

Workplace Victimization: Aggression from the Target's Perspective

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Annu. Rev. Psychol. 2009.60:717-41

The *Annual Review of Psychology* is online at
psych.annualreviews.org

This article's doi:
10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163703

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0066-4308/09/0110-0717\$20.00

Key Words

aggression, bullying, harassment, victimization, incivility

Abstract

This article reviews research on workplace victimization, which we define as acts of aggression perpetrated by one or more members of an organization that cause psychological, emotional, or physical harm to their intended target. We compare several types of victimizing behaviors that have been introduced into the organizational psychology literature to illustrate differences and similarities among them. We then review studies looking at who is likely to become a victim of aggression. Predictors include personality, demographic, behavioral, structural, and organizational variables. We also review research on coping strategies for victimization, which include problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. We conclude with a summary of challenges for victimization research. These include addressing the proliferation of constructs and terms into the literature, attempting to clarify inconclusive findings, and using theory to guide the selection of study variables.

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INTRODUCTION

Work organizations are like any other social setting where competition, scarce resources, time pressure, differences in goals and personalities, and other stresses of group life can sometimes lead people to aggress against coworkers, subordinates, and even authorities. Aggression has been defined as behavior directed toward another person or persons that is carried out with the intent to harm (Anderson & Bushman 2002, Buss 1961). For every perpetrator of workplace aggression, there is at least one victim. It is the victim's perspective that we examine in this review. By taking this perspective, we complement Anderson & Bushman's (2002) *Annual Review of Psychology* article that focused on the factors that motivate aggression and Barling et al.'s (2009) review of the predictors of workplace aggression appearing in this volume.

Previous reviews of aggression from a victim's perspective have been conducted (e.g., Einarsen 2000, Hoel et al. 1999, Hogh & Viitasara 2005, Salin 2003b, Tepper 2007); however, these reviews focused on specific types of aggressive behaviors such as bullying and abusive supervision. In contrast, we take a broader perspective by including studies examining other forms of aggressive behaviors along with studies of how employees cope with their victimization experiences. Our review extends a recent meta-analysis of workplace harassment (Bowling & Beehr 2006) by including studies examining antecedents (e.g., Big 5 traits and informal status) and outcomes of victimization (e.g., revenge, seeking social support). Also, we offer a critique of the current state of research on workplace aggression from the target's perspective and propose challenges for future research.

We refer to the experience of being a target of workplace aggression as "workplace victimization." Workplace victimization occurs when an employee's well-being is harmed by an act of aggression perpetrated by one or more members of the organization. An employee's well-being is harmed when fundamental psychological and physiological needs are unmet or thwarted. In general, these needs include a sense of belonging, a feeling that one is a worthy individual, believing that one has the ability to predict and to cognitively control one's environment, and being able to trust others (Stevens & Fiske 1995). The most basic physiological need is the avoidance of pain. We assume that being the target of workplace aggression can thwart the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs and/or inflict psychological, emotional, and even physical pain upon its target.

We stated above that aggression has been defined as behavior directed toward another person or persons carried out with the intent to harm. Adopting this definition of aggression raises the epistemological challenge of determining whether an act was intentional and therefore aggressive. The position we adopt in our review is that there is no easy way to resolve this issue, but because we are interested in aggression from the target's perspective, we

believe that for theoretical and practical purposes it is reasonable to classify a behavior as aggressive if the target perceives some possibility that it was performed with the intent to harm. Our position recognizes that the target's interpretation of another employee's behavior is likely to be most consequential from predicting his or her response. At the same time, we acknowledge that in some cases it is important to rely on more than just the target's interpretation; if, for example, he or she is seeking legal remedy or if internal disciplinary action is to be taken against the harm-doer.

As we document in our review, the costs of workplace victimization are high. Victims of aggressive actions suffer psychologically, become fatigued, stressed, sick, and sometimes traumatized. Consequently, individual, group, and organizational performance can suffer (Leymann 1990). Research on workplace aggression has increased over the past 20 years as these costs have become widely recognized by organizational psychologists, human resource practitioners, and the general public. Interestingly, North American scholars have generally studied the motives or characteristics of perpetrators of aggression, paying relatively less attention to understanding the experiences of victims, with the exception being studies of sexual harassment. In contrast, Northern European scholars have examined questions such as (a) Why do some employees but not others become victims of aggression? (b) What organizational conditions make victimization more likely? (c) What are the psychological and behavioral consequences of victimization? (d) What strategies do employees use to cope with victimization? In this review, we examine research on workplace victimization published from 1990 to the present to document the answers that past studies provide to these four questions.

Our review is necessarily selective. We chose articles that explicitly assess the target's experience, although some articles included in our review might have taken into account the role of the perpetrator if it was critical for understanding the target's response. We excluded from our

review studies that focus primarily on sexual harassment. Other scholars have already conducted reviews on that topic (e.g., Cortina & Berdahl 2008, Fitzgerald 1993, O'Leary-Kelly et al. 2000), so rather than covering old ground we survey the literature on nonsexual forms of aggression. We also excluded from our review studies examining interactional justice, which has been defined as "the quality of interpersonal treatment received during the enactment of organizational procedures" (Bies & Moag 1986, p. 44). Interactional justice is a type of workplace behavior that arguably falls within the conceptual domain of workplace victimization. However, we chose not to review research on interactional justice for two reasons. First, reviews of this literature have already been conducted (Greenberg & Colquitt 2005), and second, we believe that the construct belongs in broader discussion of organizational justice that our review was not intended to address. We accessed the relevant literature by conducting a PsychInfo search of titles and abstracts covering the period from 1990 to 2005 and a manual search of more recent journals in applied psychology and organizational behavior. We chose for inclusion only empirical articles written in English and published in peer-reviewed journals. We cite theoretical papers if we deemed them relevant for clarifying construct definitions.

Our review begins by categorizing the types of victimizing behaviors researchers have studied. We then review studies examining the various factors that have been empirically related to perceptions of workplace victimization, looking first at individual factors such as personality, behavior, and demographics before turning to structural factors such as the target's formal or informal social position and to broader organizational-level factors such as the nature of the work being performed, job characteristics, and management styles. Next, we review studies documenting the consequences of victimization and how victimized employees cope with their experiences. We conclude with observations of what progress has been made in understanding workplace

victimization and offer suggestions for advancing research in this area.

