COMMENTARY

Actions of little consequence

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We applaud the authors of the focal article (Medeiros & Griffith, 2019) for bringing the important issues around sexual harassment and industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology's role in the prevention of harassment in the workplace to the forefront of discussion. We agree that this is an important topic. The #MeToo movement is bringing to light issues of harassment and violence that have lingered for many years and across numerous industries (Van Dis, Stratom, & Choo, 2018). Although we laud the authors' focus on how I-O psychologists can help create a healthier workplace environment, we wish to focus our response on the importance of consequences and culture in addition to the issues of training.

Values and policies impact culture

An organization's corporate culture guides decisions on who should be hired, who should continue to be employed, and what behaviors are considered desirable or undesirable. An organization's culture can be encapsulated in the entirety of the background, ideologies, and mindsets and life experiences each employee brings (Schein, 1985). Corporate culture matters immensely to its policy choices, employee engagement, and economic performance (Cronqvist, Low, & Nilsson, 2006; Hermalin, 2001; Sorenson, 2013). Understanding corporate culture is necessary if we want to understand organizational policy choices and ultimately organizational performance (Kreps, 1990). Values and policies intend to influence culture and, thus, respectful human behavior in the workplace. We believe the culture is powerless as a deterrent if little or no consequences are in store for perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Inclusive, respectful, collaborative, and diverse workplaces foster workplace climates where careers grow and thrive but sexual harassment does not. These cultures also require a climate and environment that put these values into action (Hertzog, Wright, & Beat, 2008). Organizations with a strong and deep-rooted culture driven by values honoring ethical and respectful behavior perform more effectively than organizations with a weak culture. These values have a deep impact on how a culture evolves (Gochhayat, Giri, & Suar, 2017; Hertzog et al., 2008). In communicating and promoting the organizational ethos (policies shared by values) to employees, their acknowledgment and acceptance of it can influence their work behavior and attitudes (Cheung, Goldberg, King, & Magley, 2017).

Cultural expectations fueled by espoused values around gender and racial equity align with a company climate where policies and practices do not handicap or disenfranchise groups of people and render sexually harassing behavior against organizational norms (Jacobson & Eaton, 2018). Lim and Cortina (2005) showed that gender harassment occurred in corporate climates with high
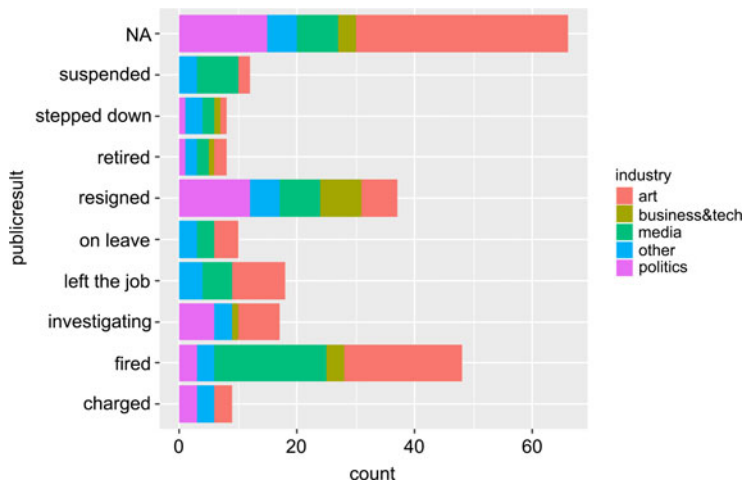
Figure 1. Organizational responses to #MeToo allegations by industry by percentage (NA = not applicable).

rates of uncivil conduct. Therefore, inculcating a culture of respect is a necessary component to preventing sexual harassment. In order to understand the #MeToo movement, we must understand its goals and the nature of its demands as a response to enacted corporate values.

A qualitative review of #MeToo allegations

To better understand the allegations made by the #MeToo movement, the authors conducted a thematic analysis of the allegations (North, Grady, McGann, & Romano, 2018). The authors used Python to scrape all the alleged names and reported consequences from online media (Glamour, 2018; North et al., 2018), and one of the authors read the allegations to identify common themes. Figure 1 contains a percentage breakdown of organizational responses by industry to the #MeToo allegations based on the details of the reported allegations. Figure 2 shows these data as total counts in each category. After reviewing the 255 claims listed, the authors identified two key themes among the #MeToo allegations. The first theme was a lack of consequences for harassers. Sixty-six out of 255 claims, nearly 27%, had not reported any consequences, or the reports did not officially make it to the public. Nineteen percent of the individuals were fired or removed from their roles. Individuals like CBS's Les Moonves and Google's Andy Rubin had a history of harassment and suffered few consequences prior to the #MeToo allegations (Conger, Wakabayashi, & Benner, 2018; Farrow, 2018).

