

Australian research shows workplace bullying involves us all

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New research from Murdoch University and Edith Cowan University sheds light on the roles bystanders play in workplace bullying.

To better understand how co-workers can impact [conflict](#), Dr Megan Paull of Murdoch's School of Business and her partners created 13 'types' – ranging from the aggressive Instigating Bystander to the Submitting Bystander, who ends up becoming a substitute for the victim.

Middle spectrum types include the Manipulating Bystander, Abdicating Bystander, Defending Bystander and Sympathising [Bystander](#).

“Bystanders are not incidental, but are an integral part of the context of

bullying, with some siding with the bully or victim, either actively or passively,” Dr Paull said.

“People don’t always appreciate the impact of their actions, or inactions. For example, a social reaction to walking into a room where colleagues are laughing is to laugh along without thinking. But you could be adding fuel to someone’s embarrassment.”

Dr Paull said establishing context was important, and that the issue was complex, noting competition and rivalry were natural in work and social relationships. She also cautioned that what might appear as bullying to an outsider could be fine with the target of the act.

“It’s not a cut and dried issue, but we’re trying to raise awareness and make organisations and individuals aware of the responsibilities they have to respect and appreciate the subtleties of human relationships and psychological well-being,” Dr Paull said.

“Awareness can lead managers and staff to develop effective strategies for diffusing potential situations. Studies have shown that people who recognise their roles, and have the tools to act, can make a positive difference.”

Dr Paull said her study was informed by research on school bullying, an area which has benefited from training, awareness and culture change programs.

She noted [workplace bullying](#) has become a matter of concern on a national level. In May 2012, Federal Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations Bill Shorten MP requested a House of Representatives report on the issue.

Provided by Murdoch University

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