TYPES OF VICTIMIZING BEHAVIOR

Many kinds of aggressive behaviors can occur in the workplace, and researchers have introduced a myriad of terms into the literature to describe them. Among the ones appearing frequently in the literature are workplace harassment (Björkqvist et al. 1994, Bowling & Beehr 2006), mobbing (Leymann 1996, Zapf et al. 1996), petty tyranny (Ashforth 1997), bullying (e.g., Einarsen & Skogstad 1996, Salin 2003b, Vartia 1996), emotional abuse (Keashly 1998), abusive supervision (Tepper 2000), social undermining (Duffy et al. 2002), incivility (Andersson & Pearson 1999, Cortina et al. 2001), identity threats (Aquino & Douglas 2003), and victimization (Aquino et al. 1999). An underlying assumption of these descriptive terms is that the behavior being observed is aversive and potentially harmful to the intended target (see **Table 1**). Consequently, we believe all of them can be circumscribed within the broader construct space of workplace victimization as we have defined it.

There are obviously differences among the behaviors examined by various writers. But these differences are not substantial enough in our judgment to warrant exclusion from the larger “family” of workplace victimization behaviors that are the focus of this review. To take just one example, consider the definitions of workplace incivility and social undermining. Andersson & Pearson (1999) define workplace incivility as “low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (p. 457). In contrast, social undermining is defined as “behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation” (Duffy et al. 2002, p. 332). The conceptual dis-

inction between these two behaviors is that the intent to harm is less transparent to the victim of incivility than of social undermining. Yet both behaviors can thwart the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs for self-esteem, a controllable and predictable environment, and sense of belonging. Both can also be construed by the victim as having been done intentionally. Consequently, for our purposes, they represent acts of workplace victimization.

The terms used in past studies to define and measure various forms of victimizations have some similarities and dissimilarities. We already mentioned that we can distinguish between behaviors that cause physiological and psychological harm. We can also distinguish between behaviors that cause direct and indirect harm (Buss 1961). Most of the studies we reviewed do not explicitly differentiate between direct and indirect forms of victimization, although some data suggest that indirect aggression is more frequent than direct aggression (Baron et al. 1999).

Table 1 summarizes the definitions of victimizing behaviors introduced by researchers. The table indicates whether the instruments used to measure these behaviors tap direct aggression, indirect aggression, or both.

A review of **Table 1** yields several insights into the current state of victimization research. First, most operationalizations emphasize psychological rather than physical harm, which makes sense because the latter are less common than the former (Barling et al. 2009). Physical acts of aggression such as hitting or pushing a fellow employee would likely result in serious punishment including criminal prosecution or dismissal from the job. Thus, we expect physical aggression to occur less frequently because the costs of engaging in such behavior are high. Second, some researchers are broadly interested in victimization by all organizational members without specific reference to the status of perpetrator (e.g., identity threat, Aquino & Douglas 2003; incivility, Andersson & Pearson 1999), whereas others make a distinction between whether the employee is victimized by higher- (e.g., supervisors, Tepper

Table 1 Constructs consistent with victimization definition by thwarted needs, direct/indirect behavior, and perpetrator status

Definition of construct	Thwarted needs are		Victimizing behaviors are		Perpetrator's status		
	Psychological	Physiological	Direct	Indirect	Higher	Coworker	Lower
Workplace harassment (Björkqvist et al. 1994, pp. 173–74): “Repeated activities, with the aim of bringing mental (but sometimes also physical) pain, and directed towards one or more individuals who, for one reason or another, are not able to defend themselves.”	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996, p. 191): “A situation where one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending him or herself against these actions.”	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mobbing (Zapf et al. 1996, p. 215): “Severe form of harassing people in organizations.”	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A petty tyrant (Ashforth 1997, p. 126) is “someone who uses their power and authority oppressively, capriciously, and perhaps vindictively.”	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Emotional abuse includes verbal and nonverbal modes of expression; repeated, or part of a pattern; unwelcome and unsolicited; violate a standard of appropriate conduct toward others; result in harm or injury; actor intended to harm; actor is in a more powerful position (Keashly 1998).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson 1999, p. 457; Cortina et al. 2001, p. 64): “Low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect.”	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Definition of construct	Thwarted needs are		Victimizing behaviors are		Perpetrator's status		
	Psychological	Physiological	Direct	Indirect	Higher	Coworker	Lower
Victimization (Aquino et al. 1999, p. 260): "Individual's perception of having been exposed, either momentarily or repeatedly, to the aggressive acts of one or more other persons."	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Abusive supervision (Tepper 2000, p. 178): "Extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact."	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Social undermining (Duffy et al. 2002, p. 332): "Behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation."	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Identity threat (Aquino & Douglas 2003, p. 196): "Overt action by another party that challenges, calls into question, or diminishes a person's sense of competence, dignity, or self-worth."	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓

2000) or same-status (coworkers, Aquino et al. 1999) organizational members. We found no studies that explicitly operationalized the victimization of higher-status by lower-status organizational members. Third, most of the Northern European operationalizations of victimization allow participants to indicate the status of the perpetrator separately, whereas most North American operationalizations make virtually no reference to the possibility of low-status perpetrators. Finally, **Table 1** shows that at some level all of the research using these different definitions deals with essentially the same phenomenon: victimization.

Our review of the victimization literature reveals three streams of research that attempt to answer the question of why someone is likely to

become the target of aggression. The first investigates the role of the target's personality; the second investigates the target's behavior; and the third examines positional, structural, and social predictors of victimization.

WHO BECOMES A VICTIM?

Personality Characteristics

Among the many investigations into the role of personality as a predictor of victimization, the propensity to experience negative affect (trait NA, Watson & Clark 1984)—which includes emotions such as anger, fear, worry, anxiousness, sadness, and depression—shows the most consistent relationship to various

victimization measures (e.g., Aquino et al. 1999, Aquino & Bradfield 2000, Coyne et al. 2000, Duffy et al. 2006b, Glasø et al. 2007, Matthiesen & Einarsen 1991, Tepper et al. 2006, Vartia 1996, Zellars et al. 2002).

Several explanations for the NA-victimization relationship have been proposed. According to some investigators, the relationship may be partly due to high-NA employees being perceived as hostile, demanding, or interpersonally difficult, making them more likely targets of aggression from other organizational members (Aquino et al. 1999, Aquino & Bradfield 2000, Tepper et al. 2006). This explanation is consistent with victim precipitation (Amir 1967), symbolic interactionist (Felson & Steadman 1983), and conflict escalation (Glomb 2002) models, which suggest that employees with certain personality characteristics tend to act in ways that violate social norms or threaten others' identities. As a result, they are targeted for aggression by those seeking to enforce norms prescribing cooperation, respect, or deference in interpersonal relations.

An alternative explanation for the NA-victimization relationship is that employees who have experienced aggression over a period of time developed high NA as a result (cf. Hansen et al. 2006, Mikkelsen & Einarsen 2002). Which of these explanations is more likely is difficult to determine without additional longitudinal studies, which are quite rare (for an exception, see Kivimaki et al. 2003).

