometimes it doesn't matter, staff just won't do what you ask.

Within this context, interviewees considered women managers to be particularly susceptible to workplace bullying initiated by peers and subordinates. Recent literature also highlights the use of covert and insidious forms of bullying against women managers, particularly from their subordinates (Scutt 2003; Shallcross 2004). Some interviewees described much of this sort of bullying as being related to rumour and gossip about women's professional competence and their personal lives. Tom, a policy implementor, provided a vivid account of these tactics:

The manager of the unit left and a young woman took on his job. Now the manager who left was a pretty tough older guy who was considered to be a 'slash and burn' type. I think most people were a bit scared of him. He'd done most of the cost cutting and redundancies before he left but there was still ongoing change but not so bad. She tried to be more consultative and open with the staff but she got the backlash. She put up with all sorts of bad things being said about her behind her back. One day she came to work and pinned to the office personnel directory next to her name was a picture of a woman's body in a bikini with her [the manager's] head stuck on top. It's hard to understand it. The old boss was probably an old fashioned bully so nobody acted up. She was much more approachable and didn't do a lot of cost cutting but she gets treated really badly by the staff.

Tom describes the previous male manager as 'older', 'tough', a 'slash and burn type' and 'a bully' who had managed major cost cutting and of whom people were 'scared'. However, despite the negative description of this manager, he appears to have experienced no resistance from workers because, according to Tom, he was 'probably an old fashioned bully so nobody acted up'. Instead, a manager who appears to be the opposite of the first manager, in that she is a woman, 'young' and

'consultative' and who is not engaged in disruptive activities such as 'a lot of cost cutting', becomes the target for workers' bullying. The placing of a photo of the woman manager's head on the photo of a bikini clad female body is an act designed to undermine the woman manager's confidence and authority by sexually objectifying her. Eveline and Booth (2002) describe a similar type of bullying against a woman in authority in a mining company. However, in their example a photo of a woman's head was placed on a male body, and labelled a 'dyke'. It is hard to imagine that workers would do the same to the 'tougher older' male manager. When asked to comment on this alternative scenario, Tom speculated:

Well, I don't think they'd do it. It wouldn't have the same effect. If they put his (the male manager's) head on a buff male body, he'd either think it was funny or a compliment about his sexual prowess, you know like he was a stud.

Interestingly, Tom went on to surmise: 'If you put his head on a woman's body... Wow! That would be a real insult'. In short, such an act of gender disruption would be intimidating or malicious towards a man. While rejecting gender as an issue in workplace bullying, Tom's assessment reflects an implicit understanding of gendered power relations.

Tom finds it hard to understand why the woman manager in his story is treated badly when she was 'approachable' and 'consultative', yet he also suggests that this was her downfall. Tom implies that if the woman had been more like 'an old fashioned bully, nobody [would have] acted up.' Similarly, other interviewees represented the problem of the bullying of women managers as being about women's management styles. Echoing Tom's view, Sherry, a policy implementor, argued: 'Unfortunately some women are perceived to be 'soft managers and leave themselves open to criticism and attack'. Sherry went on to explain the term 'soft' as 'too participative...not decisive enough'. Wayne, an employee advocate, also described some women managers as 'not striking staff as being tough and give as good as you get'. Some interviewees, like Marie, a policy implementor, pointed to the need for leaders to be seen as heroic warriors. She considered that in an unstable and constantly changing environment: 'Departments want to know that their manager is going to fight for them and their jobs...so nobody wants to be led by a weak manager'.

In these accounts of women managers being bullied, women themselves are seen as the cause in that they do not fulfil expectations about effective leadership. Good leadership is masculinised and assumed to be combative, decisive and tough. The stereotypically

feminised 'soft' approach to leadership does not compare favourably with the heroic norm. There is considerable literature to show that when women occupy leadership roles they are confronted by a powerful contradiction (Eagly and Carli 2003; Kawakami *at al.* 2000). This contradiction was present in my study. If, as some interviewees argued, women managers are bullied because they do not demonstrate the required leadership attributes, then it seems reasonable to assume that those women managers who enacted a more masculinised style of leadership would not attract bullying. However, this was not the case in my study. A number of examples were provided where women managers were targeted because they were perceived as being '...too bloody tough' (Tom). Tom's reflection on women being over-tough appears to be in conflict with his earlier account of women managers being targeted because they were too 'soft'. I asked him to help me understand this apparent inconsistency. He did so by explaining: 'I guess it's hard for women...they have to be careful not to be too hard like a man because that really annoys a lot of people, but if they are seen to be too soft and a pushover, they're asking for trouble as well'.

