

Chapter 18

The Gendered Nature of Workplace Mistreatment

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There is a fairly vast literature on workplace violence and aggression; two entire books recently were published on the topic (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly, 2004; Kelloway, Barling, & Hurrell, 2006). A gap exists, however, in the analysis of the gendered nature of such experiences. Although empirical and theoretical accounts have appeared here and there, an overview of this scattered work is due. Hence, our goal for the present chapter is to provide a summary of the research and thinking on ways in which workplace violence and aggression are gendered phenomena.

Why is a gendered lens on this issue of value? Although workplace aggression and violence are important to organizations due to its negative impact on employee well-being (and, ostensibly, on overall productivity), it does not affect men and women equally. A recent meta-analysis of 57 studies showed that men were more likely than women to be aggressive at work (Hershcovis et al., 2007). Further, in a study of attorneys practicing in US federal courts, nearly 75% of female attorneys, but only 50% of male attorneys, reported having experienced some intermix of incivility and sexual harassment in the previous 5 years (Cortina et al., 2002). Why are there such stable and significant differences? Readers of this volume might not even consider such a question necessary, and we certainly do not want to “preach to the choir” and provide what might seem like an endless list of statistics and theories. But, for those who perhaps are first-time consumers of this literature, we offer the following summary.

Conceptual Space of Workplace Mistreatment

Before we go any further, we want to be sure that we are clear in what we mean by “workplace mistreatment.” There are several conceptually overlapping forms of workplace mistreatment, and it is important to understand the similarities and differences among them before we discuss issues of gender more specifically. Types of workplace mistreatment abound in the literature, including incivility (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999), deviance (e.g., Bennett & Robinson, 2000), aggression (e.g., Neuman & Baron, 1997), bullying (e.g., Rayner & Hoel, 1997), and sexual harassment (e.g., Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995).

Andersson and Pearson (1999) developed a framework specifically for the purposes of differentiating and defining workplace incivility, but it is also useful for making sense of some of the several classes of mistreatment. In an overlapping Ven diagram, they fit several kinds of mistreatment into the larger conceptual areas of antisocial and deviant behaviors. Robinson and Bennett

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(1995) defined organizational deviance as behaviors that “violate significant organizational norms” (p. 556). Thus, the common thread among several forms of mistreatment is that they are antisocial and, thus, have the capability of harming an organization and/or its members, and they violate workplace norms.

Andersson and Pearson (1999) further differentiated among aggression, violence, and incivility. According to their framework, violence is a specific form of aggression because it is a high-intensity, physically aggressive behavior with intent to harm the target, in contrast to incivility, which is a *low*-intensity deviant behavior with *ambiguous* intent. Thus, some acts of incivility may be deliberately aggressive; for example, a worker might deliberately make a rude comment to a coworker. Other incivility acts, however, are not meant to harm the target. For example, a worker might not notice a colleague’s greeting and that colleague may take it as a personal slight.

There are other forms of workplace mistreatment mentioned in the literature that are not included in Andersson and Pearson’s (1999) diagram but fit into this framework as well. For example, one particular form of workplace mistreatment that has received increased attention is workplace bullying. It is one of the only forms of workplace mistreatment, besides sexual harassment, to receive attention in legal circles (e.g., Tuna, 2008). The study of workplace bullying began in Scandinavia (e.g., Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1990) and soon spread to other European countries (e.g., Lee, 2000; Quine, 2001; Rayner & Hoel, 1997). It has been defined as a kind of aggressive behavior that occurs at least once per week for at least 6 months and involves either a structural or an interpersonal power imbalance between the target and the instigator(s) (e.g., Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). Rayner and Hoel (1997) defined five categories of bullying that include threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, isolation, overwork, and destabilization. Given that bullying occurs with the intent to harm the target, it can be considered a pervasive form of aggression that overlaps somewhat with incivility.

Sexual harassment is another form of workplace mistreatment that has been discussed in gendered ways. The psychological definition of sexual harassment (i.e., unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive or threatening; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997) has traditionally included three types of harassment: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Fitzgerald, Shullman, Bailey, & Richards, 1988). Gender harassment consists of any behaviors that convey misogynist or homophobic attitudes. Unwanted sexual attention, as the name implies, is any kind of sexual attention that is unwanted and unreciprocated. These first two kinds of sexual harassment are what would fall under the legal definition of a *hostile working environment*. The last type of harassment, sexual coercion, mirrors the legal term *quid pro quo*, which involves attempts to make job rewards contingent on sexual cooperation.

Sexual harassment is, thus, another form of antisocial, deviant workplace behavior that can be relatively high in intensity, and the intent to harm the target is present. What differentiates it from other forms of high-intensity, calculated forms of mistreatment (e.g., aggression) is that it is sexualized in nature – either by subtly demeaning members of a certain sex (or sexual orientation) or by more blatantly using sexual attention in an inappropriate and/or intimidating manner.

In sum, the number of possible constructs in the larger workplace aggression and violence literature exceeds what we can possibly manage within a single chapter. Hence, given the legal importance of sexual harassment and workplace bullying, as well as our own specializations in sexual harassment and incivility, we focus our chapter on these three constructs. As we are able, and as appropriate, we also include relevant research on the umbrella area of workplace aggression.

