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## Second-Order Victim-Blaming

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*Second-order victim-blaming emerges within a host of rationales given when designated solutions to first-order social problems do not produce the desired results. In certain cases second-order victim-blaming is built upon first-order victim blaming. This article develops a typology of second-order victim blaming based on the nature of problems forthcoming from failed social interventions. It then explores the implications of the phenomenon for those upon whom the blame falls, for other actors in intervention systems, and for social policy and programs more generally. It concludes with a tentative model of the sociopolitical implications of accumulated institutionalized victim-blaming, including the extremes of isolation and genocide.*

Ryan's argument (1976) about the pervasive orientation of blaming the victims of social inequalities for those social inequalities has received widespread attention in social problems analysis. He and subsequent writers have examined a host of areas in which the following pattern of victim-blaming occurs. First, people experiencing inequities are defined as different; then that difference is viewed as the cause of inequity; finally, programs are developed to "correct" the difference. We call this phenomenon victim-blaming of the first order because it describes an approach to causes and solutions for what are identified as fundamental, or first-order, social problems. Poverty, other inequalities, and related concerns are viewed here as first-order social problems.

The proliferation of government-sponsored interventions in social welfare since the 1960's around such first-order social problems appears to have produced another form of victim-blaming. What we call here second-order victim-blaming occurs

around problems forthcoming from the interventions themselves, which were designed to alleviate first-order social problems. Second-order victim-blaming refers to a series of rationales given when the designated solutions to the first-order social problems do not produce the desired results. These rationales, like those of first-order victim-blaming, focus on the presumed shortcomings of people experiencing social problems to explain policy and program failures and needed corrections. We will show that in certain cases second-order victim-blaming is built upon first-order victim-blaming, while in other cases it emerges anew at this stage of the social problems life cycle. In other words, first-order victim-blaming need not have occurred in order for second-order victim-blaming to emerge. Furthermore, when second-order and first-order victim-blaming occur cumulatively, they need not focus on the very same presumed difference of the party being blamed; they only need blame the same party in order to be considered cumulative.

Second-order victim-blaming is a provocative issue in its own right. Its examination elaborates a number of salient theoretical concerns. For example, discussion of second-order victim-blaming continues the critique of the social pathology model Ryan initiated with regard to first-order social problems. Ryan criticized the widespread application of theoretical filters that come to see social problems' causes as lodged within individuals rather than being structurally produced. We add to that critique by our focus on yet another layer of such thinking.

Second-order victim blaming also speaks to the ongoing struggle over the social construction of social problems wherein elites prefer individually-focused analyses (Neubeck, 1986). The use of personal attributions to explain social problems enables dominant groups to redirect criticism from the very social systems from which they derive their own power and privilege. This article demonstrates another mechanism by which elites and their agents protect themselves from blame.

Furthermore, a focus on second-order victim-blaming builds upon Sieber's (1981) catalogue of fatal remedies by exploring rationalizations for perverse policy outcomes. Sieber identified seven inherent features of policy interventions that produce reverse/negative effects. Our article points out that, while the

sources of failure of these regressive interventions may be systemic in nature, the failures are rationalized through second-order victim-blaming.

Finally, an understanding of second-order victim-blaming as rationalization expands the critical examination of accounts from service providers when policies and programs fail (Waters and Dressel, 1985; Dressel, 1984). Social welfare workers are the agents typically called upon to explain program and policy failures. Thus, as Miller (1992) claims, a primary part of their job becomes "social problems work," or the articulation of ways of thinking about social problems by representations about concrete cases. Selected research has already catalogued strategies frequently used to accomplish this task. This article provides an understanding of the structural contexts within which such rationalizations are likely to emerge.

Our goal here is to develop an initial typology of second-order victim-blaming and to explore, if only in a preliminary way, its implications for those upon whom the blame falls, for other actors in intervention systems, and for social policy and programs more generally. This enterprise approaches the analysis of social problems from a contextual constructionist perspective (Miller and Holstein, 1993; Best, 1989). That is, we view the social scientist's role as critic of claims about social problems to be an important part of the research process. As such, the following analysis both describes the claims being made and offers an evaluation of whether or not such claims seem warranted.

