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2005

## "Bad Behavior" in Organizations: A Review and Typology for Future Research

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*Journal of Management* 2005; 31; 988  
DOI: 10.1177/0149206305279942

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# “Bad Behavior” in Organizations: A Review and Typology for Future Research

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*In recent years, organizational scholars have increasingly focused on various forms of bad behavior in the workplace. Notable examples of these behaviors include deviance, aggression, antisocial behavior, and violence. Unfortunately, as this body of work has grown, so too has a proliferation of concepts, constructs, and definitions. This article reviews the literature regarding the general set of concepts and constructs relating to bad behavior in organizations. The authors identify both areas of uniqueness as well as areas of overlap among these various concepts and constructs. They also propose a typology to guide future theory development and empirical research.*

**Keywords:** *deviance; aggression; antisocial behavior; violence; dysfunctional behavior*

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During the past decade, a body of literature has emerged that portrays a variety of different forms of bad behavior in organizations. At this point, we use the term *bad behavior* to refer to any form of intentional (as opposed to accidental) behavior that is potentially injurious to the organization and/or to individuals within the organization. Another viewpoint would be to characterize so-called bad behavior as behavior that the organization, given control, would prefer not to have exhibited by its employees. Examples of such behaviors range from physi-

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Journal of Management, Vol. 31 No. 6, December 2005 988-1005

DOI: 10.1177/0149206305279942

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cal violence to sabotage and theft to verbal abuse to counterproductive political activity (cf. Griffin & O'Leary-Kelly, 2004).

Unfortunately, as this body of work has emerged, so too has a proliferation of concepts, constructs, and definitions. It might even be argued that the wide array of approaches taken to date regarding bad behavior may be on the verge of impeding further theoretical development and empirical research. For example, deviance, aggression, antisocial behavior, violence, dysfunctional behavior, abuse, incivility, and misbehavior are all examples of constructs that have formed the basis for published research in the past decade. In many cases, however, the distinctions between these constructs are ambiguous or unspecified. Consequently, even subtle differences in how concepts are implicitly or explicitly defined and/or conceptualized may result in contradictory and/or incongruent theoretical arguments and empirical conclusions.

Our purpose in undertaking this work is twofold. First, we will review the literature on a general set of concepts and constructs relating to bad behavior in organizations. Second, we will then identify areas of uniqueness and areas of overlap among these various concepts and constructs. Finally, we assess the theoretical clarity of each behavior and then propose a typology to guide future theory development and empirical research.

### **Forms of Bad Behavior in Organizations**

Many forms of bad behavior of current interest to organizational scholars have roots that can be traced back for decades. For instance, by definition, the concept of deviance derives from earlier work on group norms (cf. Davis, 1964; Feldman, 1984; Sherif & Sherif, 1953). However, we focus primarily on the past 10 years of work because it is during this period that most current formulations of bad behavior have been proposed and brought into the contemporary mainstream. In addition, we also concentrate on research associated with organizational settings. That is, for example, we include work dealing with aggression in the workplace but not aggression in other settings.

Furthermore, we focus primarily on four central forms of bad behavior in organizations: deviance, aggression, antisocial behavior, and violence. We make this choice because it is these four areas that have received the preponderance of attention by organizational scholars. It is also among these behaviors that the greatest likelihood exists for theoretical and operational confusion and ambiguity. Other related concepts such as incivility, workplace abuse, destructive work behavior, noncompliant behavior, organizational misbehavior, and bullying are found in the literature, but there does not yet exist a substantial body of work regarding any of them.

Moreover, we also exclude other forms of behavior that are best addressed in terms of legality—employee theft, criminal negligence, discrimination, sexual harassment, industrial espionage, and so forth. These behaviors have been defined by our legal system and are almost always assessed and punished (as appropriate) by that system. Finally, we also exclude those behaviors that might be seen as undesirable by the organization, such as whistle-blowing, but that may provide social benefits.

Inherent in any such classification scheme are ethical and value-driven distinctions about what indeed reflects goodness versus badness. We acknowledge that for our current purposes,

we do not directly address these issues. However, we do see them as being very significant and worthy of additional consideration in their own right. Our boundaries reflect the points made earlier regarding intentionality and injury—behaviors that are intentional and that may cause injury. For purposes of this analysis, we implicitly use normative perspectives to reflect the nature of both intentions and injury. For instance, most observers would agree that although whistle-blowing might result in injury to an organization, that injury is justified insofar as the organization was guilty of some act that was harmful to others.

