Preferential Mistreatment: How Victim Status Moderates the Relationship Between Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Workplace Victimization

Karl Aquino • William H. Bommer
Department of Business Administration, College of Business and Economics, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19716
Department of Management, Georgia State University, 33 Gilmer Street SE, Atlanta, Georgia 30303
aquinok@be.udel.edu • mgtwhb@langate.gsu.edu

Abstract
This study investigates whether the performance of organizational citizenship behavior and three indicators of social status—hierarchical position, gender, and race—predict employees’ vulnerability to being victimized by the harmful actions of others. We hypothesize that interpersonally directed organizational citizenship deflects mistreatment by others because it enhances social attractiveness and creates bonds of mutual obligation and reciprocity. However, drawing from prior research that shows that people with high social status are perceived more favorably than people with low status, we also hypothesize that benefits of organizational citizenship are more likely to accrue to employees in high, as compared to low, status groups. Data were from 448 employees of a U.S. manufacturing firm. As expected, citizenship was more strongly and negatively related to perceived victimization for whites as compared to African-Americans. However, contrary to our prediction, citizenship was more strongly related to perceived victimization among employees with low, as compared to high, hierarchical status. No moderating effect of gender was found. Implications for organizations are discussed and future research directions are offered.

(Workplace Victimization; Organizational Citizenship Behavior; Social Status)

The question of why people injure, offend, or unjustly treat each other at work has emerged as an important research area in management. A common thread running through much of the research and theorizing on this topic is the emphasis on the characteristics or motives of perpetrators as predictors of harmful interpersonal behavior (e.g., Andersson and Pearson 1999, O’Leary-Kelly et al. 1996, Robinson and Bennett 1995). A complementary approach is offered by studies of workplace victimization (e.g., Aquino 2000, Aquino et al. 1999), which suggest that a more complete theoretical explanation for harmful workplace behavior should also consider victim characteristics. Workplace victimization should be of concern to scholars and practicing managers because employees who are frequently harmed by their coworkers can experience high levels of fear and anxiety that adversely affect work performance (Bennis 1989). Furthermore, exposure to even relatively minor forms of mistreatment can trigger an escalating pattern of retaliatory responses from the victim, leading to more serious acts of workplace aggression and violence (e.g., Andersson and Pearson 1999). Lastly, employers have a legal and, arguably, a moral obligation to provide a safe working environment for employees (Fenton et al. 1997).

Victimization has been defined as a person’s perception of having been exposed either momentarily or repeatedly to injurious actions emanating from one or more other persons (Aquino et al. 1999, Olweus 1978). Prior research suggests that three broad categories of victim-centered variables can reliably predict such experiences in organizations. The first consists of personality characteristics like aggressiveness (Felson and Steadman 1983, Olweus 1978), self-esteem (Egan and Perry 1998), or negativity (Aquino et al. 1999, Furr and Funder 1998). Past studies show that people who possess certain characteristics may knowingly or unknowingly create the social conditions that lead them to become frequent targets of others’ harmful actions. A second category of victim variables consists
of strategic behaviors that people might use to defend themselves from interpersonal mistreatment. Examples include tactical revenge (Tripp and Bies 1997), social accounts (Bies 1987), and apologies (Schlenker 1980). Finally, there is evidence that indicators of social status, such as hierarchical position (Aquino 2000, Aquino et al. 1999), race (Sidanius and Pratto 1999), or gender (Daly 1971) can predict victimization.

In this study, we examine a set of variables drawn from two of the aforementioned categories. The first variable is based on the argument that employees who exhibit certain strategic behaviors can minimize their risk of being victimized by coworkers. The specific behavior we chose to examine is organizational citizenship. To date, there have been few studies examining the consequences of citizenship (Organ and Ryan 1995). This is a gap that our study hopes to address by testing whether one consequence of good citizenship is to discourage victimization. However, in addition to positing a direct relation between citizenship behavior and victimization, we test a more complex model by hypothesizing that this relationship is strongest among employees who belong to high-status groups. This argument builds on previous studies showing that hierarchical position moderates the effects of personality characteristics (Aquino et al. 1999) and conflict management style (Aquino 2000) on perceived victimization. We extend the generality of these findings by investigating whether hierarchical position also moderates the relation between citizenship behavior and victimization. We also break new empirical ground by investigating the possible moderating effects of two other indicators of social status in organizations: race and gender. The following sections present the rationale for our hypotheses.