Tom's explanations are built on the assumption that leadership is a masculinised activity. He provides a powerful insight into how gender operates and points (perhaps inadvertently) to the dilemma for women leaders or women who aspire to leadership. Tom's comments underscore

the veracity of feminist research showing that leadership archetypes are masculinised. They frame what is normative leadership identity, and within this frame feminine attributes are considered to be undesirable (Eveline 2005; Sinclair 1998; Trinidad and Normore 2005). The consequences, as Wajcman (1999: 2) observes are, that: 'When a woman occupies a position traditionally filled by a man, the significance of her sex, for both how she operates and how she is treated, is subjected to a scrutiny in a way that the "normal" hierarchical order is not'.

Other interviewee explanations for why women managers are bullied reinforced the gendered nature of leadership and suggested deep fears and hostility towards women managers. These fears are dramatically expressed in a story by Cara, a senior manager:

There was a campaign in one agency where someone used to write anonymous letters to the CEO, the Minister responsible and the Prime Minister accusing one woman senior executive of sleeping with a group of other senior women and plotting the demise of senior men including the recipients of the letters. They also left copies of the letters in pigeon holes, on coffee tables, and all over the place. While everyone laughed about it, it was distressing for the people [women] involved...it

wasn't the accusations about being lesbians that was worrying, it was that they were disloyal.

Cara's account suggests that the content and intent of the anonymous letters were designed to tap into some deeper fear of a female conspiracy, of a feminist cabal plotting to overthrow the legitimate (male) leadership regime. Her use of the phrase 'plotting the demise of senior men' represents a power struggle and the sense that men need to defend themselves against women. Cara's observation is reminiscent of Sinclair's theory (1998) that men share an archetypal fear of the mother's capacity to give or deny them life. The contents of the letter represent the problem as being a group of women managers who are not to be trusted by other leaders. As women senior managers, they are unique and are presented as such. The women are presented in the letter as 'lesbian', thus pitting them further against men's primary heterosexual right to women's sexual favours. The letter suggests that these 'lesbians' are dangerous and untrustworthy, engaged in a plan to overthrow the (male) leadership *status quo*. The letter's author(s) were astute in their analysis of gendered power relations and aimed to tap into men's fear of women encroaching onto the masculine territory of leadership, the male territory of heterosexual dominance. The wide distribution of the letter was also a significant aspect of the bullying as it attempts to undermine the capacity of this particular group of women managers to inspire

organization-wide confidence. The process of undermining confidence has a flow-on effect to women leaders in general. Indeed, as Cara relates in her story, the women targeted were most concerned about the allegations of 'disloyalty'. They understood at some level the inherent distrust of women leaders by their male colleagues and felt their status as 'female travellers in a male world' (Marshall 1984).

Conclusion

In this article, I have applied a gendered analysis to workplace bullying in Australian public sector organizations. First, by using a gender lens approach to the accounts of the bullying of women managers by subordinates, I have highlighted how traditional theorisations and representations of workplace bullying mask the power imbalances produced by gendered organizational processes that support and facilitate workplace bullying. Second, there are recurring themes that emerge in relation to the gendered organizations. These themes are particularly strong in male-dominated occupations and industries. They include worker resistance to women leaders through practices that ostracise and undermine women who challenge the established cultural and gender norms. Some of this resistance, described as workplace bullying, has the effect of rendering women managers 'undermined, confused and disempowered' (Morley 1999:1). Finally, notwithstanding their identification of women managers as targets of bullying interviewees

put considerable effort into portraying and defending the view that workplace bullying is gender-neutral, suggesting that gender-neutrality has strategic value for retaining the policy's organizational status and resourcing. These explanations of gender-neutrality, as well as their defence and dissemination, are themselves examples of how the gendered power relations of organizational processes and outcomes are accomplished.

REFERENCES

- Acker, J. (1990) 'Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations', *Gender & Society*, 4, pp. 139-158.
- Acker, J. (2000) 'Gendered Contradictions in Organizational Equity Projects', *Organization*, 7, p. 625.
- Bagilhole, B. (2002) *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations Challenging Men*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill.
- Brewis, J. (1999) 'How Does it Feel? Women Managers, Embodiment and Changing Public-Sector Cultures' in *Transforming Managers: Gendering Change in the Public Sector*, eds S. Whitehead and R. Moodley, UCL Press, London.
- Bryman, A. 2004, 'Qualitative research on leadership: A critical but appreciative review', *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 15, pp. 729-69.
- Calas, M. B. & Smircich, L. (1991) 'Voicing seduction to silence leadership', *Organizational Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 567-602.
- Collinson, D. & Hearn, J. (2000) 'Critical studies on men, masculinities and managements' in *Women in Management: Current Research Issues, Volume 2*, eds M. Davidson & R. Burke, Sage Publications, London.
- Collinson, D.L. & Hearn, J. (1996) 'Men' at 'work': Multiple Masculinities/Multiple Workplaces', in *Understanding Masculinities*, ed. M. Mac an Ghail, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Connell, R. (2006) 'Glass ceilings or gendered institutions? Mapping the gender regimes of public sector worksites', *Public Administration Review*, 66, pp. 837-849.
- Cortina, L.L.M., Magley, V.V.J., Williams, J.J.H. & Langhout, R.R.D. (2001) 'Incivility in the workplace: incidence and impact', *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6, pp. 64-80.
- Cox, H. (1987) 'Verbal abuse in nursing: report of a study', *Nursing Management*, 18, pp. 47-50.