### *Workplace Deviance*

Drawing on earlier work regarding group norms, the concept of workplace deviance (i.e. deviance from norms) was recently reframed as a significant organizational construct by Robinson and Bennett (1995). These authors define workplace deviance as voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both. Furthermore, they both implicitly and explicitly see deviance as a form of bad behavior. This definition and perspective are carried forward in several subsequent articles dealing with deviance (cf. Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Lee & Allen, 2002; Peterson, 2002; Robinson & Greenberg, 1998).

More recently, Warren (2003) has extended the concept of workplace deviance by first defining the construct in a more neutral manner as simply being a departure from norms. This perspective actually reconnects the concept of deviance from norms with earlier theoretical work (cf. Sherif & Sherif, 1953). With this viewpoint as a foundation, Warren then frames convincing arguments that although some forms of deviance (termed *destructive deviance*) are indeed negative, others (called *constructive deviance*) are actually positive behaviors that can potentially benefit the organization, its members, or both. For instance, if the strongly held work norms of a group encourage selfish behaviors and discourage various cooperative and team-oriented behaviors that the organization would prefer, deviance targeted at changing these norms might be beneficial to the organization, the work group itself, and some or all of the group's members.

### *Workplace Aggression*

Aggression has a substantial intellectual heritage (cf. Bandura, 1973). For instance, aggression has been studied, documented, and debated in the fields of child development, political science, sociology, criminal justice, anthropology, psychology, social psychology, and several other disciplines. However, its relevance and application to organizational work settings is relatively new. There are two different but not incompatible definitions of aggression that have emerged as commonly used perspectives in the organizational literature.

*The Neuman and Baron perspective.* Neuman and Baron (1998) used the term *workplace aggression* to encompass all forms of behavior by which individuals attempt to harm others at

work or their organizations. These authors later extended their thinking by describing five forms of aggression: *covert aggression*, *overt aggression*, *verbal aggression*, *obstructionism*, and *workplace violence* (Baron & Neuman, 1998). This approach to aggression has also been used by Glomb and Liao (2003); Dietz, Robinson, Folger, Baron, and Schultz (2003); Jawahar (2002); and Kennedy, Homant, and Homant (2004).

*The O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew perspective.* A somewhat different approach to workplace aggression has been developed by O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996). Using the work of Bandura (1973) as context, these authors introduced the term *organization-motivated aggression*, defined as an attempted injurious or destructive behavior initiated by either an organizational insider or outsider that is instigated by some factor in the organizational context. That is, aggression is seen as a specific behavior or set of behaviors by an individual in an organization. This aggression is also seen as resulting from a stimulus in the organization, such as a perceived injustice or some extreme stressor such as being terminated or demoted.

O'Leary-Kelly et al. (1996) continued to differentiate this construct from organization-motivated violence, which they defined as the significant negative effects on a person or property that occur as a result of organization-motivated aggression. Hence, although aggression is seen as a behavior, violence is seen as the consequence of that behavior. A terminated employee may feel justified in attempting to assault the manager responsible for the termination (aggression); the effects of the attempted assault may be physical injury (violence). Tobin (2001) and Aquino and Bradfield (2000) are among the researchers who have used this perspective in their own work.

Although these two perspectives are not incompatible, there are some fundamental differences between them. For one thing, the Neuman perspective subsumes violence as a form of aggression, whereas the O'Leary-Kelly et al. viewpoint assumes that violence results from aggression (and is therefore a different construct). In addition, Neuman, Baron, and colleagues do not focus on the causes of aggression per se but are instead primarily concerned with various forms, dimensions, and/or targets of aggressive behavior. O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and colleagues, meanwhile, cast their discussion of organization-motivated aggression specifically in terms of its causes—behaviors that are instigated by some factor in the organizational context.

### *Antisocial Behavior*

As with deviance and aggression, the concept of antisocial work behavior can be traced back several decades (cf. Festinger, 1950). However, it was the more recent work of Giacalone and Greenberg (1997) that brought the concept back into the contemporary mainstream. Antisocial behavior is defined as any behavior that brings harm, or is intended to bring harm, to an organization, its employees, or its stakeholders. It is juxtaposed as the theoretical antithesis of prosocial behavior—behavior intended to help others and/or to accomplish positive outcomes. Most researchers who have addressed antisocial behavior have adopted perspectives or definitions consistent with, or the same as, this point of view.

For example, Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly (1998) defined antisocial behavior simply as negative behaviors in organizations. Aquino and Douglas (2003) referenced this same perspective in their work, as did O'Leary-Kelly and Newman (2003). Meanwhile, Elangovan and Shapiro (1998) used the formulation of the construct as presented by Giacalone and Greenberg (1997).