Theoretical Background

We want to predict the quality of treatment employees receive from their coworkers in the context of daily social interactions, so the interpersonally oriented forms of organizational citizenship, rather than those directed towards the organization, are of primary interest. Three types of citizenship identified by Organ (1988)—sportsmanship, courtesy, and altruism—are used to represent these behaviors. Organ (1988) describes sportsmanship as behavior indicating an individual’s willingness to tolerate less than ideal situations by not fending petty grievances or complaining about minor issues, courtesy as behavior aimed at preventing work-related problems, and altruism as behaviors that help another specific person with an organizationally relevant task or problem.

Our hypothesis that organizational citizenship is negatively related to victimization is based on two social psychological mechanisms. The first is the norm of reciprocity. The norm of reciprocity arises from the duties that people believe they owe to one another because of their history of previous interaction (Gouldner 1960). When one person does something to benefit another, a norm of positive reciprocity can be initiated whereby the recipient feels obligated to return the favor (Gouldner 1960, Trivers 1971). Conversely, when someone harms another person, a norm of negative reciprocity can be invoked, leading the injured party to retaliate against the harm-doer (Andersson and Pearson 1999, Axelrod 1984). There is considerable evidence supporting the universality of these norms (e.g., Axelrod 1984, Cialdini 2001, Trivers 1971), and we argue that the operation of positive reciprocity in organizations provides a theoretical rationale for predicting that citizenship is negatively related to victimization. In making our argument, we conceptualize good citizenship as a social resource that, by definition, benefits others. Consequently, such behaviors should elicit feelings of reciprocal obligation among those on whom benefits are conferred. By helping others directly through altruism, or (more indirectly) by striving to maintain harmonious working relationships with them, good citizens can obligate coworkers to treat them in similar ways. Furthermore, because harming someone who treats them favorably violates the norm of reciprocity, employees should feel strong internalized constraints against victimizing good citizens (Cialdini 2001).

On the other hand, employees who withhold citizenship behaviors are less likely to establish relationships built on positive reciprocity. In the absence of social obligations to reciprocate positive treatment, fellow employees may be undeterred from victimizing someone who is perceived as a vulnerable or deserving target of mistreatment. Furthermore, poor citizens may be viewed in a negative light because they fail to exhibit minimal standards of cooperativeness and social sensitivity. Such perceptions can decrease their social attractiveness and increase their risk of being victimized. Studies show that socially attractive people are more likely to be valued as partners, friends, or allies (Gilbert 1997) and are less likely to be victimized (Furr and Funder 1999, Parker and Asher 1987). Because organizational citizenship can enhance social attractiveness (Bolino 1999), it follows that such behavior should be negatively related to workplace victimization. Based on the two theoretical mechanisms described above, we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. The performance of interpersonally directed organizational citizenship behavior is negatively related to perceived victimization.

Although there are good theoretical reasons supporting Hypothesis 1, it is possible that the benefits of citizenship may not accrue equally to all employees. Rather, they are
more likely to benefit those employees who belong to high, rather than low, status groups. We consider this possibility below.

The Moderating Effect of Social Status

We test for possible moderating effects of social status by examining three indicators of status—hierarchical position, race, and gender—that have been shown to have implications for organizational behavior. Our argument is based on the observation that people tend to hold trait-like stereotypes of those who occupy low- and high-status positions. Specifically, people with high status are frequently judged as more competent, intelligent, and even better looking than those with low status (Georgesen and Harris 1998). This evaluative effect is robust and occurs in many different contexts using numerous status manipulations and evaluation measures (Georgesen and Harris 1998). In sum, people have a nearly automatic tendency to think high-status people are better than low-status people and to treat them accordingly.

One of the most relevant indicators of social status in organizations is hierarchical position. Not surprisingly, high-ranking employees are treated differently, and often better, than those of lower rank. For example, low-level employees are more likely to experience social isolation, supervisory control of their work, disproportionate criticism from fellow workers and supervisors, and exposure to humiliating and threatening comments (Ehrenreich 2001, Zegers de Beijl 1990). These differences in how high- and low-status people are treated can be explained by social dominance theory (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Social dominance theory posits that all societies form group-based hierarchies in which at least one group is dominant over all others and enjoys a disproportionate share of the positive assets (e.g., wealth, prestige, education, health). In contrast, there is at least one subordinate group that receives a disproportionate share of negative liabilities (e.g., poor health, social stigma, high levels of criminal punishment). Virtually all organizations are structured as group-based hierarchies, so it is reasonable to presume that members of the subordinate group receive a greater share of “negative liabilities” than members of the dominant group. This implies that, in general, low-ranking employees should report higher levels of victimization than high-ranking ones. In this study, we extend this simple, direct relationship by suggesting that hierarchical position moderates the relationship between organizational citizenship and victimization.