A third possibility is that employees high in NA selectively recall (Blaney 1986) more negative events than do employees low in trait NA. This explanation needs to be tested with multisource designs that match employee and coworker reports to determine the level of agreement. A related explanation is that high-NA employees are more prone to make hostile attributions for ambiguous behaviors, and consequently they report more victimization than do employees low in NA. Supporting this possibility, Matthiesen & Einarsen (2004) found that some victims of bullying were extremely suspi-

MOTIVATION TO PERCEIVE VICTIMIZATION

Arguably, it is functional to know whether environments put one at risk of victimization. Knowing that one may be victimized can satisfy one's fundamental needs for uncertainty reduction and protecting self-esteem (Fiske 2004). However, the possibility of victimization may motivate employees to become hypervigilant to potential risks (Allen & Badcock 2003). Both situational and personality factors may contribute to some people being chronically overattuned to potential victimization (Kramer 1998). Some evidence in the close relationships literature suggests that people who are strongly motivated to acquire information that reveals harm will suffer from poor relationship quality (Ickes et al. 2003). If the risk of victimization is chronically salient, minor negative events will gain more importance in people's cognitive and emotional processes, and so events that would be unnoticed by others may be interpreted as victimization experiences.

scious of the outside world, which could make them more likely to interpret others' behavior as being more malevolent. Another study reported a positive relationship between a measure of hostile attribution bias and victimization (Aquino et al. 2004) (see sidebar Motivation to Perceive Victimization).

Research on the relationship between personality factors from the Big 5 reveals mixed findings. One study found that victimized employees tend to be more extraverted (Glasø et al. 2007), whereas other studies show that victims are more introverted than nonvictims (Coyne et al. 2000) or that victims and nonvictims do not differ on extraversion at all (Coyne et al. 2003, Vartia 1996). Some studies report that victimized employees tend to be more conscientious (Coyne et al. 2000), but other studies fail to support this relationship (Coyne et al. 2003). Coyne et al. (2003) found that victims of bullying tended to be lower in emotional stability in comparison with a control sample of nonvictims, which is consistent with the studies of NA reviewed above since people who lack emotional stability are more prone to experience negative emotions including anxiety, depression, and hostility (e.g., Costa et al. 1991).

Several studies have explored the role of self-esteem as a predictor of victimization. These studies show that employees with low self-esteem report more victimization (e.g., Einarsen et al. 1994, Harvey & Keashly 2003, Matthiesen & Einarsen 2001, Vartia 1996; see Bowling & Beehr 2006 for a meta-analytic review). A number of investigators have argued that victimization can undermine employees' self-esteem (Björkvist et al. 1994, Lee & Brotheridge 2006, Liefoghe & Davey 2001, Tepper 2000), but like the other personality variables reviewed, the causal direction of the self-esteem-victimization relationship is unclear. It could be that the relationship is due to previous victimization encounters and accumulated state self-esteem levels. It may also be that the emotional and behavioral tone of people with low self-esteem invites victimization because someone with low self-esteem is less able to assertively defend him or herself against others' aggression (Matthiesen & Einarsen 2001), deal constructively with conflict (Zapf 1999), or challenge those who try to exploit them. Supporting this latter view, Coyne et al. (2000) found that employee victims of aggression tended to score lower on personality measures of assertiveness, competitiveness, and extraversion than do nonvictims.

Demographics

Studies looking at the relationship between demographic variables including age, tenure, gender, and victimization do not show an obvious relationship between these variables. Zellars et al. (2002) report that employees' gender, age, and tenure were all unrelated to their perception of supervisor abuse. Vartia (1996) found no correlations between gender and bullying and only a small correlation between age and bullying. Einarsen & Skogstad (1996) found that older employees reported significantly more bullying than younger ones reported. However, Einarsen & Raknes (1997) found that among male workers, older ones reported significantly less exposure to potentially harassing behavior than did younger ones. In a number of stud-

ies, women report more victimization than men report (Aquino & Bradfield 2000; Björkvist et al. 1994; Cortina et al. 2001; Salin 2001, 2003a; Tehrani 2004); in others, men report more victimization than do women (Jennifer et al. 2003). Finally, some studies find no or only marginal gender effects (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996, Hansen et al. 2006, Leymann 1996, Vartia & Hyyti 2002). Bowling & Beehr's (2006) meta-analysis found that some demographic variables are reliably related to victimization. Among these relationships were that females were less likely to be victimized than were men, employees with longer tenure were more likely to be victimized than were those with shorter tenure, and older employees were less likely to be victimized than were younger ones. However, Bowling & Beehr (2006) described all of these relationships as being relatively weak compared with the effects of work environment variables. One conclusion we draw from the studies we reviewed is that employee demographic variables are likely to explain relatively little variance in victimization, and so a more fruitful approach would be to examine possible mediators and moderators of the demographics-victimization relationship.

Behaviors

A handful of studies have directly examined how a target's behaviors might be associated with his or her perceptions of victimization. These studies show that low levels of citizenship behavior (Aquino & Bommer 2003), voicing discontent with previous mistreatment (Cortina & Magley 2003), and adopting an overly accommodating conflict management style (Aquino 2000, Zapf & Gross 2001) are associated with higher levels of victimization. However, Aquino (2000) also found that frequent victims used a dominant conflict style more so than did nonvictims. Aquino & Byron (2002) qualified the relationship between dominating behavior and victimization by showing a curvilinear pattern in student workgroups. The pattern was such that group members who were perceived as exhibiting either high or low levels of dominating

behavior reported higher levels of victimization by group members than those who exhibited moderate levels of dominating behavior. However, this relationship was only found among men.

The studies discussed in previous sections of this review examined how characteristics of victims might predict whether they are likely to become targets of workplace aggression. Other studies have examined social structural predictors of victimization. By social structural predictors, we mean an employee's position within a larger social structure such as a formal hierarchy or an informal social network.

Structural Predictors of Victimization

Employees occupying lower positions in the organization's formal hierarchy have been shown in several studies to report higher levels of victimization (Aquino 2000, Aquino et al. 2004, Bjorkqvist et al. 1994, Hoel et al. 2001, Keashly et al. 1994, Salin 2001). But other studies show no significant, direct effects of formal hierarchical position on victimization (Aquino & Bradfield 2000, Aquino & Douglas 2003). One study reports that employees in managerial positions were more often victimized than those in nonmanagerial positions (Lamertz & Aquino 2004).

