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It Takes Two to Tango: Victims, Perpetrators, and the Dynamics of Victimization

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As researchers who have advanced victim precipitation arguments in our own work on victimization and job performance (Jensen, Patel, & Raver, 2014), we agree fully with this statement made by Cortina, Rabelo, and Holland (2018): "A victim's traits or behaviors might help us understand *why* the instigator chose that particular person for abuse, but we must always emphasize that it was the instigator, not the victim, who did the choosing and abusing" (p. 93). An overemphasis on victim characteristics does deflect attention away from wrongdoers, and theory that encourages us to consider perpetrator motivation and the social environment is needed.

Yet, we diverge with Cortina et al. (2018) on how much focus is placed on the perpetrator relative to the victim and argue that an overemphasis on the perpetrator, with limited acknowledgment of the victim, masks the dynamic of conflict. In their chapter on workplace aggression, Raver and Barling (2008) note that there has been very little recognition in the organizational literature that aggression emerges as a result of social interaction between victims and perpetrators. This is important because it suggests that aggressive behavior is embedded in a dynamic relationship. In downplaying the social interaction, what emerges is a focus on the victim or the perpetrator, rather than the dyadic spiral (see Andersson & Pearson [1999] for an

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exception). Cortina et al.'s focus on aggressive behavior instigated by parties that have had historic imbalances in society (e.g., male-on-female sexual harassment) does imply that there is a greater need to focus on the perpetrator's characteristics, as well as societal drivers of hostility, as blaming the victim for stereotypes or violence does not advance scientific understanding. Yet, not all exchanges are marked with contextual or status differences (i.e., incivility marked by general rudeness or disrespect), and in those situations we believe it is justified to look at both parties interacting in a spiral of conflict.

We also argue that there is a difference between blaming the victims for their situation and using victim characteristics to predict when individuals may be targeted by bullies. For example, police routinely advise people not to walk around using their cell phones, as it can make them an easier target for mugging. These individuals are not asking to be robbed, but knowing what differentiated a victim from a non-target does add to our predictive landscape and offers advice for how to prevent future victimization. Drawing this back to research on victimization in the workplace, Kim and Glomb's (2014) suggestions that high performing victims might want to downplay their accomplishments, avoid the spotlight, and behave humbly offer similar advice. An alternative to Cortina et al.'s (2018) arguments that this places undue burden on the victim to change is that these strategies give victims some control over the situation. The implication of Kim and Glomb's recommendation was not that the victim performs less well but simply shifts the focus away from their performance and onto something else. By giving victims the power to do something to address how they might be treated in the future, the power dynamic shifts as well. We agree that there are limits, however, to how far a victim should go; as noted by Raver and Barling (2008), we need more evidence beyond suggesting that the best way for targets to stop the aggression is to leave their jobs.

Furthermore, remedies to perpetrator predation also presuppose that perpetrators are able to be intervened against. Yet, victims may not be able to wait for the instigator to change their behavior and may elect to alter their own behavior instead. Second, we suspect that the most egregious bullies are not interested in organizational training around emotion regulation or cooling down when angry. Indeed this is a burden acknowledged by Cortina et al. (2018) that may be rather difficult to lift.

These arguments collectively point to research that is multifaceted and speaks to the intersection of victim, perpetrator, and environmental characteristics. We are not alone in calling for this type of work, as Aquino and Lamertz (2004) have advanced a relational model of victimization that accounts for both victim and perpetrator characteristics. Dyadic research on how both parties interpret the situation, describe triggers, and make attributions would be illuminating. However, this can present a challenge for

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researchers seeking to collect field data. For legal and possibly reputational reasons, how likely is an organization to permit researchers to collect data that clearly points the finger at individual instigators, who in some cases have enacted illegal harassment or discrimination? Although this should not hold back our theorizing, it practically does limit the type of data collected and designs that researchers are able to test. For these reasons, we also see great benefit in team-based designs that might still describe how one (or more) individual(s) are being bullied by a teammate without having to name the instigator. This perspective would also afford researchers the opportunity to explore ambient mistreatment (e.g., Raver & Gelfand, 2005) as well as bystander reactions to aggression and hostility (e.g., O'Reilly, Aquino, & Skarlicki, 2016)—two additional areas that would benefit from greater empirical study. Experimental designs, often criticized for lack of external validity, would also afford researchers the opportunity to examine both perpetrator and victim characteristics and behavior. Although much of the experimental work on harassment has still focused on victim responses (e.g., Porath & Erez, 2007; Raver, Jensen, Lee, & O'Reilly, 2012), there is an opportunity in an experimental setting to examine how a victim might trigger a negative reaction in the perpetrator and under what conditions this dynamic emerges.

Because of the prevailing theoretical models and the challenges associated with data collection on a sensitive topic, we do appreciate why a focus on the victim has remained the predominant window by which I-O psychology describes and understands victimization in the workplace today. We also acknowledge that a focus on the victim's point of view and perspective have resulted in very important research advances, such as the reasonable woman standard over a reasonable person standard in judging the breadth of behaviors that constitute harassment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001). Yet, in any conflict dynamic, "it takes two to tango," which suggests an integrated framework advancing knowledge of both victims, perpetrators, and their circumstances is much needed to understand the dynamics at play.

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Victim Precipitation and the Wage Gap

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Cortina, Rabelo, and Holland (2018) accurately cite the general public's overuse of victim precipitation ideologies, or the notion that victims engage in actions that directly bring about their unfortunate circumstances. These ideologies also have permeated industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology and the study of people in the workplace (e.g., women's choice in clothing leads to sexual harassment, certain target characteristics and actions incite workplace bullying). We agree with Cortina et al. that this ideology unintentionally benefits the perpetrator by placing blame and responsibility for nonoptimal workplace situations directly on the target. The field of I-O psychology needs to move away from this model of victim blaming as a remediation for workplace disparities.

We bring attention to a specific arena in the workplace that is besieged with a victim precipitation framework: the wage gap between men and women. People often justify the gender wage gap by suggesting that "Women are not doing the same amount of work," "they are opting out," or "they are working fewer hours." These justifications put the responsibility and blame on women themselves, preventing us from identifying and addressing the real root of the problem: not women's actions or inactions but systemic inequity within organizations and society. Gender discrimination occurs both

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