Chapter Overview

We begin our summary of the literature with a discussion of theories about the etiology of each of these forms of mistreatment, and we focus particularly on theories that emphasize, or are relevant to, gender. Note that complete descriptions of the origins of each of these theories appear elsewhere in the literature; for example, see Cortina and Berdahl (2008) on sexual harassment or either of the books (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly, 2004; Kelloway et al., 2006) mentioned earlier for general aggression summaries. Next, we review the research findings on gender differences in incidence of workplace mistreatment, as this information certainly forms the basis for why the larger topic is relevant to gender studies. We then move on to the more psychological studies of the process by which these negative experiences impact targets. We consider how men and women appraise their experiences differently, as well as how they are differently affected. Although we raise questions for future research throughout the chapter, we conclude with a few more broad-brushed thoughts on the directions for this area of research.

Gendered Frameworks of the Antecedents of Workplace Mistreatment

Until psychologists and employers have an understanding of the causes of workplace mistreatment, they cannot even begin to intervene in any systematic or potentially successful manner. Hence, we begin with gendered frameworks for understanding the antecedents of workplace mistreatment. Given the complexity of the different types of mistreatment, we consider them one by one, beginning with sexual harassment.

Sexual Harassment

Although researchers have suggested a number of factors that lead to sexual harassment, one of the most frequently cited contributing factors is power – whether this is in the form of the status of the perpetrator or the desire to dominate the target (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Timmerman & Bajema, 2000; Wayne, 2000).¹ Recent research suggests that sexual harassment occurs as a means of protecting one’s gender-related social status. Specifically, Berdahl (2007a, p. 641) argued that sexual harassment “derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual’s sex” and that harassers engage in such behavior to protect their own sex-based social status. What exactly does this mean? Social status is derived in a number of ways, and one such way is through gender. Being part of one gender group or another can be an empowering or a disempowering experience simply because of the rewards or punishments that accompany being female or male. More men than women tend to reap the benefits associated with gender, as is obvious in any consideration of societal and organizational disparities (e.g., laws that punish women but not men for the same acts, unequal pay between the sexes, a greater number of men in leadership positions in organizations). To maintain this position of power associated with “maleness,” some men will sexually harass women as a means of preventing women from infiltrating the dominant social position in society and, more specifically, at work. Women who

¹Although there is a small body of research that documents harassment from less to more empowered individuals, known as contrapower harassment (e.g., DeSouza & Fansler, 2003; McKinney, 1990), we focus here on the more common occurrence of harassment that originates from someone with greater power.

challenge men by displaying traditionally masculine characteristics or by successfully navigating male-dominated cultures may be particularly susceptible to this hostile form of harassment (Berdahl, 2007a).

It is important to note that sexual desire is missing from discussions of sex-based harassment, and this omission is certainly purposeful. Harassment based on maintaining the existing gender hierarchy is thought to have little to do with sexual attraction and everything to do with dominance and power. Although the layperson's understanding of sexual harassment may include notions of love spurned or romantic requests unrequited, Berdahl (2007a, 2007b) noted that some forms of sexual expression at work may be benign and in some instances may be conducive to building positive relationships. It is certainly not uncommon to hear stories of spouses who first met on the job. Of course, the notion that certain sexual behaviors can be viewed by targets as flattering or welcome further complicates our understanding of why sexual harassment occurs and what constitutes sexual harassment from the perspective of the target (e.g., Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999). Greater understanding of this appraisal process is long overdue and is particularly relevant to a gender analysis of the ample literature that documents gender differences in perceptions of harassment severity (c.f., meta-analysis by Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001).

Incivility

Theoretical frameworks are noticeably absent from the incivility literature. However, an exception that is relevant here, as it incorporates gender, is Cortina's (2008) recent theory of selective incivility. In it, she suggested that, under certain circumstances, these subtly rude behaviors can be forms of rogue sexism (and/or racism). Based on the social psychological literature on modern discrimination, the main idea of this theory is that, because modern society does not accept and even punishes overt sexism, instigators who hold sexist beliefs may engage in *selective incivility* by mistreating the targets of their beliefs (e.g., a man with sexist attitudes toward women targets only women). Incivility is not overtly sexist in and of itself because these behaviors are simply rude and discourteous and not gendered in nature, but, because of the instigator's underlying beliefs and motives, selective incivility can be labeled covert sexism.

In her multi-level theory, Cortina (2008) discussed person-, organization-, and societal-level predictors of selective incivility. She also discussed the potential interaction between person and organization by suggesting that, for example, covert discrimination (under the guise of incivility) can occur when workers do not necessarily hold sexist beliefs but are members of an organization that seems to promote such beliefs. In an effort to preserve their own identity ("I'm not sexist") but to fit in with their workplace, such individuals may engage in selective incivility.

Cortina's (2008) selective incivility theory makes several important contributions in the understanding of how gender, race, and incivility intersect. First of all, simply exploring this intersection is a contribution by itself, as it is an oft-neglected area for incivility researchers. It also provides a framework for understanding why women, and particularly women of color, may be especially vulnerable to modern day discrimination. By taking a perpetrator's perspective, which is something that is not often done in this area of research, Cortina (2008) provided a mechanism for understanding *why* individuals might engage in incivility. The theory also suggests the idea that, even though it may be harder to pinpoint, discrimination does continue to exist in modern organizations, and selective incivility should be taken just as seriously as its less subtle counterparts (e.g., sexual harassment). Of course, from a practical standpoint, pinpointing selective incivility in organizations may be difficult because, to put it simply – how can we see something that, given its ambiguity, is hidden? However, the challenge of removing the mask of unseen injustice is a worthwhile endeavor.