Our rationale is based on the argument that acts of citizenship performed by a high-ranking employee are more likely to elicit the positive reciprocity norm than the same behavior performed by a low-ranking employee. There are two theoretical justifications for this argument. First, there is a greater political advantage to reciprocating the positive behavior of a high-ranking employee. Because positive reciprocity can be starting a mechanism for establishing a mutually beneficial relationship (Gouldner 1960), it is reasonable to presume that an employee gains more from establishing such a relationship when the other party yields great influence within the organization. Assuming that employees act rationally most of the time, they should be more strongly motivated to reciprocate the positive behaviors of high-ranking as opposed to low-ranking coworkers. Organizational citizenship performed by a high-ranking coworker is also more likely to elicit positive reciprocity because there are costs for nonreciprocal behavior. Employees who violate the reciprocity norm can invite punishment or gain a reputation for being ungrateful, inconsiderate, or unreliable (Cialdini 2001, Gouldner 1960). Logically, the social costs of gaining such a reputation increase when the person whose good deeds go unreturned occupies a position of power and authority. The arguments presented above suggest that there are practical reasons why people of high rank may benefit more from being good citizens compared to those of lower rank. The following hypothesis tests this argument:

HYPOTHESIS 2. The negative relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and perceived victimization is stronger for employees who have a high, as compared to low, hierarchical position within the organization.

In addition to hierarchical position, membership in a salient social category, such as being a racial minority or a woman, indicates one’s status in an organization (Pettigrew and Martin 1987). Our hypotheses regarding the moderating effects of these socially constructed indicators (Ely 1995) are derived from status characteristics theory (Berger et al. 1977). According to status characteristics theory, the standards people use to make inferences about underlying individual attributes differ for high- versus low-status persons. The theory predicts that people make inferences about others based on diffuse status characteristics such as gender, race, or physical attractiveness that are correlated with status and perceived competence in society. If the diffuse status characteristic is made salient, as when people who work together differ from each other on this characteristic, then positive behaviors (e.g., high performance) by high-status persons are more likely to elicit favorable inferences of underlying positive traits (e.g., intelligence, ability) than the same behaviors displayed by low-status persons. Applying this theory to organizational citizenship, we
propose that diffuse status characteristics like race and gender can lead observers to make more favorable inferences of underlying traits like cooperativeness, generosity, or dependability when these behaviors are performed by people from high- as compared to low-status groups. In turn, these inferences will enhance good citizens’ social attractiveness (Argyle 1991, Gilbert 1997), making them less vulnerable to victimization (Furr and Funder 1999, Parker and Asher 1987). There is some evidence supporting this prediction. Rubovits and Maehr (1973), for example, found that teachers gave preferential treatment to “gifted” students, but only if they were white. In contrast, nongifted African-American students were treated more positively than gifted African-American students, who were generally treated negatively. Their findings suggest that race may moderate the relationship between good citizenship and victimization. However, this prediction assumes that African-Americans are widely perceived as having lower social status relative to whites.

Although the economic and social conditions of African-Americans have improved since the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in the 1960s (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1998), African-Americans continue to experience a disproportionate share of social liabilities like poverty, criminal punishment, low education, and social stigma relative to whites (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Furthermore, African-Americans are not well represented in society’s most influential, desirable, and prestigious positions (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1998). Given that social judgments typically reflect societal and organizational hierarchies, there is reason to expect that being African-American is associated with having lower status in organizations (Pettigrew and Martin 1987). In support of this view, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) showed that UCLA undergraduates who rated the social status of five ethnic groups (whites, Asians, Arabs, African-Americans, and Hispanics) rated whites as having the highest status and African-Americans and Hispanics the lowest. Furthermore, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) found high agreement within ethnic groups with regard to relative status, indicating that African-American and Hispanic students also viewed their groups as having low status compared to whites.

Based on status characteristics theory, we propose that acts of citizenship will be less effective at enhancing the social attractiveness of an African-American as compared to a white employee. The reason is that the same positive behaviors performed by an African-American, as opposed to a white, employee are less likely to lead to favorable inferences of positive underlying traits. There is some empirical evidence supporting this argument. An experiment by Biernat and Kobrynowicz (1997) showed that subjects required African-Americans to achieve higher levels of performance than whites in order to make the same inferences of underlying ability when they judged the performance of a fictional employee. The researchers interpreted this pattern as supporting status characteristics theory. If inferences of positive underlying traits can enhance social attractiveness, and if social attractiveness reduces one’s vulnerability to victimization, then it follows that citizenship behaviors performed by an African-American employee should be less effective at discouraging victimization than the same behaviors performed by a white employee. We make the same argument with respect to gender.