The following claims emerge from processes of both induction and deduction. In the routine conduct of pursuing our own research projects, reviewing research and policy analysis by others, and scanning mass media reports, especially newspaper accounts about social problems, we began to detect recurrent themes that gradually produced the typology offered below. The inductively-derived typology generated logical categories which we had not noticed in the previously mentioned materials. Thus, when those categories were identified, we sought empirical cases which would document the utility of the category and provide an initial illustration of it. Our project, therefore, is not intended to be a systematic study of empirical predictability.

Rather, it is a formulation of rhetoric about social problems that brings together a range of experiences within a single conceptual scheme and explores potential social consequences, should our formulation prove to be viable.

### A Typology of Second-Order Victim-Blaming

The various manifestations of second-order victim-blaming can be organized according to the nature of the problems forthcoming from social interventions for which an explanation is required. For the purpose of illustration we will explore three manifestations, but we doubt that these exhaust the possibilities for cataloging this phenomenon. We discuss how second-order victim-blaming arises from inadequate policy design, insufficient program funding, and inadequate program implementation. The distinction made earlier between second-order victim-blaming built upon first-order victim-blaming versus that emerging anew is combined with these sources of second-order victim-blaming to produce the typology shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 also includes illustrations of each type that we describe below. It is important to recognize that we have simplified the issues for the purpose of illustrating the typology. In reality, some social interventions are simultaneously plagued by inadequate policy design, underfunding, poor implementation, or some combination thereof. However, in order to illustrate each cell in Figure 1, we have chosen to highlight certain arguments over others. Following illustration of the cells, we will discuss the conditions under which each type of second-order victim-blaming is likely to occur.

*Inadequate Policy Design.* Numerous scholars (e.g., Binstock and Levin, 1976; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1979; Sieber, 1981; Rein and Rabinovitz, 1978; Estes, 1979; Dressel, 1984) have identified features in the design of social policies that are likely to produce problems in policy implementation. These include intentional ambiguity, symbolic and ambitious goals, universal entitlement, and fragmentation. In addition, Ryan (1976) details the preference for individually-focused interventions over structural change in the face of evidence that recommends otherwise. When perverse manifest functions or negative latent functions

Figure 1  
*A Typology of Second-Order Victim-Blaming and Illustrative Cases*

Type of Victim-Blaming	Nature of Intervention Problem from which Second-Order Victim-Blaming Arises		
	Inadequate Policy Design	Insufficient Program Funding	Inadequate Program Implementation
Second-Order Built Upon First-Order	Workfare remedies	Forced removal of the homeless	AFDC requirements
Second-Order Not Built Upon First-Order	Equal opportunity/affirmative action outcomes	Child abuse intervention	Prison visitation

are produced or manifest functions go unfulfilled, the arena is set for second-order victim-blaming as a substitute for questioning the policy design itself. In the first illustration below, second-order victim-blaming is built upon first-order victim-blaming; in the second illustration it is not.

1) Second-order victim-blaming built upon first-order victim-blaming. Workfare has been a central element in public assistance policy since the Family Support Act of 1988. It mandates that AFDC recipients meeting certain criteria must work or receive work training as a condition of eligibility for public assistance. Workfare is premised on first-order victim-blaming in that it assumes that recipients are disinclined to work because of lack of motivation. State workfare initiatives have produced modest success at best, as measured by participants' ability to find long-term work at above-poverty wages (e.g., Gardner, 1990; Gaiter, 1991). This outcome is in fact predictable, given a stagnant economy with an unprecedented proportion of low-paying jobs.

Because the workfare intervention has not produced the desired level of results, explanations must be found for its lackluster performance and corrections made to the program. Nowhere in legislative debates about what should be done is there sustained discussion of the inadequacy of workfare's policy mandate in the context of the present economy. Instead, specific legislative steps have been taken to correct workfare's shortcomings by adding second-order victim-blaming to the first-order blame reflected in the premises of workfare itself. For example, some states are considering laws that will eliminate public assistance payments for recipients after a specified number of years (e.g., Clymer, 1992). The underlying assumption of these proposals is that if recipients will not motivate themselves to work, then the state must.