- Davies, A. & Thomas, R. (2000) 'Researching Public Sector Change: The Argument for a Gender Inclusive Framework'. *Public Management*, 2, 4, pp. 548–554.
- Di Martino, V., Hoel, H. & Cooper, C.L. (2003) *Preventing Violence and Harassment In The Workplace*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin.
- Eagly, A.H. & Carli, L.L. (2003) 'The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, pp. 807–834.
- Einarsen, S. (2000) 'Bullying and harassment at work: a review of the Scandinavian approach', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 5, pp. 379-401.
- Equal Opportunity for Women in The Workplace (EOWA) (2008) *Australian Census of Women in Leadership*, Canberra.
- Evans, M. (1995) 'Ivory towers: Life in the mind', in *Feminist Academics*, eds L. Morley & V. Walsh, Taylor & Francis, London, pp. 57–85.
- Eveline, J. (2005) 'Postcards from Down Under: Juggling an Epistemological Geography of South, West, North and East', *Gender, work, and organization*, 12, pp. 1-13.
- Eveline, J. & Booth, M. (2002) 'Gender and Sexuality in Discourses of Managerial Control: The Case of Women Mine Workers', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 9, pp. 556-578.
- Fletcher, J. K. (2003) 'The paradox of post heroic leadership: Gender matters', *Working Paper*, vol. 15, no. 17.
- Grint, K. (ed.) (1997) *Leadership*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hearn, J. (1998) 'The critical study of men managers in universities', in *Winds of Change Women & the Culture of Universities*, eds. D. Cohen, A. Lee, J. Newman, A. M. Payne, H. Scheeres, L. Shoemark & S. Tiffin, Equity & Diversity Unit, University of Technology, Sydney, pp. 296–303.
- Hearn, J. (1992) *Men in the Public Eye: The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies*, Routledge, London.

- Hodson, R., Roscigno, V.J. & Lopez, S.H. (2006) 'Chaos and the Abuse of Power: Workplace Bullying in organizational and Interactional Context', *Work and Occupations*, 33, pp. 382-416.
- Hoel, H., Cooper, C.L. & Faragher, B. (2001) 'The experience of bullying in Great Britain: The impact of organizational status', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10, pp. 443-465.
- Jaensch, D. & Teichmann, M. 1984. *The Macmillan Dictionary of Australian Politics*, Macmillan, South Melbourne.
- Jones, C. (2006) 'Drawing Boundaries: Exploring the relationship between sexual harassment, gender and bullying', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29, pp. 147-158.
- Kakabadse, A. & Kakabadse, N. (1999) *Essence of Leadership*, International Thomson, London.
- Kanter, R. (1977) *Men and Women in the Corporation*, Basic Books, New York.
- Kawakami, C., White, J. B. & Langer, E. J. (2000) 'Mindful and masculine: Freeing women leaders from the constraints of gender', *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 49-64.
- Kazi, E. (2005) 'Clock drives women to early highs', *The Australian Financial Review*, 21 October, p. 25.
- Keashly, L. & Jagatic, K. (2003) 'By any other name: American perspectives on workplace bullying', in *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International perspectives in research and practice*, eds S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. Cooper, Taylor Francis, London.
- Kolb, D.M. & Merrill-Sands, D. (1999) 'Waiting for Outcomes: anchoring a dual agenda for change to cultural assumptions', *Women in Management Review*, 14, pp. 194-202.
- Kolb, D.M. & Meyerson, D. (1999) 'Keeping Gender in the Plot: A Case Study of the Body Shop', in *Gender at Work. Organizational Change for Equality*, eds A. Rao, R. Stuart & D. Kelleher, Kumarian Press, West Hartford CT.
- Lee, D. (2002) 'Gendered workplace bullying in the restructured UK Civil Service', *Personnel Review*, 31, pp. 205-227.