Women have progressively improved their positions in the workplace and wider society relative to men (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1998), yet gender still acts as a diffuse status characteristic in our society (Berger et al. 1977, Ridgeway and Diekema 1992). Because women have traditionally held jobs that are lower in power, influence, and supervisory responsibility than men (Kanter 1977), lingering social stereotypes of “women’s work” may reinforce the perception that women in organizations are members of a lower status group (Ely 1995). If so, then the social psychological mechanism that accounts for why citizenship behavior will be less effective at discouraging victimization for African-Americans should generalize to women. Specifically, such behaviors are less likely to lead to positive inferences of underlying traits for women than men. Biernat and Kobrynowicz’s (1997) study also provides empirical support for this argument. Replicating their findings for race, they found that experimental subjects required women to perform at a higher standard relative to men for similar inferences of underlying ability to occur. The theoretical arguments and empirical findings described above suggest the following hypotheses concerning the moderating effects of race and gender on the relationship between citizenship and victimization:

**Hypothesis 3.** The negative relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and perceived victimization is stronger for white than for African-American employees.

**Hypothesis 4.** The negative relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and perceived victimization is stronger for men than for women.

**Method**

**Sample and Procedures**
The sample consisted of employees of an American manufacturer. The company has five locations: two in the
southeastern United States, two in the midwestern United States, and one in the western portion of the country. The company has consistent organizational policies (e.g., pay scales, labor practices, hiring policies, drug testing, etc.) across locations. Of the total population of 650 employees, 575 responded to the survey. Performance ratings and measures of organizational citizenship behavior were collected from the immediate supervisors of 479 (85%) of these respondents. Usable data on all study variables were obtained from 425 employees (74% of the employees who responded). Because of our interest in race, seven employees were removed from the sample because they were Hispanic, and this represented too small a group to conduct meaningful analyses and cross-group comparison. Thus, 418 employees were retained for further analysis. Of the sample 63% was white and 37% was African-American; 66% was female and 34% was male. Fifteen percent of the employees were employed in professional positions; the remaining employees held line positions. These line positions consisted largely of manual sewers, machine operators, and materials handlers.

The study’s second author administered an employee survey on-site as each location scheduled time for all employees to take part in the study. Each employee received a survey, a letter from the researcher that assured the confidentiality of his or her responses, and a letter from the company’s president again guaranteeing the confidentiality of the data. The letter from the researcher emphasized that, “Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Whether you fill out this survey or not will not affect how you are evaluated or rewarded by your supervisor or any other member of this company.” On the same day that the employee data were collected, the researcher provided supervisors with performance-appraisal forms containing the names of their immediate subordinates. These researcher-provided instruments for measuring organizational citizenship were necessary because the company did not have a consistent performance-appraisal mechanism across locations and levels, and their existing appraisal instruments did not measure this construct.

Measures

Measures for the main variables of interest were obtained from three sources. Employees provided self-reports of perceived victimization and gender; the HR manager provided us with a list of employees that included their race, job title, and supervisor’s name; and supervisors provided data on organizational citizenship. Unless described otherwise, all measures were collected using Likert-type scales ranging from “1” (strongly disagree) to “7” (strongly agree).

PerceivedVictimization. We used 10 items from Aquino et al. (1999) to measure this construct. We excluded four items (i.e., “threw something at you when angry,” “pushed or punched you,” “made an obscene comment or gesture in front of you,” and “threw things at you with physical harm”) from their original instrument because company representatives indicated that these were extremely low-base-rate behaviors. For each item, respondents were asked to report the number of times that one or more organizational members displayed the target behavior towards them within the past six months. Responses were on a five-point, Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = 1–3 times, 3 = 4–6 times, 4 = 7–9 times, and 5 = 10 or more times). We wanted to distinguish between behaviors that were actually experienced by the target as being injurious and those that were not; hence, we instructed respondents to “Report only those times where you experienced emotional or physical discomfort as a result of the behavior.” We performed a principal components analysis with varimax rotation to assess the factor structure of these items. Inspection of the eigenvalues and scree plot indicated that all of the items loaded on a single factor, accounting for 49% of the variance. Accordingly, we summed the items to produce a perceived victimization scale (α = 0.83).

Race. We used company records to identify each employee’s race. This variable was dummy coded, with African-Americans being coded as “0” and whites coded as “1.”

Gender. Employees reported their gender which was coded as “0” for females and “1” for males.