We reviewed two studies that looked at victimization as a function of employees' structural position within an informal social network. Using sociometric analysis, Coyne et al. (2004) studied 36 fire service teams in the United Kingdom and found that in contrast to the commonly held view that victims of bullying are usually social isolates (e.g., Salmivalli et al. 1996), fire service personnel who reported higher levels of bullying also tended to be considered preferred people to work with and to be placed within the main informal network. Self- and peer-reported victims were also more frequently nominated as stars in their team, although 24% of such victims were also rejected by the rest of the team. Lamertz & Aquino (2004) also used sociometric methods to study victimization among 32 employees in a single

bureau of a city government. They found that employees who maintained a balance in their dyadic friendship networks reported lower levels of victimization than did employees whose friendship networks were imbalanced. An example of an imbalanced friendship network would be one where one actor in a relationship chooses another actor as a friend, but the other actor does not make the same choice (i.e., the relationship is nonreciprocated). Such a pattern indicates a discrepancy in mutual esteem between two parties.

There do not appear to be consistent findings regarding the direct relationship between formal status and victimization. Studies looking at informal status by taking a social networks perspective are too few to draw firm conclusions. Based on our review of the existing literature, we believe the inconsistencies associated with the effect of formal status might be addressed by testing more complex models hypothesizing that status interacts with other factors to predict victimization. A few status studies have taken this approach and have found evidence supporting our argument.

Vartia & Hyyti (2002) found no differences in perceived victimization between men and women, but they did find that women were victimized more often by coworkers, whereas men were victimized equally across status groups. Salin (2003a) found that men were typically bullied by superiors, whereas women were typically bullied by superiors and colleagues in approximately equal proportions. In addition, none of the male victims, but one-fifth of female victims, reported being bullied by subordinates. Hoel et al. (2001) found an interaction between formal status and gender such that women in the highest organizational-status positions are more likely to be victimized than are men.

Another perspective suggests that possessing particular status characteristics in combination with behaving in certain ways can make employees more likely to be targets of aggression. Consistent with this perspective, one study found that low-organizational-status employees are more likely to be victimized when they also tend to use a highly accommodating style to

resolve conflicts with coworkers (Aquino 2000). Another study showed that whites who exhibited higher levels of organizational citizenship behavior reported lower levels of victimization than did African Americans who exhibited similar levels of citizenship (Aquino & Bommer 2003).

Organizational Factors

A stream of empirical research on workplace aggression from the target's perspective has examined how organizational factors might affect employees' vulnerability to being victimized. One organizational factor that has been found to predict the likelihood of being victimized is the type of work the organization performs. Mikkelsen & Einarsen (2001) found that employees in a manufacturing company reported significantly more exposure to bullying than did employees in hospitals. A survey of 7787 employees from 14 Norwegian organizations found that respondents from public companies reported less bullying than those from private enterprises (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996). The investigators also reported that the highest prevalence rate of bullying over a six-month period was found among industrial workers, with 17.4% reporting having been bullied. The lowest prevalence rate was among psychologists and university employees. However, Salin (2001) surveyed 377 Finnish employees from various organizations and found that public sector employees reported higher levels of bullying than private sector employees reported, although this difference was statistically not significant. Hubert & van Veldhoven (2001) measured the prevalence of aggression in 11 different workforce sections in the Netherlands and found that aggression from colleagues or the boss was higher in sectors such as industry, education, (local) government, and public administration than in sectors such as business services and financial institutions.

Our review of studies comparing various forms of victimization as a function of occupation or work sector does not present a clear conclusion about what types of organizations

or job sectors are likely to be associated with higher victimization. One logical prediction is that employees are more likely at risk of being victimized in organizations where they are required to interact frequently with others and to work interdependently. The ambiguity regarding occupation or work sector is to be expected given the multitude of other factors that are likely to vary across organizations even within the same industry. Consequently, researchers have examined specific attributes of the work environment.

Employees who report having less control over their jobs are more likely to report being mobbed (Zapf et al. 1996), bullied (Agervold & Mikkelsen 2004, Einarsen et al. 1994, Quine 2001), or directly and indirectly victimized by coworkers (Aquino et al. 1999). Bullying has been found to be higher when work is uninteresting and has low variability (Einarsen et al. 1994, Vartia 1996) or lacks meaning (Agervold & Mikkelsen 2004). Stressful and competitive work environments have been associated with higher levels of victimization (Coyne et al. 2003, Vartia 1996), as has role conflict (Einarsen et al. 1994, Skogstad et al. 2007a), role ambiguity (Agervold & Mikkelsen 2004, Jennifer et al. 2003, Quine 2001), the number of employees in the workplace (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996), high cooperation requirements (Zapf et al. 1996), greater workloads (Quine 2001), and being in a male- rather than female-dominated organization (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996). Liefoghe & Davey (2001) interviewed 113 employees and concluded that various organizational practices contribute to what the authors referred to as institutionalized bullying. These practices revolve around mechanisms of organizational control such as rules for monitoring and controlling time, the use of numerical performance measures, or the use of performance improvement mandates as a punishment for failure to perform. Their study is distinctive because it asserts that the organization rather than individuals within it is responsible for bullying. Finally, we found one study showing that organizational changes involving changes in technology, staff reductions,

and wage cuts were positively related to what the researchers described as task-related bullying (e.g., "Being given tasks with unreasonable targets or deadlines," "Being exposed to an unmanageable workload") (Skogstad et al. 2007b). Skogstad and colleagues (2007b) speculated that one explanation for the relationship between organizational changes and bullying was that these changes led to reduced role clarity, higher workloads, and task fragmentation, which as the findings cited above show, are related to victimization.

Our review of studies examining workplace attributes as predictors of victimization reveals that the most consistent finding is the effect of role conflict or ambiguity. Our conclusions are supported by Bowling & Beehr's (2006) meta-analysis, which shows these two variables showed the strongest effect sizes among potential antecedents of various forms of victimizing behaviors, with $\rho = 0.44$ and $\rho = 0.30$ for the role conflict and role ambiguity, respectively. A lack of control over one's work environment was also found to be strongly associated with victimization in Bowling & Beehr's (2006) meta-analysis ($\rho = -0.25$), and this relationship is supported by our own review of published empirical studies.