Indeed, there are several challenges for researchers who want to study the relationship between gender and incivility. Future theoretical work should build upon selective incivility theory by answering such questions as the following: Are there other gendered motives, besides discrimination, for engaging in incivility? What about organizational power issues? Are there inherent gender differences that make the experience of incivility different for women and men? Clearly, the next-generation of incivility researchers have the potential to do quite interesting work with a gendered lens.

Buss' Framework of Aggression

Most research on workplace bullying and aggression concerns the antecedents that contribute to such behavior and the resulting outcomes. For example, Neuman and Baron (1998) proposed a three-part model that includes an extensive list of social (e.g., unfair treatment, norm violations), situational (e.g., electronic performance monitoring, downsizing), and individual (e.g., Type A personality, low self-monitoring) antecedents to aggression. In addition, Glomb (2002) examined antecedents (e.g., job-related stress, organizational injustice) and individual-level outcomes (e.g., job-related stress, need to "get away" from work environment). Although these models of aggression are certainly helpful, they tell us little about the role of gender in contributing to aggressive behavior.

More to the point, no formalized theoretical discussions of the gendered nature of other forms of workplace mistreatment (e.g., aggression, deviance, bullying) exist, despite empirical studies of whether men and women differ in their experiences of such behaviors, either as perpetrators or targets. Although we summarize this material later in the chapter, here we want to consider briefly how one typology of aggression – Buss' (1961) aggression framework – might be useful in understanding the role of gender in workplace mistreatment. Specifically, Buss proposed that aggression can be viewed in three dichotomies: active–passive, physical–verbal, and direct–indirect. Active aggression perpetrators inflict harm to the target through various actions such as criticizing, insulting, or threatening, whereas passive perpetrators are more likely to withhold information that is important to the target. Physical forms of aggression include assaulting the target, whereas verbal forms of aggression include yelling, swearing, and insults. Finally, direct forms of aggression are intended to harm the target directly, whereas indirect forms of aggression are intended to cause injury to something the target values (e.g., yelling at the target versus yelling at the target's child).

What does Buss' framework have to do with gender? Given the traditional social expectation for women to comply with social demands instead of expressing stereotypically masculine traits such as anger and aggression (Kopper & Epperson, 1996), it would not be surprising to find that women are more likely to engage in verbal, passive, and indirect forms of aggression, whereas men are more likely to engage in physical, direct, and active aggression. According to social role theory, physical, cultural, ecological, and socioeconomic contexts pressure women and men to behave in accordance with their designated roles in society (Eagly & Mitchell, 2004). Within patriarchal societies, men typically assume roles with greater status and power. Given this power, men may have an easier time engaging in aggressive behaviors without negative consequence to themselves (i.e., getting away with the aggressive behaviors) and may even be expected to engage in such behaviors. Further, societal expectations of men and women may explain why women who behave aggressively experience fear and anxiety regarding their actions (Douglas & Martinko, 2001).

More research is needed to illuminate how gender influences experiences and perpetration of workplace aggression. Not only would this aid in our understanding of perpetrators and targets, but

it would also help to determine whether women and men engage in different types of aggression and, if so, what the outcomes of that aggression are.

Contextual Influences on Mistreatment

Although social roles and norms have been implicated in the above analysis of gender and workplace aggression, the workplace context in and of itself can certainly affect the incidence and experience of mistreatment. Specifically, one's workgroup may be a particularly influential part of the experience and/or the perpetration of mistreatment. Glomb (2002) found that angry feelings or experiences in workgroup settings escalated to more damaging aggression. As one member of a workgroup experiences mistreatment of some form, others are simultaneously exposed to the same behavior, even if it is not directed at them. These subtle experiences are known as *ambient stimuli*, or stimuli that are potentially available to all group members. The pervasive impact of a workgroup on individuals' attitudes and behaviors may be due to ambient stimuli such that workgroup members' actions act as cues to others about what will and will not be tolerated within the group (Hackman, 1992), which ultimately has the potential to perpetuate and/or escalate the mistreatment.

Similarly, George (1990) found that workgroups are often characterized by a particular affective tone or consistent affective reaction. For example, groups that are composed of individuals who tend to be enthusiastic and excited could be characterized as groups with a positive affective tone. In regard to mistreatment, if hostility, anger, harassment, and/or incivility are consistently present in individual members of a workgroup, the workgroup can be said to have a negative affective tone, which could inhibit positive and foster negative behaviors (George, 1990; Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998).

In addition to the influence of the workgroup, the larger organizational climate may impact targets' experiences of, and potential perpetration of, mistreatment. Considerable work has been done on the impact of organizations' climate on the incidence of sexual harassment. Specifically, sexual harassment is less prevalent within positive social climates and when women and men work in gender-equitable climates (Timmerman & Bajema, 2000). Furthermore, organizations that create climates that do not tolerate and clearly discourage harassment through rules, policies, and procedures have lower incidence of sexual harassment than other organizations do (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, & Magley, 1999; Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999). Perceptions of an intolerant climate not only predict respondents' reports of their own sexual harassment experiences but also that of their workgroup members (Glomb et al., 1997), which provides reassurance that the results reviewed above are not simply response bias artifacts.