Organizational Level. This measure was obtained from company records and was operationalized as a dichotomous variable, where “0” represents line employees and “1” represents professional employees.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior. We formed a 12-item scale consisting of items from Podsakoff and MacKenzie’s (1989) courtesy, sportsmanship, and altruism subscales to measure this construct. Sample items for each of these dimensions include “This employee takes steps to prevent problems with other workers” for courtesy, “This employee consumes a lot of time complaining about trivial matters (reverse coded)” for sportsmanship, and “This employee helps others who have heavy work loads” for altruism. Supervisors rated each employee who directly reported to them on each of the items. The items were averaged to produce a single scale (α = 0.90).

Control Variables. We controlled for several variables that might be related to perceived victimization but that were not of direct interest. The dependent variable was
self-reported, so it was important to control for personality characteristics that might systematically influence these perceptions. Personality may be directly related to self-reports of victimization for two reasons. First, people with certain personalities may be more likely to provoke others to mistreat them, which would lead them to report being more frequent targets of harmful action. It may also be that people with certain personalities interpret the content of social interactions negatively, leading them to “exaggerate” the frequency of victimization. For these reasons, it was important to assess the amount of variance explained by personality characteristics that might account for differences in victimization prior to testing the variables of direct interest. If after controlling for these characteristics our hypotheses are supported, then we can be more confident in concluding that the additional variance accounted for by the main variables in our model is likely due to the theoretical mechanisms proposed rather than being the result of individual personality differences.

We included two personality traits that have been shown to predict victimization in prior studies: aggressiveness and neuroticism. We included aggressiveness because people who have higher levels of this trait may be more likely to provoke others into mistreating them (Felson and Steadman 1983, Olweus 1978) and to interpret a wider range of relatively ambiguous social interactions as hostile (Dodge 1980). Employees completed the nine-item Physical Aggression subscale of the Buss and Perry (1992) Aggression Questionnaire to measure this construct. Buss and Perry report a correlation of 0.45 between self-reports of physical aggressiveness and peer nominations of aggressive behavior. The strength of this relationship was higher than any of those found for the other subscales in their Aggression Questionnaire, leading Buss and Perry to state that “...there is unequivocal evidence for the construct validity of the Physical Aggression scale” (1992, p. 458). Responses to the items were summed to produce a scale score ($\alpha = 0.77$). We controlled for neuroticism because people who have higher levels of neuroticism are more susceptible to psychological and emotional distress than those who have lower levels (cf. Costa and McCrae 1991). Consequently, it is possible that more neurotic people may report having been victimized more frequently because our measure of perceived victimization instructed employees to report only those behaviors that caused them to experience emotional or physical discomfort. Including neuroticism allowed us to separate out the effects of individual differences in emotional sensitivity prior to testing our hypotheses. This construct was measured using 10 items from Goldberg (2001). Items were averaged to produce a scale score ($\alpha = 0.83$).

We controlled for age because people under 25 years old are the most likely victims of violence in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice 1992). We controlled for company tenure because people who have been with the organization longer may have had more opportunities to experience mistreatment. We controlled for the plant in which the employee was located to account for potential differences in the social context that may impact perceived victimization, independent of the predictors. Finally, we controlled for employee performance because poor performers may be more frequent targets of mistreatment than good performers. We measured this construct with Williams and Anderson’s (1991) three-item, overall performance scale ($\alpha = 0.91$).

**Results**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables.

We used hierarchical regression to test Hypotheses 1–4. Data were centered in this analysis using the deviation score approach to reduce multicollinearity among the interaction terms and their individual components (Aiken and West 1991). Table 2 shows the change in $R^2$ at each step as well as the unstandardized beta weights across the three regression stages.²

Table 2 shows that among the control variables, age, neuroticism, and physical aggression were related to perceived victimization throughout the addition of the other main effects, as well as the interactions. Step 2 added the main effects of direct interest. The results showed that, after controlling for the effects of personality, race and citizenship were both negatively related to perceived victimization. The direction of the effects indicate that white employees reported being victimized less often than African-Americans, as did employees who were perceived by their supervisors as engaging in more citizenship behavior. The second finding supports Hypothesis 1, however, the effect is qualified by significant interactions (Aiken and West 1991).