In most cases, harassers were protected by their organizations because harassers were top performers who were necessary to the success of the organization. Across the allegations were repeated instances of a lack of organizational response. Ninety-eight percent of organizations have some type of sexual harassment policy and required training; however, many of these interventions are often symbolic in nature (Schulte, 2018). Training without consequence will not change these counterproductive work behaviors.

A second theme in the allegations was a failure of policy to protect victims. Instead harassers benefited from their perceived job performance. Even as the #MeToo allegations have impacted the careers of those accused of harassment, many are on the path to returning to their industries. Individuals like Louis C.K., Charlie Rose, and Mario Battali are planning returns to their organizations and to their careers, whereas the individuals they allegedly victimized have not been able
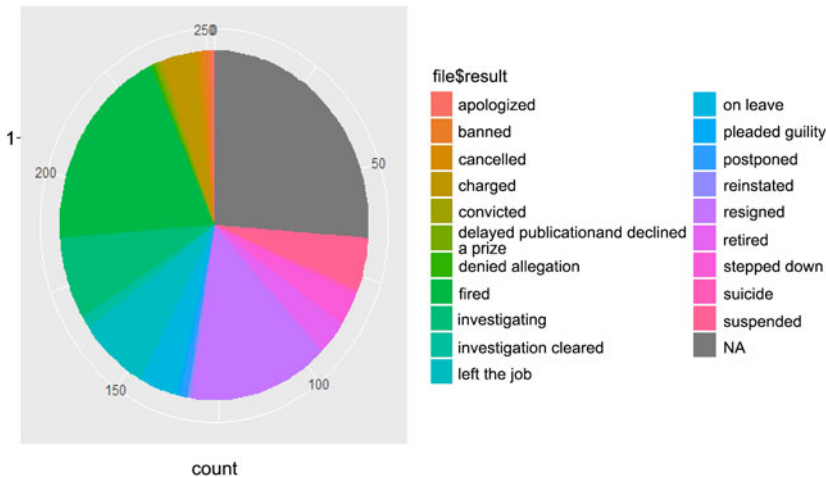
Figure 2. Organizational responses to #MeToo allegations by overall count.

to recover their careers (Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995; McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone, 2017). Consequences from perpetrating and reporting harassment diverge in powerfully different ways.

Victim consequences

Whereas harassers have faced few consequences, victims face numerous consequences both within the organization and outside the organization. As evidenced in the #MeToo allegations, many victims felt as if they had no recourse. Despite the prevalence of policies, actions taken by organizations against harassers has been minimal. Recent data indicate that only 32% of organizations have instituted new policies and initiatives in reaction to the #MeToo movement (Winerman, 2018).

Consequences for victims can extend beyond the workplace. Victims of harassment often know that reporting harassment has effects outside of the workplace (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). Harassment can derail careers (Benson &Thomson, 1982; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007), and reporting harassment can negatively affect an individual's work-related and health-related outcomes (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002). These findings indicate reporting structures that are not functioning as intended.

The lack of effective reporting structures within organizations is mirrored outside of organizations. Qualitative data from a study of online harassment (Eaton, Jacobs, & Ruvalcaba, 2017) show that individuals who wished to report did not have many options for reporting online harassment. Sexual harassment laws, policies, and training may be in place, but if reporting results in status loss among victims and not abusers, then abusers will have received protection while victims remain exposed to negative consequences.

The #MeToo course correction

For I-O psychology researchers and practitioners to address the #MeToo movement, we must first understand the nature of the movement. We have established that consequences have not been effectively implemented in organizations across harassers and accusers. This lack of consequence for harassers serves as positive reinforcement for their behavior. Eaton et al. (2017) showed evidence that the stronger the consequence around harassment behavior, the stronger it served as a deterrent. Climate and consequence are key factors in enabling harassing behavior. Experimental

research has shown that men will engage in harassing behaviors when clear signals are given around the acceptance of harassing behaviors (Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009). The consequences and climate of an organization matter in harassment.