### *Workplace Violence*

Finally, the fourth substantive construct we address is workplace violence. Not surprisingly, given the generally understood meaning of the term, definitions and perspectives associated with violence are relatively consistent and straightforward. For example, Neuman and Baron (1998) defined workplace violence as an instance involving direct physical assault. They also characterized violence, as noted earlier, as the most extreme form of aggression. LeBlanc and Kelloway (2002) described workplace violence as physical assaults and threats of assault directed toward employees. And Greenberg and Barling (1999) defined workplace violence as an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person. Recall, however, the distinction made between aggression and violence (seen as the result of aggression) previously noted in the work of O'Leary-Kelly et al. (1996).

Interestingly, and no doubt attributable to the general widespread agreement on the meaning of violence, many researchers who address workplace violence do not even bother to actually define it in their work, apparently assuming that it has common meaning. For example, among numerous others, Wade (2004); Blythe and Stivarius (2004); Camardella (2002); Zugelder, Champagne, and Maurer (2000); and Johnson and Indvik (1994) all presented cogent discussions and examinations of the subject of workplace violence without ever explicitly defining the term.

## **Similarities and Differences Among Central Constructs**

We now turn to an analysis of the substantive similarities, differences, and related issues among the central constructs of deviance, aggression, antisocial behavior, and violence. The dimensions we use to frame this analysis are definitional precision, temporal consistency, construct dimensionality, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences. These dimensions are chosen because they contribute in meaningful ways to our ability to identify substantive similarities and differences among constructs and to frame meaningful directions for future theory and research.

### *Definitional Precision*

Definitional precision is often a problem in organizational research. In some cases, for instance, researchers modify existing definitions to best fit their own research objectives. Subsequently, the original definition may get modified several times, resulting in a proliferation of

slightly different definitions for what is intended to be the same construct. In other cases, they create or introduce new terms without a precise explication of boundary conditions. As a result, definitional precision (at a minimum) and/or construct validity (more significantly) may suffer.

A review of the definitions of the four central constructs of bad behavior reflects this precision problem. For instance, each of the four constructs has been portrayed as a unique concept that, although related to other concepts, is also sufficiently different from them so as to warrant its own terminology. Table 1 presents a summary of the primary definitions of each construct, as introduced previously. Common to all four concepts are the implicit and/or explicit elements of threats and harm. Hence, the four constructs clearly encompass these elements. But each also at least purports to have some unique perspective as well.

To compound the issue of definitional precision even more, Table 1 also presents common lay definitions for each of these constructs. There are clearly several differences between the scholarly perspectives and lay definitions. This issue is important, given an assumed goal of helping practicing managers better understand the underlying behavioral issues and potential implications for preventing bad behaviors and their consequences in organizations. Of course, some of these differences are already being addressed. For instance, the refinement of the deviance construct by Warren (2003), as discussed earlier, clearly brings that construct more in line with conventional lay uses for the word *deviance*.

In other cases, however, more parsimony between scholarly and lay meanings might be desirable. Aggression poses a very clear example. In the academic literature, aggression is almost universally used in a negative context. In practice, however, managers often characterize someone as aggressive with an associated positive meaning. As noted in Table 1, for instance, a secondary definition of aggressive is assertive, bold, and enterprising. Hence, an executive who is willing to make risky decisions, who strongly communicates an ambitious agenda for the organization, and who actively seeks innovative and unusual methods for surmounting obstacles might very well be seen by others as aggressive, but in a very positive way.

Likewise, scholars also use the term *antisocial behavior* with strictly negative connotations. In social settings, however, someone who is introverted and/or does not care to socialize with colleagues outside the workplace might be called antisocial by others in the organization. Although this reference is not likely to be used in a positive manner, it is also generally not as negative as the scholarly meaning; that is, the scholarly meaning reflects undesirable actions directed at others, whereas the lay meaning is often more passive or neutral in nature. In addition, the lay definitions of antisocial behavior are also consistent with the deviance concept as refined by Warren (2003)—behaviors that do not follow social norms.

### *Temporal Consistency*

Another dimension for assessing bad behaviors is their temporal consistency. By this, we mean the extent to which any given behavior is or can be maintained over time by an individual. In effect, most scholars have treated bad behaviors as present or absent, without considering the extent to which any given behavior can be maintained or repeated. In reality, it is likely that some forms of bad behavior can actually be maintained for an extended period of time,



**Table 1**  
**Scholarly Versus Lay Definitions of Key Bad Behaviors**

Behavior	Scholarly Definitions	Lay Definitions <sup>a</sup>
Deviance	"Voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well being of an organization, its members, or both" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995)	Behaviors and attitudes that differ from accepted social standards
Aggression	"Behavior by which individuals attempt to harm others at work or their organizations" (Neuman & Baron, 1998)	1. Inclined to behave in a hostile fashion. 2. Assertive, bold, and enterprising
Antisocial behavior	"Actions directed towards other employees or the organization that have the potential for producing physical, economic, psychological, or emotional harm" (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998)	1. Shunning the society of others; not sociable 2. Hostile to or disruptive of the established social order
Violence	"Instances involving direct physical assaults (an extreme form of aggression)" (Neuman & Baron, 1998)	1. Physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging, or abusing 2. The act or an instance of violent action or behavior 3. Abusive or unjust exercise of power

a. Lay definitions are taken from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (1992).