A few studies have looked at the relationship between managerial or leadership styles and victimization. Ashforth (1997) found that subordinate ratings of petty tyranny were negatively correlated with managers' tolerance for ambiguity and Theory X beliefs and were positively correlated with managers having a bureaucratic orientation. Agervold & Mikkelsen (2004) found that bullied employees reported that they had received insufficient information from immediate superiors and had a serious conflict with their manager that was not satisfactorily resolved. Coyne et al. (2003) reported that victims of bullying perceived their work organizations to be characterized by more negative aspects, which included authoritarian management, and Einarsen et al. (1994) found that employees who were bullied reported being more dissatisfied with their organization's leadership. A study of bullying in public sector or-

ganizations concluded that weak and indistinct leadership contributed to workplace conflicts going unresolved and eventually escalating into bullying (Strandmark & Hallberg 2006). This qualitative study concluded that bullying results from unresolved value conflicts that are exacerbated by weak leadership. Skogstad et al. (2007a) showed that employees who described their superiors as adopting a laissez-faire leadership style, which is characterized by an absence of leadership, an unwillingness to intervene in employee affairs, a lack of transactions or agreements with followers, and a failure to meet the expectations of subordinates, reported higher levels of victimization. Moreover, Skogstad and colleagues (2007a) showed that the relationship between leadership style and victimization was partly mediated through role conflict and increased conflict with coworkers. Skogstad et al.'s (2007a) study is the only one we found that tested mediating mechanisms through which leader behavior might predict victimization. Our review of studies examining relationships between leadership and victimization suggests that leaders can potentially influence their subordinates' vulnerability to being victimized by failing to establish clear guidelines for what constitutes inappropriate conduct. It is also possible that certain types of management styles, such as those that are highly authoritarian or bureaucratic, result in subordinates being victimized by leaders.

CONSEQUENCES OF VICTIMIZATION

Not surprisingly, many studies have found consistent relationships between experiencing workplace victimization and a host of negative psychological, emotional, and physiological outcomes. Among the negative psychological consequences that have been reported are increased depression and anxiety (Björkqvist et al. 1994, Cortina et al. 2001, Haines et al. 2006, Hansen et al. 2006, Matthiesen & Einarsen 2001, Niedl 1996, Quine 2001, Tepper 2000, Zapf 1999), job stress (Agervold & Mikkelsen 2004, Budd et al. 1996,

Vartia & Hyyti 2002), posttraumatic stress (Fitzpatrick & Wilson 1999, Leymann & Gustavson 1996, Matthiesen & Einarsen 2004, Mikkelsen & Einarsen 2002), and decreased mental health (Hansen et al. 2006, Hoel et al. 2004, Hogh et al. 2005, Rogers & Kelloway 1997, Vartia & Hyyti 2002). Frequent victimization is also associated with negative somatic symptoms (LeBlanc & Kelloway 2002; Rogers & Kelloway 1997, Mikkelsen & Einarsen 2001, Schat & Kelloway 2000, Zapf et al. 1996), fatigue (Agervold & Mikkelsen 2004; Hogh et al. 2003, 2005), and sickness (Agervold & Mikkelsen 2004; Kivimäki et al. 2000). Affective responses to being victimized include diminished emotional well-being (LeBlanc & Kelloway 2002; Schat & Kelloway 2000), lower levels of job satisfaction (Budd et al. 1996, Keashly et al. 1997, Lapierre et al. 2005, Quine 2001, Tepper 2000, Vartia & Hyyti 2002) and life satisfaction (Tepper 2000), shame (Hallberg & Strandmark 2006, Lewis 2004), fear (Rogers & Kelloway 1997), and emotional exhaustion (Goldberg & Grandey 2007, Grandey et al. 2007, Tepper 2000, Winstanley & Whittington 2002). Bowling & Beehr's (2006) meta-analysis reports effect sizes associated with several of the psychological, physiological, and emotional consequences listed above, making their study a helpful guide for evaluating the effect sizes of victimization on a variety of individual outcomes. Bowling & Beehr (2006) found that the strongest effect sizes were between victimization and individual outcomes such as negative emotions at work, frustration, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion (burnout). Victimization showed weaker relationships (mean $\rho > 0.25$) to self-esteem and life satisfaction.

We reviewed three studies that show relationships between victimization and outcomes external to the organization. Tepper (2000) reported that abusive supervision was positively related to work and family life conflict. Lewis & Orford (2005) showed that victimized employees also negatively affected participants' non-work relationships, and they suggested that victimization at work can produce a ripple effect

that compromises other potential sources of support. Haines et al. (2006) found that workplace aggression experienced by one partner in a dual-earner couple was related to the other partner's psychological distress. The investigators concluded that this relationship supported a crossover model in which one partner's work and family experiences affect the other partner's experiences.

Most of the studies we reviewed tested direct relationships between victimization and employee outcomes, but some looked at whether the relationship is moderated by other factors. Kaukiainen et al. (2001) found that victimization was more strongly related to negative physical and psychological symptoms for men than for women. Lapierre et al. (2005) showed that the negative relationship between victimization and job satisfaction was stronger for women than men. Hoel et al. (2004) reported that the relationship between victimization and mental health was stronger for older than for younger employees and for workers than for senior managers. Tepper (2000) found that the relationship between abusive supervision and outcomes such as depression, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion was stronger for subordinates who had low as compared to high job mobility. Duffy et al. (2006a) examined the consequences of social undermining and found that the relationship between undermining and outcomes such as job satisfaction, depression, and intention to quit was stronger when group-level supervisor undermining (the amount of supervisor or coworker undermining experienced by all group members) was low rather than high. The authors concluded that this pattern supported a "singled out" hypothesis in which the level of victimization within a group moderates the relationship between individual perceptions of victimization and outcomes.

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH VICTIMIZATION

We reviewed several studies that examined employee responses to victimization. We consider these responses to be examples of a broader

set of strategies for coping with victimization. Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) transaction model of stress distinguishes between problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies. The goal of problem-focused strategies is to change the situation by eliminating the source of stress (e.g., by taking direct action against the perpetrator, seeking support from others) or one's view of the situation (e.g., positive reappraisal). Included in the category of problem-focused strategies are behaviors that could be considered aggressive, such as taking revenge against the perpetrator, but that are performed in response to an initial provocation. Also included are attempts to take advantage of social or organizational support systems that might act as a buffer against further victimization or provide protection or redress to the victim. The goal of emotion-focused strategies is to manage the emotional consequences of the stressor and could include attempts to escape psychologically (e.g., substance abuse) or to execute emotion-regulation strategies that minimize the negative impact of being victimized. We turn first to studies of problem-focused strategies.

Problem-Focused Coping Strategies

One problem-focused coping strategy is to retaliate against the perpetrator as a way of altering his or her behavior through punishment or by demonstrating one's willingness to defend against further mistreatment (Glomb 2002, Lee & Brotheridge 2006). An emerging empirical literature on revenge in organizations suggests that retaliatory aggression is considered by many people to be a morally legitimate response to being victimized (Tripp et al. 2002). Supporting this conclusion, Zapf & Gross (2001) reported that defending oneself was identified by 9% of their sample as a recommended strategy for coping with bullying, placing it somewhere between the most frequently recommended strategy of leaving the organization (22%) and the least-recommended strategy of protocol events (2%).