Although none of the above contextual factors explicitly incorporates gender, there are several studies that suggest that the context is experienced differently by men and women. Fitzgerald and colleagues (1999) found that organizational tolerance of sexual harassment is a somewhat stronger predictor of sexual harassment for women (path coefficient = 0.39) than for men (path coefficient = 0.24). Similarly, Bergman and Henning (2008) found that gender moderated the same perceived tolerance–sexual harassment relationship such that the relationship was considerably stronger for women (0.63) than for men (0.18). Further, recent research has shown that women who worked in a climate intolerant of sexual harassment but who, nonetheless, found themselves sexually harassed suffered from intensified negative work-related outcomes (e.g., lower job satisfaction and affective commitment, greater job withdrawal; Kath, Swody, Magley, Bunk, & Gallus, 2009).

Gendered Profiles of Targets and Perpetrators

There is more gender research in the area of incidence and perpetration of workplace mistreatment. It is to this literature that we now turn.

Incivility

Research on general, rude experiences in the workplace has shown that approximately 70% of respondents report experiences of incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Women are more likely to be the recipients of incivility (Cortina et al., 2001), and men are more likely to be the perpetrators (e.g., Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). In their groundbreaking study on incivility, Pearson, Andersson, and Porath (2000) found that men were twice as likely as women to be instigators. In addition, men were seven times more likely to perpetrate incivility when the target was of lower status, whereas women were just as likely to behave uncivilly to their superiors as they were to their subordinates (Pearson et al., 2000). This pattern demonstrates that women's perpetration of incivility may be based more on individual than contextual variables as such experiences do not seem to be linked to organizational power or status.

What can we make of the incongruence between the genders in terms of who behaves uncivilly? Does the greater perpetration of incivility by men suggest that they are by nature more rude? One possible explanation for this difference is that women are more likely to rate potentially uncivil experiences as offensive or rude (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). It is also possible that the higher incidence of perpetration by men reflects society's greater tolerance for men to treat others in a manner that is normally considered unacceptable. It is interesting that other preliminary research in this area suggests that men who work in an organizational climate that tolerates incivility are more likely than women to perpetrate it. Women's rudeness is more apt to be related to their own uncivil experiences, whereas men are more influenced by organizational norms for such behaviors (Gallus, Matthews, Bunk, Barnes-Farrell, & Magley, 2006).

Bullying

Research indicates that 4–5% of employees are targets of bullying and that the bullying lasts, on average, about 3 years (Rayner & Hoel, 1997). Unlike incivility, which may come from subordinates, peers, or managers, most targets of bullying report that the mistreatment comes from someone with greater organizational status – usually their direct manager or a senior manager in the company (Adams, 1997; Rayner, 1997). The gender of the perpetrators reflects the management structure of most organizations; the rate of female perpetrators is lower than that of male perpetrators, which may be due to the fact that women occupy fewer management positions than men do.

Results of research on targets of bullying and gender are mixed. A study of bullying in a university setting indicated that women reported having been targets more often than men did (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994), yet it is unclear whether these results would translate to more traditional work settings. Other researchers have found that women and men experience similar incidence rates of bullying (Rayner & Hoel, 1997; Vartia & Hytti, 2002). Although this may be the case in most work settings, Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2001) found that gender impacts bullying dynamics at higher organizational levels. For instance, female senior managers were more than twice as likely as their male counterparts to experience bullying. The intensity of such experiences was also more

severe for women, as 4.5% reported having been bullied on a regular basis, but none of the men did (Hoel et al., 2001).

One finding that is consistent across the bullying research is that men are more likely to be targeted by other men than by women (Lewis & Orford, 2005; Rayner & Hoel, 1997). Whether this is due to actual bullying rates or because of men's reluctance to label bullying from women as such remains to be seen. In addition, the prevalence of same-sex bullying of men (62.2%) is much higher than that of same-sex bullying of women (37.3%; Hoel et al., 2001).

Sexual Harassment

Given that, on average, men tend to have more power than do women in Western societies, it is no surprise that the majority of harassment occurs from men to women. This has been the most extensively studied type of what is referred to as "opposite-sex" sexual harassment (OSSH; Stockdale, Visio, & Batra, 1999). Estimates of men's sexual harassment of women in the workplace usually range from 40 to 80% (Firestone & Harris, 2003). This broad range may be explained by the greater incidence of sexual harassment in certain types of organizations, particularly those with definitive hierarchies and power differentials (e.g., the military; Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003).

Significantly less is known about the other type of OSSH, that is, women's harassment of men, although researchers have offered a few explanations for such behavior. The first explanation mirrors Berdahl's (2007a) sex-based harassment theory and suggests that men who threaten women's sex-based status are more likely to be sexually harassed by women. This is certainly an unusual kind of sex-based harassment in that women generally have less social power than men do. It is possible that such harassment is more prevalent in female-dominated arenas, such as child care or nursing, in an attempt to keep men from progressing in areas where women are traditionally viewed as more competent. It is also possible that women's harassment of men is a form of approach-based harassment (Stockdale, Gandolfo-Berry, Schneider, & Cao, 2004) or harassment that consists of sexual advances or unwanted sexual attention. This is unlikely, though, as men seldom view the sexual advances of women as bothersome or harassing (Berdahl, 2007a; Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996). Despite these possibilities, the harassment of men by women warrants further empirical examination so that we can understand what motivates such behavior.