whereas other forms can only be of a very short duration. For instance, very mild forms of deviance (constructive or destructive) may be tolerated by others for extended periods of time; however, a coworker who brandishes a weapon and threatens to hurt someone will no doubt incur severe organizational and legal sanctions in very short order.

Others in the organization may also be willing to make allowances for various bad behaviors because of awareness or perceptions of extenuating circumstances. For instance, suppose a coworker is known to be going through some severe personal problems. As a result, the individual is often irritable and occasionally hostile to others at work (likely to be seen as aggression) and uninterested in socializing with coworkers (frequently referred to as being antisocial). Coworkers may, in fact, be willing to tolerate these behaviors far longer than would be the case without the extenuating circumstances. In general, it might be inferred, then, that various forms of deviance, aggression, and antisocial behavior may be tolerated for some period of time (affected by circumstances and intensity). Violence, however, is much less likely to be tolerated for even brief periods.

There are clear implications for the concept of temporal consistency as we use it here that can be drawn from attribution theory (cf. Kelley, 1971). For instance, attribution theory posits that people observe and then assess behavior in terms of consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness. Observers then make attributions as to the cause of that behavior. So, as it relates

here, it seems that the extent to which observers see the behavior of someone as being truly deviant, aggressive, or antisocial could largely be explained in terms of the degree of consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness associated with that behavior.

### *Construct Dimensionality*

Construct dimensionality refers to the potential that the primary construct is, in fact, composed of multiple subconstructs. As noted earlier, for instance, it has been argued that the deviance construct actually consists of two dimensions, constructive deviance and destructive deviance (Warren, 2003). Likewise, aggression has been portrayed as consisting of overt aggression, covert aggression, verbal aggression, obstructionism, and violence (Baron & Neuman, 1998). In addition, as noted in the Definitional Precision section, it may also be possible to argue that, like deviance, aggression may actually be either positive or negative.

The antisocial behavior construct is also clearly multidimensional in nature, although most efforts to describe its components have been general in nature. O'Leary-Kelly and Newman (2003), for instance, characterized antisocial behavior as including negative behaviors that are both verbal and physical, severe and less severe, and that are directed at a wide array of targets. Interestingly, although there is perhaps the most consistency between scholarly and lay definitions of violence, there has been relatively little discussion in the literature regarding different forms of violence. It is relatively simple, however, to identify an array of violent acts that can occur in organizational settings, including physical assault, sexual assault, assault with a deadly weapon, and violence against property. Less commonly addressed in the academic literature are such other forms of violence as verbal assault and similar abuses of power.

### *Behavioral Motives*

In virtually all cases, researchers studying bad behaviors have focused almost exclusively on the behaviors themselves. Although there are occasionally references to the causes of such behavior, there have been few detailed discussions and virtually no in-depth analyses of why individuals elect to pursue behaviors that the scholarly community, at least, would classify as undesirable. Indeed, although only the Robinson and Bennett (1995) definition of deviance describes the target behavior to be voluntary, the other central constructs under discussion here certainly imply that individuals elect to engage in relevant behaviors. Hence, it is perhaps worthwhile to focus attention on the intentions of those identified as engaging in bad behaviors. We will consider such intentions from the points of view of motivation, complexity, and transparency.

*Motivational intent.* What factors might motivate individuals to engage in deviant, aggressive, antisocial, and/or violent behaviors? There are actually a number of factors that can be readily identified. From the perspective of common academic definitions that assume that such behaviors are bad, their origins may be pathological in nature (i.e., associated with some mental or psychological illness). They may also be brought about by stress and/or perceived

injustice (cf. Neuman, 2004). The felt need for revenge or retaliation in response to an action by someone else (real or imagined) can also be seen as an obvious trigger for various forms of bad behavior (cf. Skarlicki & Folger, 2004).

Less commonly addressed, however, are those instances in which what is classified as a bad behavior by the academic community definitions might, in fact, be motivated by a desire to help or otherwise benefit the organization and/or its employees. Consider, for example, a talented and hardworking employee transferred to membership in another work group. In addition, suppose that this work group has strongly held norms reinforcing a leisurely work pace and social behaviors that are clearly contrary to the organization's goals (such as ridiculing company announcements, ignoring company events, and so forth). The newcomer to the group might intentionally—and for valid reasons—engage in deviant and antisocial behaviors toward other group members. He or she might also be aggressive in efforts to alter the group's norms, make management aware of the situation, and otherwise promote what the organization would see as a beneficial and healthy agenda.