The two-way interactions explained significant incremental variance in perceived victimization ($AR^2 = 0.02$, $p < 0.05$). Inspection of the individual unstandardized beta weights showed that the race by organizational citizenship interaction was significant. We explored the pattern of this interaction using procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991). Separate regressions performed in groups comprised of whites ($N = 265$) and African-Americans ($N = 153$) showed that, as predicted in Hypothesis 3, the negative relationship between citizenship...
Table 1  Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among the Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Perceived Victimization</td>
<td>14.17</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>(0.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Age</td>
<td>37.92</td>
<td>10.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Job Tenure</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Overall Performance</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Neuroticism</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>(0.83)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Physical Aggressiveness</td>
<td>23.73</td>
<td>10.37</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>(0.77)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) OCB</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>(0.90)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Race (White Coded as “1”)</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>(9) Gender (Males Coded as “1”)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
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<td>(10) Employee Level</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.18</td>
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</table>

Note: \((n = 418)\). Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities are shown along the diagonal. All \(r’s > 0.10\) and are significant at \(p < 0.05\).

Table 2  Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Perceived Victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
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<th>Model 2</th>
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<th>Model 3</th>
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<td>(t)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(t)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-3.15**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-2.47*</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-2.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Tenure</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Performance</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-1.33</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-4.34***</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>4.19***</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>4.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressiveness</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>3.63***</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2.62**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2.39*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCB</td>
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<td>-3.46***</td>
<td>-0.77</td>
<td>-2.51*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-2.16*</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>-2.40*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.58</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Race x OCB</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
<td>-2.46**</td>
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<td>1.98*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
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<td>Model (R^2)</td>
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<td>Adjusted Model (R^2)</td>
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Note: \((N = 418)\). *\(p < 0.05\); **\(p < 0.01\); ***\(p < 0.001\).

and victimization was stronger for whites \((\bar{\beta} = -0.31, \ p < 0.001)\) than for African-Americans \((\bar{\beta} = -0.01, \ n.s.)\). Table 2 also shows that the organizational level by organizational citizenship interaction term was significant \((\bar{\beta} = -0.10, \ p < 0.05)\). A follow-up analysis revealed that the negative relationship between citizenship and
perceived victimization was stronger for first-level employees ($\beta = -0.22, p < 0.001$) than for managers and professionals ($\beta = 0.03, \text{n.s.}$). This result contradicts the prediction of Hypothesis 2. The two-way interaction asserted in Hypothesis 4 was not supported because the gender by organizational citizenship interaction term was not significant ($\beta = 0.01, \text{n.s.}$).

**Discussion**

This study moves both organizational citizenship and workplace victimization research in a new direction by treating the former as a possible predictor of the latter. Although we found support for a hypothesized direct link between citizenship and victimization, we also showed that this relationship is moderated by formal position and race. One theoretical implication of the direct relationship is that acts of citizenship can benefit the giver as well as the receiver. Researchers have traditionally viewed citizenship as prosocial (Organ 1988), but there is no reason to assume that such behavior is entirely selfless (Bolino 1999). For example, citizenship can be used purely for impression-management purposes, advancing one’s interests through ingratiation or self-promotion (Bolino 1999).

Past studies of workplace victimization (e.g., Aquino et al. 1999, Felson and Steadman 1983) have used a *victim precipitation* model to explain why some people become more frequent targets of harmful action than others. The central tenet of this model is that frequent victims exhibit certain behavioral styles that make them appear as vulnerable or deserving targets for mistreatment. The hypothesized link between citizenship behavior and victimization follows the logic of this model, although we reverse the process by suggesting that *positive* behavior can *deter* victimization. One implication of this argument is that employees can proactively manage their risk of being victimized by being good citizens. However, our data suggest that victimization may be more manageable for whites than for African-Americans, and being a good citizen may be more consequential for low-ranking as compared to high-ranking employees.

Power differences between victims and offenders are central to the experience of being victimized (Einarsen 2000). Although our definition of victimization does not necessarily assume an imbalance of power between target and perpetrator, our results point toward a broader, power-based model that begins with the logical assumption that people with greater social power should be less vulnerable to victimization. Building on this assumption, we propose that the victim variables measured in our study can be translated into various forms of social power. Power is often acquired and exercised in organizations through the process of social exchange (Emerson 1962). We conceptualized citizenship behavior as a currency for social exchange, so it follows that such behavior can be instrumental in allowing employees to accumulate social power.

A form of power that a good citizen is likely to acquire is *referred power*, or the power that derives from being liked (French and Raven 1959). This proposition follows from the assertion that acts of citizenship enhance social esteem (Bolino 1999). A second form of power deriving from acts of citizenship arises from obligations others feel that they owe the good citizen in the context of social exchange relationships. We refer to this form of power as *exchange power*. Exchange power operates like idiosyncrasy credit, allowing employees whose past actions benefited others to perhaps violate some social norms without evoking punishment or retaliation. Together, we argue that the accumulation of both referred and exchange power should be associated with lower levels of victimization, which is consistent with our findings regarding good citizens.