The #MeToo movement is an attempt at creating consequences for harassers. Because existing systems of reporting, whether legal or intraorganizational, have seemingly failed to protect victims, the #MeToo movement has attempted to course correct by creating consequences through social media. By using social media to expose sexual harassment allegations, the #MeToo movement has been able to create consequences against harassers. Publicity and shaming are the tools by which organizations and individuals are punished for allowing harassment because all other routes have seemingly failed. Workers at companies from Google (Conger et al., 2018) to McDonald's (Rushe, 2018) have staged walk outs in protest of the lack of consequences for harassers. As organizational structures and reporting have failed, workers are left to act for themselves.

Ultimately, the focus of interventions should be on the transfer of training. This begs the question of what kind of transfer I-O psychology practitioners should focus on in the development of their interventions. But transfer as noted by Goldstein and Ford (2002) cannot occur unless there are clear rewards and consequences. For example, there is some research that indicates the value of bystander training (Shulte, 2018) for improving reporting. However, if reporting occurs and the organization does nothing, this intervention will have failed and a harasser will remain protected. Important questions for I-O psychology practitioners are what behavior should be expected to transfer, and how do I-O psychology practitioners create organizational policies and systems to facilitate that transfer?

What does I-O psychology offer?

With a clear understanding of both the #MeToo movement and climates within organizations that aid and abet harassers while punishing victims, I-O psychologists can be important actors in helping organizations manage this situation. I-O practitioners can offer more than training and should take a motivational approach to addressing harassment in the workplace that is rooted in behaviorism. I-O psychology practitioners can augment existing interventions with a rigorous approach that uses reinforcement theory to create workplace environments that do not reward and potentially prevent harassment.

The authors would like to make the following recommendations for I-O psychology practitioners working in the harassment space:

1. *Build effective reporting structures*. The goal of any intervention in preventing sexual harassment should include the development of effective reporting structures. The reporting process should be clear, and employees should know how and where to report harassment behavior. Both victims and bystanders should be aware of the reporting standards. These standards should be designed to protect employees and help organizations to streamline investigations and make decisions and actions on what they reveal. The reporting processes should take claims seriously and investigate claims thoroughly.

2. *Follow-through on policy*. To address the concerns of the #MeToo movement, there must be follow-through and real consequences to the actions of harassers. I-O psychology practitioners' knowledge of reinforcement theory can be an important tool in the development of policies that reward reporting behaviors and punish harassment. Policies developed and implemented because of espoused values should provide a deterrent to abhorrent counterproductive work behavior.

3. *Evaluate espoused and enacted values*. I-O psychology practitioners should evaluate their workplace climate for espoused and enacted values. Although an organization may state that it is committed to combatting sexual harassment, if the enacted values (i.e., values acted upon by the organization) do not match this espoused value (a value claimed by the

organization), then harassment may continue. I-O psychology practitioners must be aware of hidden power structures whenever they craft their interventions and should take the needs assessment process seriously in the development of any sexual harassment prevention program, whether the intervention is policy development or training.

4. *Use data to illustrate the costs of harassment.* I-O psychology practitioners must support any proposed intervention with an examination of the costs of harassment. Data around stress, lost productivity, the cost of lawsuits, and lost reputation can be compelling arguments for business owners to take sexual harassment policy more seriously. I-Os must use their data skills to augment their arguments that sexual harassment training and policy is more than a check the box exercise.

5. *Develop political skills.* I-O psychology practitioners must develop greater political skills within their organizations. This is especially important when dealing with a sensitive issue of power like sexual harassment. As Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope, and Hodson (2008) note, "Organizational attributes influence not only the presence of workplace sexual harassment but also the specific form in which it manifests," to address these concerns, I-O psychology practitioners must exercise their political skills to build the case for organizational change. Without buy-in from top leadership, this type of intervention will not be successful.

We thank the authors of the focal article for bringing this important issue to the forefront of the discussion of I-O psychology issues. We hope that I-O psychology practitioners respond positively to the call of this commentary and to the #MeToo movement. I-O psychology has a long humanist tradition (Lefkowitz, 2017). In remembrance of these values, we hope that I-O psychology practitioners address the issues of harassment at work to create healthier workplaces where employees can thrive without fear of abuse.

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