*Complexity of intent.* It also seems to be the case that any given behavior is likely to have multiple intentions. It is therefore necessary to make a more comprehensive and detailed assessment of bad behavior to develop a sufficiently rich understanding of its origins. The basic premise of this argument is that an individual choosing to enact any given behavior may actually be pursuing multiple motives simultaneously. Moreover, these various motives may be uniformly positive, uniformly negative, or some combination of positive and negative.

Again, an example is instructive. Suppose the top manager of one division of a big company has made several poor decisions, is not respected by her or his colleagues and subordinates, and is hampering the company's overall performance. However, for political reasons, corporate management is unwilling to take action as long as the division's performance does not slide further. A senior manager within the division, however, understands what is going on and resorts to various bad behaviors to make it imperative that the top manager be forced out. A variety of motives might have instigated this situation, including the belief that it was for the good of the company; however, the senior manager may also have understood that he or she would likely be promoted to the top spot. And perhaps the senior manager had a long-standing grudge against the top manager. Hence, the desire to help the company, the goal of obtaining a promotion, and the opportunity for revenge may all have played a role.

*Transparency of intent.* Finally, it is also instructive to consider the extent to which the intention is transparent, or clear, to others in the organization. A disgruntled employee who brings a weapon to work with the goal of shooting his or her boss has very clear—that is, transparent—intentions. However, the transparency of other behaviors is much more opaque. In many cases, for instance, the distinction between constructive versus destructive deviance may not be obvious to observers. There may be an understanding within a group that a given behavior is deviant, but group members may not be able to discern the actual intent of that behavior.

For example, if a group has a norm that its collective performance is more important than the performance of any one member, behaviors intended to achieve high individual perfor-

mance will be seen as deviant. However, if a group member begins to engage in such individually focused behavior, other members may develop several different possible reasons: The individual may be trying to change the norm, the individual may be angry with others and trying to get even, the individual may need additional income and see personal performance as the best strategy, and so forth. Indeed, as noted above, there may actually be multiple intentions underlying a given deviant behavior. Attribution theory, again, may also play a significant role in how these actions are interpreted by others.

### *Behavioral Consequences*

As with behavioral intention, relatively little attention is generally devoted to issues associated with the consequences of various behaviors. That is, what are the consequences of bad behavior, and what are the implications of those consequences? Hence, we turn now to the rich array of potential questions and issues surrounding behavioral consequences with a discussion of the successful enactment of intended behaviors, the complexity of consequences, the transparency of consequences, and organizational and social responses.

*Successful enactment of intended behaviors.* A major issue associated with bad behavior is the extent to which the actor (i.e., the individual enacting the behavior) successfully completes the behavior as intended. In some cases, true enactment will be very significant; in other cases, it will be less significant. For example, if the actor's intention is to shoot a coworker, the discovery of the intention itself will be sufficient to cause major repercussions. If the actor is disarmed before shooting, misses the intended victim, or inflicts only a minor flesh wound on the intended victim, he or she will nevertheless face loss of employment, social stigma, and almost certain imprisonment.

In other cases, though, the realization (or lack of) intended consequences may render the behavior moot or irrelevant. An attempt at verbal aggression, for instance, may result in a response of even harsher verbal aggression from the intended target. Consequently, the outcome of the enacted behavior may be quite different from what was intended. Similarly, an attempt to demonstrate deviance from norms may be met with indifference or sufficient ridicule from others that the deviant behavior itself becomes farcical. If the behavior enacted by the individual is intended to produce a positive outcome, the extent to which that outcome is achieved can also shed meaningful insights on these behavior patterns. Going back to an example used earlier, if a productive employee is able to alter the low-performance norms of a work group, then a positive benefit will have been realized.

*Complexity of consequences.* As with behavioral intentions, the consequences of bad behaviors can also be very complex. Given that any given behavior may elicit numerous responses, it follows logically that those responses themselves may reflect an array of qualities. An attempted physical assault in the workplace, for example, may result in the termination of a disruptive and low-performing employee (the person attempting the assault), the loss of a valued and high-performing employee who needs the psychological security of a new

workplace (the intended victim), the installation of a new emergency response procedure within the organization, and the adoption of improved employee selection and assessment techniques.

Likewise, constructive deviance may lead to enhanced work methods, improved decision making, and better overall performance. However, it may also alienate individuals who were actually predisposed to accept alternative—and perhaps less polarizing—methods of persuasion and simultaneously establish a belief system that rejecting group norms will henceforth be valued and rewarded. Hence, it seems likely that regardless of intent, there may be a complex array of consequences.