In sum, it appears that a key problem with workfare policy and programs is the failure to acknowledge the broader problems of job availability and the need for livable wages. Instead, policy and program failures are blamed on presumed shortcomings of AFDC recipients, and correctives are directed toward altering their behavior. In this case, second-order victim-blaming is layered on top of first-order victim-blaming. Both with the original problem and then with the problem of the intervention,

AFDC recipients' presumed personal attributes are claimed to have created the problems. In one way or another, then, it is mandated that their attributes change.

2) Second-order victim-blaming not built upon first-order victim-blaming. Equal opportunity and affirmative action policies and interventions are intended to reduce discrimination by gender, race/ethnicity, age, and disability in employment practices, educational opportunities, and other arenas. These policies are not premised on first-order victim-blaming. Instead, they identify structural and attitudinal barriers created by perpetrators as necessary sites for change. While the policies presumably make access to jobs and promotion more equitable, nevertheless their design is flawed in that they leave the question of institutionalized discrimination unaddressed.

For example, the policies are not designed to question recruitment and evaluation criteria, only to ensure that the criteria are applied similarly to all applicants. Yet, as Acker (1990) and others have demonstrated, recruitment and evaluation criteria derive from work profiles of dominant group members, thus requiring others to conform to standards which may be less achievable or less desired by them in order to be hired or promoted. To illustrate, Dressel et al. (1994) describe how criteria for university faculty promotion typically privilege basic research (i.e., not immediately applicable) over applied research. They claim, however, that basic research is more likely to be engaged in by dominant group members for whom social change is not as pressing a community need. The preference for basic research grounded in a dominant group profile gets transformed into an ideology of performance evaluation that impacts faculty differentially by gender and race.

When the application of these criteria work against the hiring or promotion of someone outside the dominant group, the flaws in policies of non-discrimination that preclude the examination of institutionalized discrimination typically go unaddressed. Instead, the usual response is for employers or committee members to devalue the candidate's credentials. In effect, the applicant is blamed for failing to measure up to standards that appear neutral but that nonetheless operate in discriminatory ways, ways that policies of non-discrimination fail

to address. This illustration differs from the preceding one, however, in that the second-order victim-blaming is not built upon victim-blaming of the first order.

*Insufficient Program Funding.* The passage of ambitious legislation with inadequate funding to accompany its promises is an all-too-common feature of social welfare politics (e.g., Binstock and Levin, 1976). It is predictable, then, that problems such as the need to ration services or to deny services altogether to eligible clients will arise from interventions that are inadequately funded. Second-order victim-blaming often occurs around the problem of insufficient program funding in the form of clients being blamed for their lack of access to appropriate services, and consequently the lack of improvement in their situations. The following cases from a large metropolitan area illustrate two different manifestations of this form of second-order victim-blaming. The first is built upon first-order victim-blaming, while the second is not.

1) Second-order victim-blaming built upon first-order victim-blaming. Policies and programs to address the problem of homelessness tend toward first-order victim-blaming insofar as they focus on individual shortcomings that frequently are epiphenomenal to structural problems faced by homeless people. That is, attention gets directed largely to issues such as alcohol or drug abuse, emotional disorders, and attitudinal problems. Most policies and programs around homelessness have not stemmed the growth of people without permanent residences. In part the policies and programs have failed because of insufficient funding for community mental health services and inexpensive shelter. To be sure, we could also argue that inadequate policy design is at fault here, too. Policies and funds focused on homelessness have all too often dealt with its symptoms rather than its causes, which include the ongoing restructuring of the U.S. economy and urban gentrification. For the purpose of this illustration, however, we confine the emphasis to the problem of insufficient funding.