The correspondence between hierarchical position and legitimate power is obvious. Employees with legitimate power are perceived as having the right to demand compliance and to expect some level of social deference (French and Raven 1959). Extending this argument, we theorized that citizenship would show a stronger negative relation to victimization for high as compared to low formal-status employees. Our data failed to support this prediction. We also did not find a significant direct relationship between formal status and victimization. This latter result contradicts the findings of other studies documenting the negative experiences of people at the lowest levels of the organization (e.g., Ehrenreich 2001, Zegers de Beijl 1990). Nevertheless, we note that formal status did moderate the relationship between citizenship and victimization, indicating that this form of status appears to matter.

The interaction between formal status and organizational citizenship suggests that the relationship between legitimate power and victimization is more complex than a strict interpretation of social dominance theory implies. One theoretical explanation for why, contrary to our prediction, citizenship was less consequential for high-ranking employees is that these employees have the capacity to effectively retaliate against potential victimizers and to reward those who exhibit appropriate levels of social deference. As a result, they may be treated well by others, even if they are poor citizens. Applying concepts of social power, one could argue that the failure to acquire referred or exchange power is compensated for by the
A new finding was that race moderates the effect of good citizenship. This interaction is particularly compelling given that the data involved come from multiple sources and that other known predictors of victimization were controlled. In keeping with our analysis of how social powers relate to victimization, our findings suggest that the positive referent or exchange powers that one gains from performing acts of citizenship may be offset by negative social stereotypes associated with being African-American. Researchers have argued that the over-representation of white men in high-status positions reinforces the devaluation of women and nonwhite subordinates (Ridgeway and Diekema 1992). When demographic arrangements reinforce status differences between members of different social categories, then these categories are likely to become highly salient and the perception of behavioral and psychological differences between members of these groups will be exaggerated in a manner consistent with group stereotypes (Ely 1995). Depending on the content of these stereotypes, race and gender may translate directly into referent power. If the stereotype is positive, which it tends to be for members of high-status groups (Georgesen and Harris 1998), then referent power is likely to be enhanced. If the stereotype is negative, then referent power is diminished. Because women and African-Americans are often viewed as having lower status than white men (e.g., Ely 1995, Kanter 1977, Sidanius and Pratto 1999), it seems plausible that members of the former groups tend to have less referent power than members of the latter. In turn, this lack of power can make them more vulnerable to being victimized by coworkers (Einarsen 2000).

Although the African-Americans in our sample reported being victimized more often than whites, and also appeared to benefit less from acts of citizenship, we did not find the same results for gender. One interpretation of
the null results is that they reflect a broader societal change in the social status of women relative to men. Compared to African-Americans, women have made greater advances on a number of important dimensions like pay and gaining access to high-ranking positions in organizations (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1998). Consequently, it may be that the perceived status differential between women and men may be smaller than that which still separates African-Americans from whites. This explanation would account for why race was a significant moderator of citizenship and gender was not. Another plausible explanation for the null results of gender is that social conditions within the organization we studied weakened the association between gender and perceptions of low status. Women filled the vast majority of the jobs associated with producing the company’s end product. Relative to men, women were well paid in this company and had a long tradition of holding jobs at which very few men excelled (e.g., sewing). Because pay is a “positional good” (Frank 1985) that can signal one’s status and prestige within the organization, the fact that women in this particular company were well paid may have enhanced their status relative to men. This explanation is consistent with Ely’s (1995) finding that sex roles are more stereotypical and problematic in firms with relatively low proportions of senior (high-status) women. The status differential may have been further muted because females comprised the numerical majority. However, it is not obvious that being in the numerical majority alone necessarily diminishes one’s chances of being mistreated, as we found no direct relation between gender and perceived victimization.

In the preceding discussion, we proposed theoretical extensions of our empirical findings by linking the variables we studied to various social powers. Having done this, we recognize that we did not measure power constructs directly, and so the proposed linkages between the various social powers and victimization are presented solely to advance the development of a broader theory of victimization. Bearing this in mind, our findings do have several practical implications for organizations.