*Transparency of consequences.* By transparency of consequences in this context, we refer to the extent to which individuals aware of the bad behaviors will recognize and understand the various consequences that follow from that behavior. Suppose an individual is perceived by some to have behaved in an inappropriately aggressive manner in order to make a colleague look bad and further engages in antisocial behavior in an effort to get that individual fired. If the colleague is subsequently terminated, it may be inferred that the organization was “tricked” by the aggressive individual. In reality, though, the colleague may have actually been a poor performer and scheduled for termination even before the aggressive incident occurred.

*Organizational and social responses.* Finally, few academicians have focused much attention on the ramifications of bad behavior—the significance of how the organization responds. If a person engages in destructive deviance and negative aggression, for example, and no sanctions are imposed, the message to others may be that those behaviors are acceptable to the organization. Likewise, regardless of whether deviant behavior is intended to be destructive or constructive, the extent to which the social network most relevant to that behavior tolerates or rejects the deviant behavior may carry profound implications for both the actor and others in the group.

### Theoretical Clarity of Bad Behaviors

Table 2 summarizes our view of the theoretical clarity of each of the four forms of bad behavior under consideration relative to the five dimensions of definitional precision, temporal consistency, construct dimensionality, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences. To the extent to which a given behavior relates in a relatively straightforward and unambiguous manner to a given dimension, we classify it as having theoretical clarity and use the term *clear* to make this indication. However, if a given behavior does not relate in a relatively straightforward and unambiguous manner to a given dimension, we classify it as not having theoretical clarity and use the term *unclear* to make this distinction.

On the basis of our review and evaluation of the extant literature, we see the behavior of workplace deviance as being relatively clear in terms of its definitional precision and construct dimensionality. In its most current version, deviance is described in relatively precise terms as relating to norms and comprising the two dimensions of constructive and destructive devi-

**Table 2**  
**Theoretical Clarity of Bad Behaviors**

Dimension	Deviance	Aggression	Antisocial Behavior	Workplace Violence
Definitional precision	Clear	Unclear	Unclear	Clear
Temporal consistency	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Clear
Construct dimensionality	Clear	Clear	Unclear	Unclear
Behavioral motivation	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Clear
Behavioral consequences	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Clear

*Note:* "Unclear" may indicate ambiguity and/or a lack of specification.

ance. On the other hand, to date, scholars have not addressed the issues of temporal consistency, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences in a straightforward manner, and so we see the theoretical clarity of deviance as being unclear on these dimensions. However, given the existing clarity of the meaning and dimensionality of the construct itself, it seems to be a fairly obvious next step to address the issues of timing, intent, and consequences.

Aggression has slightly less theoretical clarity. This is perhaps unexpected, given the large body of work that exists across various disciplines related to aggressive behavior. We see aggression as having some degree of theoretical clarity only in terms of its construct dimensionality. Heretofore, the dimensionality of aggression has seldom been addressed by organizational researchers, with only Baron and Neuman (1998) clearly specifying multiple dimensions. However, we also see the simpler approach previewed here that would parallel deviance by describing aggression as being constructive or destructive as having the potential to enhance the theoretical precision of the aggression construct. On the other hand, we see aggression as not relating in a clear manner to definitional precision, temporal consistency, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences.

We see antisocial behavior as having the least overall theoretical clarity. Indeed, our assessment suggests that antisocial behavior does not relate in a clear way to any of the five dimensions. Definitions and presumed dimensionality vary widely across studies, and the issues of temporal consistency, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences are only hinted at by most scholars in this area. Perhaps this is attributable to the fact that antisocial behavior was not precisely defined as it was being reframed by contemporary scholars, hence making it relatively easy for researchers to adopt their own implicit definitions and/or dimensionality to meet the needs of their own work.

In contrast, we see the concept of violence as having the most theoretical precision. Specifically, in our opinion, violence relates very well theoretically to the dimensions of definitional precision, temporal consistency, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences. We see it as relating in an unclear way only to construct dimensionality. Even here, however, although we classify violence as unclear, we also see addressing this shortcoming as being a somewhat straightforward undertaking (as will be seen later).

In summary, then, using the five dimensions of definitional precision, temporary consistency, construct dimensionality, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences in our

assessment, violence has the most theoretical clarity and antisocial behavior the least theoretical clarity. We also see deviance as being somewhat clear theoretically, with aggression as being somewhat unclear. In our next section, we propose an organizing typology that may allow organizational scientists to move forward in a more unified direction.