We reviewed three studies examining the possibility that victimization provokes retaliatory aggression against perpetrators. Dupré et al. (2006) found that teenage part-time employees who perceived high levels of abusive supervision reported more aggression against their supervisors when their financial reasons for working were high. Mitchell & Ambrose (2007) showed that subordinates who perceived high levels of abusive supervision reported engaging in more aggressive behavior directed toward their supervisors, and more so if the subordinate endorsed negative reciprocity beliefs. Tepper et al. (2001) found that victims of abusive supervision reported using dysfunctional resistance (e.g., ignoring one's supervisor or making a half-hearted effort on a task and letting the boss know that the employee could not do it) and constructive resistance (e.g., asking for additional clarification or explaining to the supervisor that the task could be done in a different way) against their supervisors more frequently than their nonabused counterparts reported. Tepper et al. (2001) interpreted the results involving dysfunctional resistance as indicating that victimizing behaviors can provoke behavioral coping responses that can potentially harm the perpetrator by threatening relationship quality and undermining the supervisor's authority to make a request. The findings involving constructive resistance were interpreted by Tepper et al. (2001) as indicating one possible way of breaking a cycle of hostility in interpersonal conflict by responding to abusive supervision in a nondestructive manner.

Most of the studies we reviewed show a relationship between victimization and aggressive behavioral responses that might be directed toward the perpetrator of aggression. Moreover, these responses were moderated by other factors. Aquino & Douglas (2003) found that employees who reported high levels of victimization and held favorable attitudes toward revenge reported engaging in more antisocial behavior directed toward other employees than those who held less-favorable attitudes toward revenge. Jockin et al. (2001) found that employees who reported high levels of

victimization had more aggressive conflicts with coworkers if they were high in neuroticism. A third study found that perceived victimization was positively related to overt expressions of anger, but more so for employees who had a hostile attribution bias or who perceived the norms of their organization as encouraging oppositional behavior (Aquino et al. 2004). Zellars et al. (2002) found that employees who perceived higher levels of abusive supervision exhibited fewer organizational citizenship behaviors, but more so if they viewed citizenship behavior as an extrarole behavior. The investigators interpreted this pattern as suggesting that withholding extrarole behaviors might be one way for employees to take revenge against supervisors who victimize them. Lee & Brotheridge (2006) found that employees who reported being undermined were also more likely to report undermining others. Duffy et al. (2006a) showed that the group social context moderates the relationship between being the target of undermining and undermining others such that the relationship was stronger in groups where group-level undermining was low than in groups where it was high. Duffy et al. (2006a) interpreted this pattern as indicating that victimized employees are more likely to reciprocate negative behavior when they perceive themselves as being singled out for such treatment.

Demographic factors have been shown to moderate relationships between victimization and aggressive, problem-focused strategies. Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir (2004) found that males are more likely to confront bullies and less likely to seek help from organizational authorities than are females, and Aquino & Douglas (2003) found that interpersonally directed antisocial behavior against other employees was more strongly related to victimization among younger as compared to older employees.

A problem-focused strategy that does not involve an aggressive response by the victim is escaping the situation. Escape could include quitting or requesting a transfer within the organization (Niedl 1996, Tepper 2000, Zapf & Gross 2001), being frequently absent from

work (Kivimäki et al. 2000, Zapf et al. 1996), or avoiding the perpetrator(s) and/or ignoring their behavior (Keashly et al. 1994). Another type of nonaggressive, problem-focused strategy is to seek support from the organization, family, friends, and fellow employees, or from professional services such as counselors. Rospenda et al. (2006) found that the experience of chronic, nonsexual harassment at work increased the likelihood that employees would use professional services (e.g., primary care physician, psychiatrist, clergy) to deal with work-related stress. However, their study failed to find evidence that these services ameliorated the negative effects of work harassment on mental health. Schat & Kelloway (2003) found that instrumental support, operationalized as support received from coworkers, managers, and supervisors following victimization, was associated with a reduction in negative psychological health consequences (i.e., low emotional well-being, poor somatic health, and negative job-related affect). They also found that informational support, operationalized as whether or not employees received training on how to deal with aggressive or threatening events at work, was associated with higher emotional well-being following victimization. Lewis & Orford (2005) interviewed 10 female victims of bullying and described how a lack of support from colleagues and the organization impaired these employees' ability to defend themselves against their perpetrators and led to increasing isolation, vulnerability, and diminished self-worth.

How effective are the various problem-focused strategies for coping with victimization? Zapf & Gross (2001) looked at 14 conflict-management coping strategies that victims of bullying used, including talking with the bullies, calling in the supervisor, taking long-term sick leave, and fighting back with similar means. The only strategy that was reported to have produced a significant improvement in their current situation was transferring to another job. Strategies that involved an active response to the bullies (i.e., fighting back with similar means, talking to the bullies) made the victim's

situation significantly worse. Cortina & Magley (2003) found that employees who tried to cope with having been targets of aggressive action by confronting the perpetrator were more likely to report being recipients of work-retaliation victimization (e.g., discharge, involuntary transfer, demotion). Employees who used other voice strategies, such as seeking social support from others or whistle blowing, were more likely to be recipients of social-retaliation victimization (e.g., harassment, ostracism, threats) when dealing with powerful wrongdoers. Although Cortina & Magley (2003) found that retaliatory victimization has negative psychological and health consequences, worse consequences were experienced by employees who failed to speak out at all.

Studies of problem-focused strategies suggest that the more confrontational or aggressive the strategy, the more likely it is that the relationship between victim and perpetrator will escalate into a cycle of reciprocal aggression. Strategies such as expressing voice (Cortina & Magley 2003) or taking more of a constructive, problem-solving approach to conflict (Hogh & Dofradottir 2001) can be effective, perhaps because they help victims gain a sense of control over their situation. Perceiving control over the situation is important because these perceptions have been associated with reduced fear and enhanced emotional well-being for people who experience victimization (Schat & Kelloway 2000).

Based on our review, it appears that avoiding the perpetrator(s) or finding a way to leave the situation is the most effective coping strategy if effectiveness is defined in terms of reducing the frequency of being victimized, minimizing the cost of executing the strategy for the victim, and avoiding further conflict escalation. According to some studies (Keashly et al. 1994, Zapf & Gross 2001), it is also the preferred option for many victims. If leaving the situation is impractical or undesirable, then problem-solving strategies that allow the victim to gain a sense of control over his or her environment are likely to be most efficacious (see sidebar Self-Defeating Responses to Thwarted Needs).

SELF-DEFEATING RESPONSES TO THWARTED NEEDS

Some evidence suggests that employees who are victimized engage in a pattern of interpersonal work behaviors that might lead to further victimization. Thau et al. (2007) refer to these behaviors as self-defeating because they are inimical to the needs employees pursue (Baumeister & Scher 1988). In a study with employees and their supervisors in a clinical chemical laboratory, Thau et al. (2007) found that employees who feel that their belongingness needs are thwarted are more likely to engage in interpersonally harmful behaviors and less likely to engage in helping behaviors. Based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960), coworkers will likely respond negatively and further thwart employees' belongingness needs. This may occur because employees who are victimized undergo self-regulation problems that make them focus on themselves and ignore the normative demands of their context (Blackhart et al. 2006). If this is true, then victimized employees may become locked into a vicious cycle in which the experience of victimization motivates them to engage in behaviors that invite further victimization.

Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies

We found some studies that examined the use of internal coping strategies to minimize the negative emotional and psychological consequences of victimization. One emotion-focused strategy is to use humor as a way to cope with victimization. Hogh & Dofradottir (2001) found that employees who were classified as being subjected to bullying (i.e., twice a month or daily over a 12-month period) used humor as a coping strategy more than those who reported being somewhat exposed to bullying (i.e., they reported being bullied between 1–23 times within the past 12 months) or not exposed at all. Keashly et al. (1994) reported that 40% of the 59 student participants in their sample said that they made a joke of the behavior as a way of coping with a hostile workplace event.

Studies of how employees respond to customers' verbal aggression show that they use either of two emotion-focused coping strategies: surface acting, which involves modifying behaviors by suppressing or faking expressions,

and deep acting, which involves changing cognitions through perspective taking or focusing on positive things to regulate feelings (Grandey 2004). Grandey (2004) found that call center employees who experienced high stress as a result of an aggressive encounter with a customer performed more surface than deep acting compared to employees who experienced lower stress as a result of an aggressive customer encounter. Positive refocusing and perspective taking were more likely to be used by the low-stress than the high-stress employee group.

Another emotion-focused coping strategy is alcohol consumption. Although alcohol consumption is a behavior, we classify it as an emotion-focused strategy because in the context of workplace victimization, imbibing alcohol can reduce negative anxiety-related physiological and emotional effects of being victimized (Rospenda 2002). Supporting this possibility, nonsexual forms of victimization have been shown to be associated with increased drinking for men and women (Richman et al. 1992, 1996), suggesting that for some employees, drinking might be perceived as a legitimate way of managing the stress of being victimized.

Forgiveness is a third emotion-focused coping strategy that has begun to receive some attention in the literature. Forgiveness has been defined as an effort by the victim of harm-doing to overcome negative emotions and thoughts about the perpetrator and replace them with neutral or even positive ones (Aquino et al. 2006). Studies have shown that victimized employees are sometimes willing to forgive their transgressors (Aquino et al. 2006, Bradfield & Aquino 1999, Hallberg & Strandmark 2006, Struthers et al. 2005). However, despite evidence in the psychology literature that forgiveness can neutralize negative psychological consequences that result from being seriously victimized (Freedman & Enright 1996), we could not find one published empirical study that explicitly examined the consequences of forgiveness in the context of workplace victimization. The paucity of research on forgiveness as a coping strategy following victimization is an obvious gap in the literature we reviewed.

CONCLUSIONS

Our review of the literature identified three main challenges facing the study of workplace aggression from the target's perspective. First, the proliferation of constructs for describing the phenomenon poses a potential obstacle to achieving theoretical parsimony. Second, the causal direction of several relationships reported in the literature, particularly those regarding personality and victimization, is unclear. Third, a large number of studies that examine relationships between victimization and various individual and organizational factors were not theoretically motivated. We consider each of these challenges and offer suggestions for how the field might address them.

Proliferation of Constructs

Philosophers of science have argued that the introduction of multiple terms to describe a similar phenomenon can impede scientific parsimony and theoretical progress (e.g., Popper 1959/2002, Sober 1981). We do not advocate the use any particular measure of victimization in our review; however, we do believe it is worth exploring whether the conceptual overlap among the various measures used by researchers who claim to be tapping different constructs may actually be tapping into the same general construct that we have labeled workplace victimization. If this is true, then it implies that one measure may be as good as any other for examining the consequences of workplace victimization, so long as one makes clear what the relationship is between victim and perpetrator (i.e., is the perpetrator a coworker, supervisor, customer, etc.). Following the lead of the organizational citizenship literature (LePine et al. 2002), perhaps it is time for an empirical assessment to be conducted on the various measures of victimization most commonly used by researchers to determine whether they tap a common construct or whether there are in fact important distinctions between them that have implications for developing a theory of victimization. Alternatively, researchers who believe their

particular construct, and the instrument used to measure it, does in fact capture a type of victimization that is distinct from other conceptualizations could support their claim empirically by showing that their construct predicts consequences that other constructs within the same victimization family (see **Table 1**) do not predict. For now, it seems important for investigators to acknowledge how related construct definitions used by other scholars working in the area can inform the state of the art of their own favored niche constructs.

Inconsistent Findings

We reported several inconsistent findings in the literature for variables that might indicate an employee's vulnerability to victimization, such as his or her gender or position within the organization's formal hierarchy or informal social network. We view these variables as possible indicators of vulnerability because they signify an employee's status and relative power within the organization. Perhaps one reason for the inconsistent findings is that markers of vulnerability may not always be salient to perpetrators (Fiske & Taylor 2007). If so, then situational factors that heighten the salience of such markers may also increase an employee's risk of victimization if the employee happens to possess them. A second reason why indicators of vulnerability have not been consistently related to victimization is that the perpetrator needs to be motivated to aggress. It follows that situational conditions that increase a would-be perpetrator's motivation to aggress, such as experiencing role conflict, working interdependently, or being in the presence of others who violate norms of social respect, can increase the likelihood that the would-be perpetrator will aggress against employees who possess markers of vulnerability.

Theoretical Development

Theoretical models of victimization have been proposed (e.g., Aquino & Lamertz 2004, Einarsen 2000, Keashly & Harvey 2005, Olson-Buchanan & Boswell 2008); however,

many of the studies we reviewed failed to provide a clear theoretical rationale for variable selection. We found theoretical underspecification to be particularly true of research on bullying and mobbing conducted in Northern Europe. Many of the Northern European studies we reviewed were more epidemiological, designed to assess frequencies of victimization among various groups rather than test theoretically derived hypotheses. One way to bring greater coherence to the literature would be for researchers to conduct more theory-guided meta-analyses similar to that of Bowling & Beehr (2006). We also note that both European and North American researchers often ignore well-established criminological literature on victimization (e.g., Hindelang et al. 1978, Schafer 1968). For example, Hindelang and colleagues (1978) proposed a model that explains victimization risk in terms of lifestyle exposure. Their model proposes that sociodemographic characteristics are associated with lifestyle differences that are expressed in the types of activities a person engages in, the time during which these activities occur, and the places they occur. With some modifications, their model could be applied to explain the risk of victimization in organizational settings since it is likely that factors that make people vulnerable to being victimized in one setting will do so in another.

