Bodies at Work: How Identity and Culture Shape Discrimination and Wellbeing

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HerStories in Science: Research by Women, For Women
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Workplace mistreatment is...

**Common**
Over 70% of employees experience incivility.

e.g., Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2001; Barling et al., 1996

**Costly**
The workplace is the 5th leading cause of death.

above Alzheimer’s, kidney disease; Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios, 2015

**Discriminatory**
Women and people of color (especially WOC) face disproportionate risk

e.g., Cortina, 2008
Research Program

1. Which factors shape the **emergence** of workplace mistreatment?

2. What are the **consequences** of mistreatment for people + organizations?

3. How can we **attenuate** the prevalence + consequences of mistreatment?

4. What are **research methods** for researching mistreatment among members of marginalized communities and working toward social justice?
Identity: Who am I? I am ______.

Self identity: how one thinks about oneself

Social identity: sense of self based on group membership(s)

Erikson, 1951, 1968; Tajfel, 1979; Oyserman & Markus, 1998
Culture:
shared assumptions, norms, and practices that shape how people think, feel, and behave

“everyday practices” can reveal cultural ideologies, which in turn can serve to reinforce power structures + maintain status quo

Islam & Zyphur, 2009, p. 120; see also Cole, 1996; Hogg, 2003, Kroeker & Kluckhohn, 1952; 2006; Mahalingam, 2006; Oyserman & Markus, 1993, 1998; Schein, 1990, 2006; Sue & Sue, 2007. image credit: @franzidraws
Bridging identity and culture: *embodiment*

The body is a site upon which culture and identity are (re)produced.

Identities are *enacted* and “*accomplished*” in *social interactions*:

Goffman, 1963; Bourdieu, 1984; Turner, 1984; Acker, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Trethewey, 1999
Embodiment & Marginality

**Marginality**: exclusion from meaningful participation in society for social, political, and/or economic reasons, preventing or lowering access to resources. “Outsider”

**Consequences of marginality**: poorer living conditions, self-esteem, and health

**Lived experience**: how things that happen to us shape our attitudes, beliefs, behavior

FLOSSPOLS, 2006; Gatzweiler et al., 2011; Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Young, 2000
Marginality and Mistreatment

Harassment as “punishment” for marginality, further perpetuating marginality

Berdahl, 2007; Cortina & Magley, 2003
How do identity and culture shape mistreatment and wellbeing?
RQ1: Which factors shape the emergence of workplace mistreatment?

Work environment

- male-dominated work environments X “masculine” occupations
- lack of training about how to prevent, respond to mistreatment
- organizational tolerance for sexual harassment
  - e.g., “People at my organization who sexually harass others usually get away with it.”

RQ1: Which factors shape the emergence of workplace mistreatment?

**Marginality and stigma**

- Challenging gender stereotypes
  - e.g., gay/bi men; men who engage in feminist activism
  - e.g., self-reliant women who self-report ‘masculine’ appearance
- Tokenism, hypervisibility (e.g., hair-touching against Black women)
- Social, occupational invisibility (e.g., nightshift)

Holland, Rabelo, Gustafson, Seabrook, & Cortina, 2016; Leskinen, Rabelo, & Cortina, 2015; Rabelo, 2017; Rabelo, McCluney, & Robotham, in prep
RQ2: What are the consequences of mistreatment for people + organizations?

Poorer well-being

- greater symptoms of stress, depression, PTSD
- lower job satisfaction; greater burnout, turnover intentions

Help-seeking barriers

- e.g., fears of being seen as weak, treated differently by leaders
  - trauma (actual + feared) → help-seeking barriers → depression, PTSD

Holland, Rabelo, Gustafson, Seabrook, & Cortina, 2016; Holland, Rabelo, & Cortina, 2016a; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014
RQ3: How can we **attenuate** the prevalence + consequences of mistreatment?

Organizational interventions to prevent, respond to workplace mistreatment (including retaliation)

- policies
- training
- reporting protocols
- restorative / transformative justice
- supportive supervisors + respectful work environments

RQ3: How can we attenuate the prevalence + consequences of mistreatment?

Remove barriers to help-seeking

- logistical (e.g., healthcare access) + sociocultural (e.g., stigma)

Improve knowledge about local, organizational resources

- feeling unsafe X lacking knowledge → depression, PTSD
- greater trust that leaders will protect confidentiality, dignity

RQ4: What are research methods for researching mistreatment + social justice?

mixed-methods research with careful attention to the ideologies and assumptions that shape research questions, study designs, outcomes

- surveys
- experiments
- interviews
- content analysis (e.g., court cases, Twitter)
- Photovoice

Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2013; Rabelo & Cortina, 2017; Cortina, Rabelo, & Holland, 2018
Bodies at Work: Bringing it all together

Mistreatment undermines people’s work, dignity, and well-being

Embodiment enables an examination of how bodies are used + abused at work, as well as which bodies suffer the consequences of work

→ The body can be a site upon which institutional practices are inscribed
→ embodiment enables an analysis of how these bodies are gendered, racialized, sexualized, classed and controlled
Conclusion

Ultimately, focusing on the body – rather than mind strictly – reveals new insights on workplace stress and (in)effective management.

Addressing mistreatment is important to promote the dignity of marginalized and devalued employees, and can also cultivate organizational effectiveness and sustainability more broadly.

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