### **An Organizing Typology of Bad Behaviors**

Our discussion seems to provide reasonably clear evidence that although a growing body of important work dealing with bad behavior in organizations has been compiled, much remains to be done. Specifically, the current body of work needs greater definitional precision and more systematic analysis and refinement of issues associated with temporal consistency, construct dimensionality, behavioral intentions, and behavioral consequences. In this section, therefore, we outline an organizing framework we believe can serve as a blueprint for future theory and research in this area.

#### *Dysfunctional Behavior*

Table 3 summarizes a proposed set of definitions and dimensions for each of the central behaviors reviewed here. First, we propose that the term *dysfunctional behavior* be used as the umbrella term under which other forms of bad behavior are subsumed. The advantages to the use of this term include the following: (a) It clearly conveys the negative connotations of the associated behaviors, (b) it does not have a generally accepted lay meaning that conflicts with the proposed scholarly definition, and (c) it is not yet associated with any specific form of behavior and thus fits the ideal model of a general categorization of objects (in this case, behaviors). As noted, we propose the definition of dysfunctional behavior to be motivated behavior by an employee or group of employees that is intended to have negative consequences for another individual and/or group, and/or the organization itself.

#### *Workplace Deviance and Aggression*

We further propose that workplace deviance, aggression, and violence be seen as major related but distinct forms of dysfunctional behavior. Workplace deviance is defined in Table 3 in a manner consistent with Warren (2003) and acknowledges two forms of deviance, one destructive and the other constructive (noted in Table 3 as the functional analog to destructive deviance). A major departure from prevailing thinking reflected in Table 3 is the proposed conceptualization of workplace aggression. Specifically, we propose that workplace aggression be defined as highly assertive nonphysical behavior directed toward a person or object. We further propose that aggression be seen as comprising destructive aggression and constructive aggression seen as a parallel configuration to the two forms of deviance.

We use the phrasing *highly assertive* to distinguish aggressive behaviors from milder forms of proactive behavior. For instance, asking for a pay raise in a reasoned and professional manner might be seen as proactive; demanding a pay raise in a rude manner and/or under threat of



**Table 3**  
**Proposed Standard Definitions for Bad Behaviors**

Behavior	Proposed Definition and Forms
Dysfunctional behavior	Motivated behavior by an employee or group of employees that is intended to have negative consequences for another individual and/or group and/or the organization itself
Workplace deviance	Behaviors that differ from social norms Destructive deviance (Constructive deviance) <sup>a</sup>
Workplace aggression	Highly assertive nonphysical behavior directed toward a person or object Destructive aggression (Constructive aggression) <sup>a</sup>
Workplace violence	Highly assertive physical behavior directed toward a person or object Violence toward person(s) Violence toward object(s)
Antisocial behavior	Alternative term for dysfunctional behavior

a. Functional or positive analog of the preceding negative behavior.

resignation would be more consistent with aggression. Moreover, in this case, the object of the aggression would be the goal of acquiring a pay increase. We also use the phrase *nonphysical* to distinguish aggressive behavior from the more extreme dysfunctional behavior of workplace violence.

Clearer distinctions between and theoretical expansions of the concepts of destructive and constructive aggression are needed. However, in general, we would see this line of work progressing along the lines of our previous discussion of aggression. Specifically, destructive aggression would include behaviors intended to verbally, emotionally, psychologically, politically, and/or socially harm someone for dysfunctional purposes (note that this is not intended to be a definition but instead to be illustrative of the concept). Constructive aggression, meanwhile, would include behaviors intended to advance appropriate agendas and/or to thwart others intent on advancing inappropriate agendas (again, this is not a definition but illustrative of the concept).

### *Workplace Violence*

Workplace violence is defined in Table 3 as highly assertive physical behavior directed toward a person or object. It can include violence toward another person or persons, and/or violence toward an object or objects. Although these concepts are generally understood in a consistent manner across different research areas, there nonetheless may be value in a more detailed explication of the various forms of violence. For instance, although it is difficult to grasp the concept of violence toward others ever having a functional purpose, the same cannot



automatically be said for violence toward an object. Using extra force to smash a racquet ball during an after-work match to blow off steam, for example, might have positive benefits for stress reduction.

### *Antisocial Behavior*

Antisocial behavior is offered in Table 3 as an alternative term for dysfunctional behavior. Given the potential for further confusion and ambiguity among constructs, we propose that this term be used in the same general manner as dysfunctional behavior—that is, as an umbrella term encompassing other more specific forms of behaviors. However, given its overall lack of theoretical clarity as well as its inconsistency with lay usage of the term, we further propose that its usage be minimized in favor of dysfunctional behavior.