If sex-based harassment is intended to help one gender group maintain their status over another, how, then, do we explain same-sex sexual harassment (SSSH; Stockdale et al., 1999)? Although women are the traditional targets of sexual harassment, SSSH is more prevalent among men. In fact, a study of federal employees showed that nearly 21% of men's harassment was done by other men, whereas only 1–3% of women's harassment was done by other women (US Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981, 1995). Magley and colleagues (Magley, Waldo, Drasgow, & Fitzgerald, 1999) found similar results in a military sample: 52% of men's harassment was perpetrated by other men, but less than 2% of women's harassment was perpetrated by other women. At first glance, one might assume that the higher rate of SSSH for men is indicative of homosexuality. Although there is some debate as to the motivation behind such harassment, the great majority of research suggests that the sexual harassment of men by other men is a form of rejection-based harassment in which the perpetrator attempts to punish or humiliate the target (Magley, Waldo, et al., 1999; Stockdale et al., 2004; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald, 1998). This is typically done as a means of "gender policing" or forcing the target to conform to stereotypical or exaggerated gender roles. In the case of man-to-man harassment, gender policing may be done to assure that men are maintaining hypermasculine standards, which have to do with antifemininity, dominance, and subordination of women (Stockdale et al., 1999; Stockdale et al., 2004). Enforcement of the heterosexual masculine

gender role is a means some men use to maintain the superiority of men in general; men who are not considered “manly” or who exhibit characteristics associated with femininity (e.g., nurturing, passive, sensitive) are punished (Magley, Waldo, et al., 1999). The emphasis on the ultra-masculine in man-to-man harassment has led some researchers to refer to such behavior as “not man enough” harassment (Berdahl, 2007a).

The majority of sexual harassment research has been focused on the most prevalent type of harassment, that is, OSSH with the man as the perpetrator and the woman as the target. Although this is certainly understandable considering incidence rates, future researchers should continue to explore SSSH of both men and women. Special attention should be paid to women’s SSSH, given that we know so little about this type of harassment. Given the low incidence rates of SSSH for women, being a target of such harassment may be a very isolating and detrimental experience. In addition, akin to the development of the SSSH construct for men, more work needs to be done in terms of defining what constitutes SSSH for women. Perhaps the existing constructs of sexual harassment experiences do not fully capture the type of harassment that occurs from woman to woman, which could give the false impression that the incidence rates of this type of harassment are very low.

Workplace Aggression/Violence

What do we know about the perpetrators of workplace violence and aggression? For one, men are more likely than women to engage in aggression, whether physical or psychological (e.g., Baron, Neuman, & Geddes, 1999; Rutter & Hine, 2005; for a meta-analysis, see Hershcovis et al., 2007). Men are also more likely than women to view aggression as acceptable behavior (Douglas & Martinko, 2001). In fact, men are more likely than women are to seek revenge, perhaps because gender norms make such behavior more socially acceptable for men (Douglas & Martinko, 2001). Although social role theory predicts these gender differences in perpetration of aggression, the same theoretical explanation is not supported for gender differences in the expression of anger. Specifically, some studies have shown that women are more likely than men to express anger and hostility, whereas other studies have found no differences (Kopper & Epperson, 1996).

What are the characteristics of the perpetrators of workplace violence and aggression? Researchers have found that trait anger, attitude toward revenge, and previous exposure to aggressive cultures contribute to workplace aggression (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001). Perpetrators are described as hot tempered and have been found to have a difficult time controlling their anger (Glomb, 2002). The perception that someone is threatening their self-esteem or position in the organization can also precipitate perpetration (Glomb, 2002). Past antisocial behavior and alcohol or drug abuse also contribute to violence and aggression at work (Elliott & Jarrett, 1994; Jockin, Arvey, & McGue, 2001; LeBlanc & Barling, 2004).

Although incidents of workplace violence and aggression appear, on the surface, to be gender blind in terms of victimization, there are still a number of factors that contribute to being targeted (Budd, Arvey, & Lawless, 1996). Individuals who work at night or in the early morning, work alone, or have jobs where they must protect valuable assets are more likely to be killed on the job, whereas supervisors and those who handle cash are more likely to be threatened but not physically attacked (Budd et al., 1996). As noted by LeBlanc and Barling (2004), the most extreme workplace aggression, or what the majority of people would consider workplace violence (e.g., homicide, physical assault), is perpetrated by outsiders. The US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reported that homicide was the second leading cause of job-related deaths in the United States in 1993, and this was also the case in a study by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1995 (Schat & Kelloway, 2000).

Reactions to Workplace Mistreatment

It would not be a bold statement to claim that different people react differently to similar workplace mistreatment encounters. This idea is central to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal theory, which suggests that, as we attempt to make meaning of the events that occur in our lives, cognitive appraisal is a key part of this meaning-making system. An appraisal is essentially an evaluation of an encounter. For example, when people experience workplace mistreatment, they may ask themselves: "Did this bother me? How much? Will this happen again? Was it my fault? Can I cope with this?" The answers to these questions will determine the individual's reactions, both proximal and distal, to this event. Cognitive appraisal theory thus serves as a very useful framework for exploring potential gender differences in reactivity to mistreatment.

Appraisal Processes

One form of appraisal identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is primary appraisal. This is an evaluation of how much a particular encounter actually matters to one's well-being. Some encounters may be appraised as benign because the individual does not think the experience caused any harm. Other encounters may be appraised as stressful because they are harmful or threatening. In addition, for an encounter to be appraised as stressful, the individual needs to *notice* its potentially harmful aspects.