- Maddock, S. & Parkin, D. (1993) 'Gender Cultures: Women's Choices and Strategies at Work', *Women in Management Review*, 8(2): 3-9.
- Marshall, J. (1995) *Women Managers Moving On*, Routledge, London.
- Marshall, J. (1984) *Women Managers Travellers in a Male World*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.
- Mayhew, C. & Chappell, D. (2001) *Internal violence (or bullying) and the health workforce, Discussion Paper No 3*, Working Paper Series, School of Industrial Relations and Organizational Behaviour and Industrial Relations Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney.
- Mayhew, C. & McCarthy, P. 2005. 'Occupational violence/bullying in public sector organizations', *Journal Occupational Health & Safety Australia and New Zealand*, 21 (1): 33-42.
- McCarthy, P. 2004. 'Costs of occupational violence and bullying', in *Safeguarding The Organization Against Violence And Bullying: An International Perspective*, eds P. McCarthy & C. Mayhew, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- McCarthy, P. (2001) 'Women's experiences of bullying', paper at the *Office of the Status of Women seminar on violence*, Canberra, August 2001.
- McGinley, A. (2007) 'Creating Masculine Identities: Harassment and Bullying 'Because of Sex''. *University of Colorado Law Review*, Research Paper No. 07-01.
- Meyerson, D.E. & Fletcher, J.K. (2000) 'A Modest Manifesto for Shattering the Glass Ceiling', *Harvard Business Review*, 78, pp. 127-136.
- Morley, L. (1999) *Organising Feminisms: The Micropolitics of the Academy* (London:Macmillan).
- Olsson, S. (2002) 'Gendered heroes: Male and female self-representations of executive identity', *Women in Management Review*, 17, 3/4, pp. 142-149.
- Olsson, S. (2000) 'Acknowledging the female archetype: women managers' narratives of gender', *Women in Management Review*, 15, 5/6, pp. 296-302.

- Omari, M. (2003) *Towards dignity and respect: An exploration of antecedents and consequences of bullying behaviour in the workplace*. Discussion paper, Institute of Research into International Competitiveness, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia.
- Quine, L. (1999) 'Workplace bullying in the NHS community trust: staff questionnaire survey', *British Medical Journal*, 318, pp. 228-232.
- Salin, D. (2001) 'Prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals: a comparison of two different strategies for measuring bullying', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10, pp. 425-441.
- Sandberg, J. (2001) 'The constructions of social construction', in *Invisible Management*, eds S.-E. Sjostrand, J. Sandberg & M. Tyrstrup, Thomson Learning, London, pp. 28-48.
- Schein, V. E., Meuller, R., Lituchy, T. & Lui, J. (1996) 'Think manager - think male: a global phenomenon?' *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, vol. 17, no. 33, pp. 33-41.
- Scutt, J.A. (2004) 'Mediocrity and the no change principle: A recipe for mobbing', paper presented at the *Workplace Mobbing Conference*, Brisbane.
- Shallcross, L. (2003) 'The workplace mobbing syndrome, response and prevention in the public sector', paper presented at the *Workplace Mobbing Conference*, Brisbane.
- Simpson, R. & Cohen, S. (2004) 'Dangerous Work: The Gendered Nature of Bullying in the Context of Higher Education', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 11, pp. 163-186.
- Simpson, R. (1998) 'Presenteeism, Power and Organizational Change: Long Hours as a Career Barrier and the Impact on the Working Lives of Women Managers', *British Journal of Management*, 9, pp. 37-50.
- Sinclair, A. (1998) *Doing Leadership Differently*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South.
- Sinclair, A. (1994) *Trials at the Top*, University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne.

- Sjostrand, S.-E., Sandberg, J. & Tyrstrup, M. (eds) (2001) *Invisible Management: The Social Construction of Leadership*, Thomson Learning, London.
- Tehrani, N. (2004) Bullying: A source of chronic post traumatic stress? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 32(3), 357-366.
- Thompson, C. (2002) 'Workplace bullying and new public management approaches', paper presented at the *International Workplace Bullying Conference*. Adelaide.
- Thornton, M. (2004) 'Corrosive Leadership (Or Bullying by Another Name): A Corollary of the Corporatised Academy?', *Australian Journal of Labour Law*, 17, pp. 161-184.
- Trinidad, C. & Normore, A. H. (2005) 'Leadership and gender: A dangerous liaison?' *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal*, vol. 26, no. 7, pp. 574-90.
- Wahl, A. (2001) 'From lack to surplus', in *Invisible Management: The Social Construction of Leadership*, eds S.-E. Sjostrand, J. Sandberg & M. Tyrstrup, Thomson Learning, London, pp. 126-48.
- Wajcman, J. (1999) *Managing Like a Man; Women and Men in Corporate Management*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK.
- Walby, S. (1990) *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford UK.
- West, C. & Zimmerman, D.H. (1991) 'Doing Gender', in *The Social Construction of Gender*, eds J. Lorber & S.A. Farrell, Sage Publications, Newbury Park CA.