We found numerous studies documenting consistent relationships between victimization and personality variables including negative affectivity and self-esteem. As we noted above, the causal direction of these relationships needs to be more firmly established. Theoretical arguments support the causal links from personality characteristics to victimization and vice versa. A case can also be made for bidirectional causality. What is clearly needed are studies using longitudinal or experimental designs to test which of these possibilities is best supported by data. Answering the causality question is important because it can help researchers understand whether the likelihood of being victimized may partly be a function of the victim's behavioral tendencies, which might be amenable to modification.

VICTIMIZATION IN DYADIC RELATIONSHIPS

Victimization often emerges in the context of dyadic relationships. Aquino & Lamertz (2004) proposed that employees sometimes enact certain relational roles within the organization's social system, leading them to experience either episodic or institutionalized forms of victimization. Aquino & Lamertz (2004) proposed four archetypal relational roles that can emerge in organizations: the dominating perpetrator, the reactive perpetrator, the submissive victim, and the provocative victim. Aquino & Lamertz (2004) theorized that the relationship between a given pair of employees who fit these role types will be characterized by certain behavioral styles, some of which can lead to interactions that are volatile and can lead one party to perceive that he or she has been victimized by the other. For example, a relational role composed of an employee who fits the provocative victim role type (i.e., he or she consistently behave in ways that violate social norms and threaten others' identities) and one who fits the reactive perpetrator role type (i.e., he or she responds very aggressively to perceived threats to his or her status or identity) is likely to be characterized by sporadic negative interactions over time that one or both parties can label as victimizing behavior.

Final Observations

We close with three final observations about the state of workplace victimization research. First, few studies make cross-cultural comparisons of victimization. For example, many of the bullying studies have been conducted in Scandinavian countries, which Hofstede (1980) has shown to be more egalitarian and feminine-oriented than the United States. In contrast, most studies of abusive supervision and incivility have been conducted in U.S. samples. It would be valuable to know whether the patterns of relationships found among these variables in existing studies would be replicated in another culture. Second, relatively few studies describe the process of victimiza-

tion. Given the dynamic nature of social interaction and the possibility that victimization likely involves actions and reactions of would-be perpetrators and likely victims (Andersson & Pearson 1999, Aquino & Lamertz 2004, Glomb 2002), it seems important for researchers to conduct more studies documenting the complexity of this unfolding process, particularly in the context of ongoing relationships (see sidebar *Victimization in Dyadic Relationships*).

Finally, more work is needed examining the efficacy of prevention and intervention programs designed to help employees cope with being victimized. We reported some studies showing how institutional and social support might buffer the negative effects of victimization, but such studies are rare.

The aim of our review was to bring greater coherence to the study of what we have referred to as workplace victimization. We have tried to show that the many constructs that researchers have introduced into the literature to study aggression from the target's perspective share a common assumption about how these behaviors thwart the satisfaction of fundamental human needs. For this reason, we encouraged researchers to give due recognition to other constructs occupying the same conceptual space as their own. Another goal of our review was to document the parallel efforts of European and North American researchers. A number of findings reported by these scholars converge; others do not. What we noticed, though, is that researchers on one continent do not always acknowledge the work being done on the other. We hope that our review will help researchers bridge this continental divide so the study of workplace aggression from the target's perspective can become a truly international enterprise.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. An employee's well-being is harmed when fundamental psychological and physiological needs are unmet or thwarted. In general, psychological needs include a sense of belonging, a feeling that one is a worthy individual, believing that one has the ability to predict and

to cognitively control one's environment, and being able to trust others. The most basic physiological need is the avoidance of pain.

2. Many constructs that researchers have introduced into the literature share a common assumption about how the behaviors of interest thwart the satisfaction of fundamental human needs. Conceptual differences among these constructs are subtle, and research that focuses exclusively on constructs that are only marginally different from others within the family of victimizing behaviors impedes theoretical progress.
3. The costs of workplace victimization are high: Victims of aggressive actions suffer psychologically, become fatigued, stressed, sick, and sometimes traumatized. Consequently, group and organizational performance can suffer.
4. Among the many investigations into the role of personality as a predictor of victimization, the propensity to experience negative affect, which includes emotions such as anger, fear, worry, anxiousness, sadness, and depression, shows the most consistent relationship to various victimization measures.
5. Many studies have found reliable relationships between experiencing workplace victimization and a host of negative psychological, emotional, and physiological outcomes. Among the negative psychological consequences that have been reported are increased depression and anxiety, job stress, posttraumatic stress, and decreased mental health. Affective responses to being victimized include diminished emotional well-being, lower levels of job and life satisfaction, shame, fear, and emotional exhaustion.
6. Organizational factors such as role conflict and role ambiguity as well as management styles that do not provide clear guidelines for what constitutes inappropriate conduct can increase employees' risk of being victimized.
7. The coping strategy that appears to consistently produce a significant improvement in a victim's current circumstances is finding a way to avoid the perpetrator(s) or to leave the situation. Strategies that involve an active response to the bullies (e.g., fighting back with similar means, talking to the bullies) often make the situation significantly worse by escalating conflict. Coping strategies that allow victims to experience greater control over their situation, such as expressing voice or engaging in constructive problem solving, can also be effective.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. Past studies have focused on negative outcomes of victimization but have paid almost no attention to how victims may forgive or reconcile with perpetrators. The paucity of research on forgiveness as a coping strategy following victimization is an obvious gap in the literature.
2. It is time for an empirical assessment to be conducted on the various measures of victimization most commonly used by researchers to determine whether they tap a common construct or whether important distinctions exist between them that have implications for developing a theory of victimization.

3. The field could benefit from more cross-disciplinary applications of criminological theories to explain workplace victimization since many of the factors that make people vulnerable to being victimized in one setting are likely to do so in another.
4. Establishing causality for many of the relationships found in the literature among personality, behavior, and victimization is important because it can help researchers understand whether the likelihood of being victimized may partly be a function of the victim's behavioral tendencies, which might be amenable to modification.
5. Very few studies make cross-cultural comparisons of victimization.
6. It would be valuable to know whether the patterns of relationships found among these variables in existing studies would be replicated in another culture.
7. Like many phenomena in organizational behavior, causal tests of theories are scarce because longitudinal and experimental data are rare. More experimental and longitudinal studies are needed to triangulate cross-sectional field studies of victimization.
8. More work is needed examining the efficacy of prevention and intervention programs designed to help employees cope with being victimized.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Susan Fiske, Helge Hoel, Gregory Marr, Denise Salin, and Daniel Skarlicki for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. We also thank Marjorie Laven, Anne Pedersen, and Xiaozhou Hu for their assistance with the preparation of the manuscript. This work was partially supported by a grant, awarded to Karl Aquino, from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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