Research findings relevant to gender and the primary appraisal of mistreatment experiences suggest that women are more sensitive to their interpersonal environments than men are. For example, in what is now considered classic work in nonverbal communication, Hall (1987) demonstrated that women are better than men at noticing and reading nonverbal interpersonal cues. Thus, women may be more likely than men to notice subtle nonverbal cues that may indicate mistreatment, especially when the mistreatment is of low intensity and ambiguous, such as with incivility. Men may be less likely to *notice* subtle mistreatment when it is happening to them (and others), and, therefore, they may be less likely to appraise these kinds of situations as stressful. There is some empirical evidence to support this claim, as it has been found that women are more likely than men to assess mistreatment experiences as offensive and/or inappropriate (e.g., Hendrick, Hendrick, Slapion-Foote, & Foote, 1985; Konrad & Gutek, 1986; Montgomery, Kane, & Vance, 2004). We should be clear here – the message is not that women are "too sensitive" and/or "can't take the heat," but that, because they are more sensitive to their interpersonal environments, they may more readily notice and understand the subtleties that often constitute mistreatment.

Another explanation that is relevant to cognitive appraisal for why there may be gender differences in reactivity to mistreatment has to do with organizational power – and the fact that women often have relatively little of it. Tiedens, Ellsworth, and Mesquita (2000) have used social stereotypes to explain the effects that social hierarchies have on appraisals. Because of what they call "sentimental stereotypes," high-status workers are perceived more positively than low-status workers, and, consequently, low-status workers are more likely to be blamed for negative events. As mentioned above, part of cognitive appraisal involves asking questions about fault and coping potential. In a situation where a male supervisor mistreats a female subordinate, she may think that it was her fault ("I brought this on. I deserved it.") and/or she may believe, because of her lack of power, that she has few resources to cope with the mistreatment. Thus, we cannot ignore the powerful role that organizational status can play in shaping women's and men's appraisals of, and reactions to, workplace mistreatment.

Note that the operative word in the previous sentence is “can.” In contrast to the substantial literature on research participants’ perceptions of hypothetical mistreatment experiences (see Rotundo et al., 2001, for a meta-analysis of this research), there simply is very little research on targets’ appraisals of their own experiences and how those appraisals might influence their responses and outcomes. Cortina and Magley (2009) recently examined overall appraisals of incivility, and they found that this form of mistreatment does trigger mildly negative appraisals, most notably annoyance and frustration. On the other hand, sexual harassment appraisals have been found to be more offensive and upsetting; Schneider, Swan, and Fitzgerald (1997) reported that over one-half of the women in their samples who had experienced sexual harassment labeled their experiences as such. Men, on the other hand, rated their sexual harassment experiences, on average, as “not at all” to “slightly upsetting” (Waldo et al., 1998). Unfortunately, there is no research to date that explicitly compares how men and women appraise workplace mistreatment; future research might benefit from such a comparison.

Coping Processes

Once workplace mistreatment is, indeed, noticed, targets determine whether and how to respond to the treatment. As Ben-Zur and Yagil (2005, p. 84) aptly stated, “a variety of coping strategies are used in dealing with aggressive behaviours in the workplace.” Their brief review of coping with workplace mistreatment – including bullying, verbal aggression, and sexual harassment – demonstrates that employees use a full range of coping strategies to manage their experiences, including avoiding the perpetrator, requesting assistance either from organizational representatives or friends and family, and even quitting the job. Cortina and Magley (2009) found a similar range of coping responses to experiences of workplace incivility.

We strongly believe that it is important to emphasize that there is no “right” way to cope with experiences of mistreatment. Some individuals may feel more comfortable using active coping strategies, such as standing up to the perpetrator or seeking social support, whereas other targets may employ passive strategies, such as minimizing or denying the importance of their experiences. Despite the number of coping methods available to targets of mistreatment, organizations tend to favor (or at least purport to favor) assertive responses to mistreatment. Unfortunately, many of these organizations encourage such responses yet fail to take individual characteristics (e.g., comfort with being assertive) or organizational factors (e.g., perpetrator power, climate for mistreatment) into account (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002). As Magley (2002, p. 944) noted, the “appropriate” response to mistreatment is often thought to be assertion, and targets who do not cope assertively are judged accordingly:

One consequence of framing women’s responses purely as a continuum of assertiveness is that responses other than assertiveness can be interpreted as weakness on the part of the recipient or evidence that she did not handle it properly.

Research from the general coping literature suggests that, although women utilize virtually all coping strategies more frequently than men do, when researchers control for each individual’s coping frequency overall, women and men cope in gender-stereotyped ways: Women emotive and men act (Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002). Hence, the expectation that women should assert themselves by standing up to their perpetrator or by reporting the behavior to their managers leaves such women in a double-bind. Given stereotypical gender roles, reporting may not be the best course of action for women, as acting outside of gender expectations is often viewed negatively (Eagly & Mitchell,

2004). This may explain in part why, in response to bullying, men are more likely than women to use assertive strategies (Olafsson & Johannsdotir, 2004).