The problem in this case is first how to explain the fact that a host of government and private programs have failed to reduce homelessness, and then to determine what to do about it. Conforti (1993) examines the idea of the removal of homeless

people from inner cities to unused or underused military bases. He claims that such steps may be desirable for those individuals in need of developmental and custodial services that local funding does not address. Implicitly he views some people who are homeless as extraordinarily needy, thereby requiring drastic measures to correct that difference. The second-order victim-blaming of Conforti's proposal—that some homeless people are so impaired as to be candidates for isolation—is built upon the first-order victim-blaming of certain existing policies—that homeless peoples' primary problems are drug abuse, mental illness, and destructive attitudes—in a way that sets the stage for the consideration of drastic measures against people in need. Indeed, early in the Clinton administration, the new president signed an Executive Order paving the way for utilization of vacated military bases to address the issue of homelessness (Jackson, 1993).

2) Second-order victim-blaming not built upon first-order victim-blaming. Laws enacted by states to protect children from abuse and neglect are grounded in the assumption that perpetrators need to be stopped. They are not conceptualized in a way that focuses the blame for maltreatment on children. Thus, they do not participate in first-order victim-blaming. Yet, the manner in which they are enacted may produce victim-blaming of the second order. For example, from our own research we are aware of a staff member of a community service agency who suspected that one of her young clients was being physically abused by a family member. Out of personal concern and by mandate of law she reported the case to appropriate parties within the local department of family and children services. After almost a week of investigation during which time the staff member worried about the possibility of ongoing abuse, the caseworker closed the case. She informed the staff member that while she believed the child was being abused, the child was "not abused enough" for assistance to be forthcoming. The caseworker explained that she had to deal with situations of greater danger to children than this one, and so she could not justify attending to it further. The problem here is inadequate funding for effective program operation. But the caseworker transformed the problem into the child's difference, that difference being that

she was "not abused enough." Presumably the child would not receive the service until her difference was "corrected," namely that she be abused more seriously. In this manner second-order victim-blaming emerged as a way to explain the service shortcoming, even though the intervention had not been grounded in first-order victim-blaming.

*Inadequate program implementation.* Over a decade ago Pressman and Wildavsky (1979) articulated various ways that the process of program implementation can distort legislative intent or alter original plans, thereby displacing, subverting, or otherwise affecting stated goals. Unfulfilled goals due to shortcomings of the implementation process represent another occasion around which second-order victim-blaming emerges. The following illustrations first demonstrate second-order victim-blaming built upon first-order victim-blaming and then that which emerges anew at the stage of explaining the shortcomings of interventions.

1) Second-order victim-blaming built upon first-order victim-blaming. A host of stigma grounded in first-order victim-blaming surround AFDC recipients (Ryan, 1976). Recipients are alternatively blamed for presumed poor work habits, improper consumer behaviors, and improper sexual behavior. All of these concerns are reflected in regulations that have emerged around this form of public assistance. The growing costs of AFDC in an economy with growing un/underemployment and despair are provoking measures in some states that reflect second-order victim-blaming of AFDC recipients in a manner that sidesteps serious shortcomings of service implementation. For example, Maryland has been given permission by the federal government to reduce AFDC payments to recipients who do not get preventive health care (Tapscott and Hill, 1991; Shen, 1992). Maryland's Secretary of Human Resources described the new policy as "... help(ing) the individual who needs just a little nudge to become a responsible adult and a responsible parent" (Tapscott and Hill, 1991:A1).

Maryland's action ignores a serious question of program implementation, namely, to what extent are preventive health services readily accessible to AFDC recipients? Certain studies have linked inadequate health care for the poor to various

service features such as lack of transportation or accessibility, lengthy waiting periods within a facility, insensitive provider treatment, and the like (e.g., Butler, 1988; Aday, Fleming, and Andersen, 1984; Lewis, Fein, and Mechanic, 1976; Milio, 1975). Goggin's (1987) study is illustrative in this regard. He documents the blotchy performance of the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) Program, a child health program that subsidizes preventive care and treatment for poor children. His analysis identified program attributes, the nature of the organization in charge of implementation, and the skills of the individuals responsible for local management of the program as the three properties behind the failure of the program.

In this illustration the policy assumption is that lack of client responsibility underlies lack of preventive health measures for children. The result is a policy grounded in second-order victim-blaming that ignores significant issues of inadequate service implementation. The policy is directed at persons who already experience the stigma of first-order victim-blaming as AFDC recipients.