## **Directions for Future Theory and Research**

We hope that this review and typology will serve two important purposes. First, we hope that it will serve to stimulate additional theory and research in the broad area we will now call dysfunctional behavior. Furthermore, we also hope that it will motivate and encourage both those already working in this area as well as those who may enter the area in the future to adopt a more consistent and parsimonious conceptual framework for their work. By using consistent definitions and meanings for terms and concepts, we may accelerate our understanding and awareness of myriad issues associated with dysfunctional behaviors in organizations and hasten our ability to provide organizations and their managers with better tools and methods for addressing these behaviors.

### *Theoretical Directions*

On the theory side, we note several specific questions that we believe warrant attention. First, our proposed two-dimensional view of workplace aggression (drawing a distinction between constructive and destructive aggression) needs additional theoretical analysis, refinement, and explication. Likewise, we see value in a more precise rendering of the violence concept and its associated forms or dimensions. We also think it might be fruitful to address the concept of antisocial behavior in a more comprehensive manner. For instance, is it a unique concept (as its associated scholars are likely to advocate), or is it analogous to dysfunctional behavior (the position taken here)? If it is unique, how precisely does it relate to other dysfunctional behaviors? What are its boundaries and its nomological network?

For all of the behaviors we note in this article, we also see a strong need for expansive theory-building work that addresses in a more comprehensive manner their various antecedents and consequences, as well as the various intentions that might stimulate them. In all likelihood, this work will require a variety of perspectives, given that both antecedents and consequences involve micro- and macro-level elements. To the extent that personality disorders and/or pathological factors are seen as intervening, different kinds of expertise may also be needed.

Finally, as we noted earlier in this article, other forms of dysfunctional behavior, most notably incivility, workplace bullying, and workplace revenge and retaliation, have also begun to emerge in the organizational literature. Incivility is currently receiving considerable research attention (cf. Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Because most of this work has involved the same set of scholars, there has not yet emerged any meaningful (i.e., complicating) variation in terminology. Moreover, the current terminology used by this group of scholars fits parsimoniously under the general umbrella of dysfunctional behavior by being clearly distinguished from other behaviors (such as deviance) without unnecessarily overlapping with those other behaviors. Workplace bullying and revenge and retaliation are just emerging as topics for research but do not yet have clear definitions.

As work directed at these behaviors continues (and as new forms of dysfunctional behavior are identified), we encourage those interested in those behaviors to draw clear and meaningful references to the typology developed here. Specifically, it will be useful if scholars draw clear delineations between their constructs and the more established constructs of workplace deviance, aggression, and violence. It will also be useful if they at a minimum acknowledge the issues of definitional precision, temporal consistency, construct dimensionality, behavioral motives, and behavioral consequences.

### *Empirical Directions*

Research dealing with dysfunctional behaviors is also needed. Empirical work in this area, however, is and will continue to be difficult. Scholars tend to rely on survey methodologies and on recall of, and/or reactions to, real or hypothetical incidents. Although these methods will continue to be of value, we must also be more open to alternative research methodologies, especially qualitative approaches. Interviews with, and case studies of, individuals involved in various dysfunctional incidents may be an especially fruitful area to pursue.

Laboratory research may provide interesting insights from a number of perspectives. For example, actors could be used to role-play people in a work setting. Their scripts could be systematically varied to convey differing levels of deviance and/or aggression. The contexts in which the interactions occur could also be systematically varied to reflect, say, different work settings (in an office versus in a social setting), reporting relationships (peers versus boss-subordinate), and so forth. Research participants could then be asked to observe various interactions and to then categorize them as reflecting, for example, positive versus negative behaviors, deviant versus aggressive behaviors, and so forth. Such studies would shed light on attribution process and the potential difficulties and related issues in observing and categorizing behaviors.

The use of archival and other unobtrusive measures should also be considered where appropriate. As governmental agencies and organizations themselves become increasingly effective in their data gathering and storage of various forms of information (such as crime statistics), researchers may be able to capitalize on newly created data sets to develop a better understanding of patterns and trends associated with at least certain kinds of dysfunctional behaviors (particularly various forms of workplace violence). Within organizations, records concerning grievances filed under union contracts and/or mediation programs might also pro-

vide useful insights into dysfunctional behaviors (of course, there may be formidable barriers that would have to be overcome to obtain such information).

In summary, then, we believe that the concept of dysfunctional behavior in organizations is still in its infancy. We have developed some fundamental understandings of its forms and concepts, but much clearly remains to be done. By carefully moving forward on the theoretical refinement of dysfunctional behavior constructs and simultaneously employing increasingly powerful research methodologies, we can gain important and meaningful insights into how and why these behaviors occur and, more important, perhaps how they can be better predicted and controlled. If we can succeed, the field of organizational behavior and the world of real organizations and people will all be the better for it.

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