In regard to sexual harassment, Gruber and Smith (1995) noted that the majority of women respond with non-assertive techniques such as minimization or avoidance. The current laws regarding sexual harassment reflect the burden that is unduly placed on targets in terms of expectations for how they should cope with their experiences. In 1998, the US Supreme Court established the "affirmative defense" to sexual harassment by declaring that organizations would not be liable for sexual harassment claims if the target did not make reasonable attempts to use established organizational complaint procedures (Bergman et al., 2002). However, recent studies have demonstrated that negative outcomes of sexual harassment are often exacerbated when targets report and that reporting may *not* in fact be a "reasonable" course of action for most targets (Bergman et al., 2002; Gruber & Smith, 1995); this was found to be particularly true for male targets in a secondary analysis of the US Merit Systems data conducted by Stockdale (1998). Assertiveness is generally used when the harassment is severe, when the perpetrator is someone other than the target's supervisor, and when the gender composition of the group is skewed such that the target works in a group of mostly men. Unfortunately, little is known about differences in sexual harassment reporting between men and women, given the few studies on the sexual harassment experiences of men.

Companies should first assess organizational culture and climate to ascertain whether assertive responses and/or reporting would be tolerated in the organization. It is likely that in organizations where assertive responses are deemed unacceptable (whether formally or informally), targets who assert and/or report could suffer a variety of negative consequences (e.g., decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment; increased work and job withdrawal). Also, organizations ought to consider individual characteristics of the target before touting the benefits of particular coping strategies. For example, companies that promote the use of assertive responses to mistreatment may actually be inducing stress in individuals who are not naturally assertive. The act of standing up to or reporting the perpetrator may be more stressful than the mistreatment itself for such individuals. Unfortunately, though, Cortina and Magley (2003) found that targets of high-frequency workplace mistreatment who did not speak out about their experiences suffered the greatest psychological and physical harm.

More research is needed on how targets cope with workplace mistreatment – particularly in light of how coping is thought to buffer the stress associated with such experiences. One serious limitation in the present research is that it lacks a common framework from which clear generalizations can be based. Perhaps the most widely used assessment within the general stress and coping literature is the COPE (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989), which is both theoretically and empirically solid. The health psychology literature provides some insights into two coping-related constructs that might be of value for organizational researchers to examine: meaning making and optimism. Individuals who have found meaning (i.e., an enhanced appreciation for life and recognition of its fragility; Bower, Kemeny, Taylor, & Fahey, 2003) in the midst of tragedy fare better than those who became overwhelmed by the traumatic event. Those who have heightened optimism also fare better than those with a more pessimistic outlook (Stanton, Revensen, & Tennen, 2007). For example, breast cancer patients who found meaning in their diagnosis were more likely to experience positive emotions (Bower et al., 2005), and those who were more optimistic were found to have better adjustment 1 year after the diagnosis (Stanton et al., 2007). Consideration of how the targets of workplace mistreatment might benefit from finding meaning in their experiences – perhaps in developing compassion for others suffering from similar mistreatment or propelling targets to change the dynamics of their workgroup or the larger organization – could be an interesting avenue for future research. In addition, as it is thought that heightened levels of optimism increase an individual's propensity to seek social support as well as to practice approach-oriented coping strategies, an examination

of whether greater optimism facilitates how targets discuss their experiences with supportive others and with organizational representatives (e.g., Human Resource professionals) could also prove interesting. Certainly, adding gender to the mix in both of these areas could only be helpful.

Escalating Aggression

A final reaction to workplace mistreatment that we need to consider is the possibility of further, potentially even worse, aggression. In particular, it is worth highlighting that mistreatment experiences do not occur in a vacuum. It takes (at least) two people to form a mistreatment episode, and it is possible that milder forms of mistreatment (e.g., incivility) can spiral into more severe forms (e.g., physical violence). Such a social interactionist approach (e.g., Felson & Tedeschi, 1993), which highlights the motives and actions of both the actor and the target, was taken by Andersson and Pearson (1999) in their work on the incivility spiral. They discussed how mild incivility can spiral out of control due to the desire to retaliate and save face. Thus, the initial actor can become the target, and this can lead to severe forms of mistreatment, such as physical violence. Although the idea that such spirals occur in workplaces certainly makes theoretical sense, it is not very well established empirically, in part because workplace violence incident rates are quite low. Privacy issues might also prevent our complete understanding of the spiral process as assessments of the motives and experiences of both parties are difficult to procure.

Although Andersson and Pearson (1999) did not explicitly address gender issues, they did discuss topics that have the potential to be gendered. For example, one of the fuels that fires the incivility spiral is the need for revenge, and revenge is a traditionally masculine motivation. This begs the questions of whether men may be more likely than women to engage in spiraling. Indeed, Pearson and Porath (2005) found that, when targeted with incivility, men are more likely than women to engage in retribution. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to avoid the instigator. Pearson and Porath concluded that the worst case scenario might be two men who take turns being actor and target, as the intensity of the mistreatment heightens each time they switch roles.

Does this mean, then, that, in order to curtail incivility spirals in work environments, men need to learn how to tone down their instinct to seek revenge? This is admittedly a bit of a stretch, but playing Devil's Advocate can raise some interesting points. First, we have to remember that we are dealing with survey results. Just because men *report* engaging in retribution more often than women do does not mean that it actually happens. Further, we also have to remember that, even if men do engage in retribution more often than women do, turning the incivility spiral (and other potential mistreatment problems in organizations) into a "men's issue" belies the larger organizational context in which mistreatment occurs. For example, as mentioned previously, climate can play a large role in guiding people's actions. If two men engage in mistreatment in a workplace climate where these kinds of behaviors are not tolerated, their actions may be less likely to spiral out of control than would be the case in a climate where these behaviors are accepted. The message for organizations, then, is to reflect carefully on how much civility, respect, and fair treatment *truly* are valued and rewarded in their workplace.