2) Second-order victim-blaming not built upon first-order victim-blaming. Prisons typically allow family members to visit inmates under heavily proscribed conditions. Indeed, family visitation may be regarded by officials as an aspect of prisoner rehabilitation, and thus as a social service that they offer. Insofar as such programs are premised on a recognition of the need to maintain family bonds, we would argue that they do not demonstrate first-order victim-blaming. However, the following case, which comes from one author's participant observation research, demonstrates how implementation shortcomings generate victim-blaming of the second order.

A community service agency provides bus transportation to inmates' family members. Agency staff have a longstanding arrangement whereby they notify prison officials in advance about which family members will visit. On one trip a grandmother accompanied her grandchildren to visit her adult daughter, who is the children's mother. Upon arrival at the prison site, these family members were delayed for almost two hours from seeing their loved one because prison officials, despite advance notice, could not determine which of two sites housed the prisoner

and then whether the family members had clearance to visit. At one point a guard delivered the wrong inmate to the visitation area. The agency staffperson registered her disapproval of the extensive delay to a prison official who had been called in in the midst of the developing confusion. The prison official responded to the staffperson, and indirectly to the grandmother, with the statement, "Look, we've got over 900 women here. You can't expect us to keep up with all of them." In other words, the second-order problem around the visitation program is that recipients' expectations of prison performance are too high, not that the program is inadequately implemented. In this scenario we see that second-order victim-blaming emerged anew in the efforts of the prison official to account for the delay of prison staff in implementing the visitation program.

#### Implications of Second-Order Victim-Blaming

Of course, victim-blaming is not a new phenomenon. What is relatively new about the process is that the significant social interventions of the past three decades have provided a second-order arena in which this orientation could emerge. What are the implications of second-order victim-blaming for those who are blamed, for actors in intervention systems, and for social policy more generally?

*Implications for victims.* The implications of second-order victim-blaming for those upon whom the blame falls are variable, depending upon the material and social resources victims have at their command. Furthermore, Hochschild's (1983) concept of status shield is relevant here. In general, those with greater exchange resources are able to avoid victim-blame or to deflect or challenge it, should it occur.

The ultimate personal consequence of victim-blaming occurs when victims come to see themselves as those who blame them do. Lower self-esteem, even self-hatred, are outcomes more likely to emerge for those who are already marginalized and devalued in society. One's adoption of negative images from others can be viewed as a form of auto-oppression which has within it the seeds of self-destruction. Tragically and ironically, self-destruction accomplishes for society what social isolation

and genocide do, but without raising the spectre of rights violations.

*Implications for interveners.* Second-order victim-blaming enables human service providers to distance from and dehumanize clientele. The process is typically gradual (Dressel, 1984), but its consequences reverberate throughout interactions across client caseloads. While such remoteness and antagonism may enable interveners to accommodate to their stressful work within an inadequate intervention system, it simultaneously reduces the likelihood that they will advocate for needed changes in the policies and programs that themselves produce second-order social problems.

The implications are substantively different for those charged with implementing rights. Dominant groups or their agents may use second-order victim-blaming not built upon first-order victim-blaming to justify their ongoing privilege or authority in the face of policy extended precisely to challenge such reproduction. The mechanisms for achieving this outcome appear to vary from the subtle and impersonal means of institutionalized discrimination to overt devaluation in face-to-face encounters.

*Implications for social policy.* So long as second-order victim-blaming receives credibility, ironic or perverse outcomes will not seem ironic or perverse. Second-order victim-blaming deflects focus from the inadequate policy designs, insufficient program funding, and inadequate program implementation that give rise to it. Thus, opportunities are lost for needed policy and program critiques and improvements.

As we have pointed out, second-order victim-blaming may or may not be built upon first order victim-blaming. The illustrations in Figure 1, when read horizontally, suggest the circumstances under which either form may occur. In the cases of second-order victim-blaming built upon first-order victim-blaming, victims' spoiled identities are already institutionalized in social policies. The routine operation of those policies will maintain stigmatization of their target populations. Given policy or program shortcomings, decision-makers already have a foundation of victim-blaming on which to build in seeking to identify responsibility for problems. To the extent to which they

are themselves identified with the policies and programs, they also have vested interests to protect from serious critique.