**Practical Implications**

One practical implication is to show that employees are not entirely powerless to defend themselves against victimization. The potential benefits of being a good citizen coincide with those associated with other strategic behaviors (e.g., apologies, tactical revenge, ingratiating) that serve a deterrent or self-protective function. Consequently, it may behoove employees to be good citizens even if they are not explicitly rewarded by the organization. At the very least, employees should avoid being perceived as poor citizens. The main and moderating effects of race show that this socially constructed identity continues to influence how employees experience and react to their work environments. In a society where African-Americans are rarely found in positions of power in organizations, there may be a pervasive tendency for others to perceive them as having low status relative to whites. The practical implications of this are clear, namely, that efforts need to be made at both the organizational and the individual level to ensure that African-Americans and other minorities are able to gain greater access to positions of power in organizations. At the organizational level, this can be accomplished through mentoring and training of minority job candidates and the continued use of affirmative action programs, designed to ensure that qualified minorities are given the same opportunities to achieve positions of prominence as whites. At the individual level, minority employees can be made more aware of how their behaviors can influence how others treat them. By becoming more conscious of the political and social dynamics of the workplace, minorities can proactively “manage” their identities to reduce the discomfort and gain the confidence of dominant group members (Zwiegenhaft and Domhoff 1998). Presumably, this would reduce their vulnerability to harmful acts. Of course, taking this proactive approach does not address the psychic costs of subjugating one’s racial or gender identity for an instrumental, organizational, or dominant group identity.

The practical implications above all point toward reducing power differentials among employees, the reason being that in a social system where highly powerful and powerless actors coexist, the likelihood of dysfunctional social dynamics, like victimization, may be much greater than in social systems where everybody holds some form of power in relatively equal amounts. Although it is impossible to eradicate all power differentials in organizations, our recommendations for minimizing these differentials is consistent with the calls for greater power-sharing and workplace empowerment made by other management writers (e.g., Pfeffer 1994).

**Limitations of the Study**

Like all studies, ours has limitations. First, the cross-sectional design makes the direction of causality impossible to determine. It may be that perceptions of victimization could lead to poor citizenship and not the other way around. To explore this possibility, we reran the data treating organizational citizenship as the dependent variable. The results showed that the regression coefficient for victimization was not significant. Although this is an imperfect test of the alternative directional hypothesis, the results do suggest that perceptions of victimization were
not associated with poor citizenship. Clearly, a stronger test would require the use of longitudinal or experimental designs.

Second, while multiple sources of data were used, the measures of perceived victimization were self-reported. This approach lends itself to the criticism that our findings regarding race and formal position merely reflect differences in interpretation, rather than in “actual” mistreatment. Our data do not allow us to conclusively eliminate this alternative explanation; however, we did control for the possibility that employees might interpret the same behavior in different ways by including two personality characteristics in our model that have been theoretically and empirically associated with the tendency to systematically exaggerate, overreport, or misinterpret as hostile the content of everyday interaction. Even after controlling for these variables, we found effects not only for citizenship, but also for its interaction with two of the status variables. Moreover, the significant interactions make our results less vulnerable to the perceptual bias explanation because the pattern of these relationships suggests a more complex theoretical model than that one group of employees is systematically more prone to misperception than another (Podsakoff and Organ 1986).

A third limitation is that we are unable to distinguish whether the source of the victimizing behavior came from peers, supervisors, or even subordinates. We also do not know whether the victimizing behavior came from one person or many, and we are unable to distinguish between acts that were intentional or accidental (only that they were injurious). Given that people are more likely to retaliate against intentional mistreatment (Weiner 1995), understanding the perceived or actual intention behind the behavior is likely to be an important predictor of how victims respond to a negative act.

Future Directions
This study initiates a new line of inquiry into the social psychological dynamics of workplace victimization. Our speculations regarding the relationship between social power and victimization suggest that one possible macro-level moderator of the relationship between formal status and victimization is the distribution of power in the organization. Where the differences are large, we might expect the lowest-ranking members to experience the greatest victimization. In an organization with a more egalitarian structure or culture, the relationship between formal position and victimization may be weaker. Another question for future research is whether behavioral strategies besides OCB may afford protection against victimization. Clearly, there are other behaviors (e.g., expressions of commitment, loyalty) that may serve as currencies of social exchange in organizations, and their relationship to victimization warrants investigation. It is hoped that the present study will encourage the exploration of these and other questions that focus on victim-centered variables as predictors of harmful behavior in organizations.

Acknowledgments
The authors thank Lynn Bartels, Tom Becker, Todd Chiles, Steve Grover, Ed Miles, and John Sawyer for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Endnotes
1The items used are available from the first author.
2There were no significant direct effects for plant on the dependent measure. Consequently, we excluded the five dummy variables to increase the efficiency of the regression estimates and enhance the clarity of Table 2. The elimination of the dummy variables did not affect the results of the significance tests for the interactions.
3The full equation for this analysis was organizational citizenship = age + tenure + neuroticism + aggression + victimization + race + male + level.

References