The Impact of Workplace Mistreatment: Is It the Same for Women and Men?

Perhaps one of the most important reasons that workplace mistreatment is a concern is its broad negative effects. Not only are there negative consequences for the victims of workplace mistreatment, but there is increased awareness that witnesses are also negatively affected and that there is

damage to larger organizational processes and general employee behavior. The meta-analytic evidence of the impact of generalized harassment (Bowling & Beehr, 2006) and sexual harassment (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007) is irrefutable; both damage targets' work satisfaction and commitment, as well as their physical and emotional well-being. Given that Glomb and Cortina (2006) have recently reviewed these general, negative consequences in great detail, in this final section we focus particularly on gender differences within this literature. Although in previous sections of this chapter we have addressed specific forms of workplace mistreatment separately, there is simply not enough research to make that demarcation an effective one here. Instead, we carefully review studies with respect to the type of consequence.

Psychological and Physical Consequences

Whether workplace mistreatment has a differential impact on psychological and physiological outcomes is, to date, virtually a toss-up. Richman, Rospenda, and colleagues (Richman, Shinsako, Rospenda, Flaherty, & Freels, 2002; Rospenda, Fujishiro, Shannon, & Richman, 2008) documented similar longitudinal effects of sexual harassment on men's and women's depression and anxiety. In a cross-sectional study of military personnel, Magley et al. (1999) also found that men and women experienced nearly identical impairments to their psychological well-being and health satisfaction as a result of having experienced sexual harassment. Finally, incivility was similarly negatively linked to both the mental and the physical health of both women and men (Lim et al., 2008).

On the other hand, Richman et al. (2002) found that generalized workplace hostility predicted women's psychological distress, but not men's. However, this is the only research that documents more serious consequences for women with respect to psychological and physical domains. Although sexual harassment was associated with more negative current mental health for both men and women, the associations with depression and general mental health (but not PTSD) were stronger for men than for women at higher levels of sexual harassment (Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007). Kaukiainen and colleagues (2001) reported stronger correlations between experienced workplace aggression and physical symptoms, psychological symptoms (including depression and anxiety), and psychosocial problems (e.g., family, work, interpersonal problems) among male employees than among female employees. Finally, Rospenda et al. (2008) found that both sexual harassment and generalized workplace hostility predicted increases in problem drinking 1 year later for men but not for women.

Work-Related Consequences

In the first research to consider gender differences in job-related consequences of sexual harassment, Gutek (1985; Konrad & Gutek, 1986) found that women were much more likely than men to report adverse job-related outcomes (e.g., transferring or quitting a job) of sexual harassment. This effect was supported by a meta-analysis that specifically considered the impact of nonsexual aggression on job satisfaction (Lapierre, Spector, & Leck, 2005). However, the preponderance of the research does point more to similar, rather than dissimilar, effects of workplace mistreatment on work-related consequences for women and men. Although Stockdale (1998) hypothesized that female military personnel would suffer more seriously from experiences of sexual harassment than would male personnel, she did not find support for this with respect to turnover intentions and perceptions of work. This lack of gender difference replicated across a host of work-related outcomes

(e.g., satisfaction with one's supervisor, coworkers, and the work itself; organizational commitment; self-reported workgroup productivity). Cortina and colleagues (Cortina et al., 2002; Lim et al., 2008) have examined the possibility that incivility experiences might affect men and women differently but have found that not to be the case for work and supervisor satisfaction, general job satisfaction, job stress, and turnover intentions.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

Throughout the chapter, we have offered suggestions for additional research. There are a few remaining areas that we would like to highlight here, as we conclude. First is a concern for vulnerable workers. The power disparities felt by young workers, token workers, and gay men and lesbians remind us that it is important to recognize that vulnerability is not only manifested in people's gender. Second, we are fascinated by the sheer lack of examination of contextual factors that might differentially influence the occurrence of workplace mistreatment for women and men. Bergman and Henning (2008) recently published research that documents that the influence of an organization's tolerance for sexual harassment on employees' actual harassment experiences was much stronger for women ($r = 0.63$) than for men ($r = 0.18$). In that organizational cultures can be changed, we find this line of research to be of great practical value and would like to see more like it. Finally, there is truly a general paucity of research on how men and women cope with their workplace mistreatment. Again, from an intervention perspective, this type of research could be helpful in improving employees' working lives.

If there is one main conclusion to be drawn from our review of the literature, it is that much more can be – and needs to be – done to understand how, when, and why workplace mistreatment differs for women and men and how to prevent it. Although we are quite familiar with this literature, we were surprised at how few researchers have examined gender differences in the occurrence of, processing of, and impact of workplace mistreatment. We hope that our review will spark interest in future researchers, who will make important discoveries about the mistreatment process and the role that gender plays in it.

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Handbook of Gender Research in Psychology

Volume 2: Gender Research in Social and Applied
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ISBN 978-1-4419-1466-8 e-ISBN 978-1-4419-1467-5

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-1467-5

Springer New York Dordrecht Heidelberg London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009941984

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