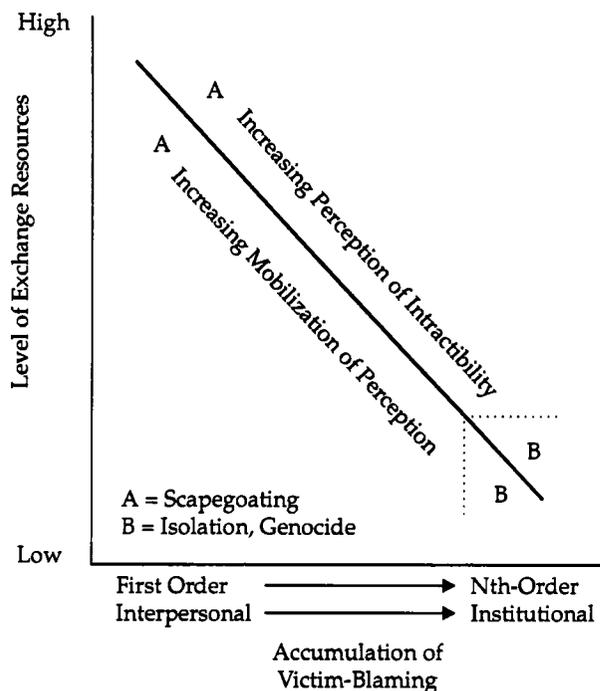
In contrast, the social policies implicated in second-order victim-blaming not built upon first-order victim-blaming are designed to protect rights (and identities) for formerly aggrieved groups. The subversive implementation of those policies may work to spoil the identities of their target populations. Indeed, the "social problems work" by the middle-level agents of the policies we cite in this category function to blame the targeted individuals for situations in which their rights are denied. Insofar as everyday micro-interactions may eventually produce macro-level claimsmaking about social problems, it is not out of the question to suggest that second-order victim-blaming not built upon first-order victim-blaming can lead to institutionalized stigmatization. In our illustrations, such an outcome would include the rollback of rights and a broadened pool of policy scapegoats.

The ultimate political danger is that the stigma generated by both first- and second-order victim-blaming will reach such proportions that severe forms of social control are considered and imposed. Such outcomes are evident in welfare policies that require a woman's use of Norplant or her sterilization in order to obtain public housing or in proposals for removal of the homeless to military reservations (Conforti, 1993). The logical outcomes of the claimed differences on which blaming-the-victim ideologies rest are isolation and genocide (nth-order manifestations of victim-blaming).

We have identified victim-blaming as a layered process that may have particularly severe consequences when next-order forms are built upon previous forms, or when interpersonal blame becomes institutionalized. Each successive level or form of blame presents people as increasingly troublesome and intractable. These potentially cumulative or developmental processes are represented on the horizontal axis in Figure 2. Furthermore, we have indicated how the strength of status shields (by class, gender, race/ethnicity and so on) and other resources (material and social) enables some to deflect the stigma of victim-blaming while others cannot. This variable

Figure 2

*Hypothesized Implications of accumulated Victim Blaming*



is represented on the vertical axis in Figure 2. The diagonal line within the figure represents either the increasing perception of intractability or increasing mobilization of stigmatized perceptions associated with the intersection of the two dimensions already identified. The areas of the cell marked with an A suggest that the likely outcome of the combinations of limited layers of victim-blaming and/or interpersonal victim-blaming and reasonable levels of exchange resources is simple scapegoating. However, when reduced levels of exchange resources are combined with multiple layers of victim-blaming wherein individuals' problems are perceived as intractable and/or wherein victim-blaming is broadly institutionalized, the most severe forms of social control—*isolation and genocide*—are more likely

results. Insofar as this model of accumulated and highly institutionalized victim-blaming is plausible, it offers ample reason for concern over the phenomenon referred to here as second-order victim-blaming.

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