The Emerging Victimhood Culture is Scary

By now you've most likely heard about the increasingly sanitized, PC culture that is coming to predominate on college campuses. And on a weekly basis you witness a public figure self-immolate in an attempt to quell the frenzied demand of a mob for an apology.

So what's going on?

A recent scholarly paper from Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning—["Microaggression and Moral Cultures"](#)—claims these trends are indicative of the emergence of a "victimhood culture" in America.

The contents of the paper have been helpfully summarized by Conor Friedersdorf in a popular article in *The Atlantic* entitled ["The Rise of Victimhood Culture."](#)

As Friedersdorf explains, Americans previously settled conflicts within the frameworks of the "honor" and "dignity" cultures:

> *"In honor cultures like the Old West or the street gangs of West Side Story, they might engage in a duel or physical fight. In dignity cultures, like the ones that prevailed in Western countries during the 19th and 20th Centuries, 'insults might provoke offense, but they no longer have the same importance as a way of establishing or destroying a reputation for bravery,' they write. 'When intolerable conflicts do arise, dignity cultures prescribe direct but non-violent actions.'"*

But now, we have the victimhood culture. Quoting Campbell and Manning, Friedersdorf explains this as

"characterized by concern with status and sensitivity to slight combined with a heavy reliance on third parties. People are intolerant of insults, even if unintentional, and react by bringing them to the attention of authorities or to the public at large. Domination is the main form of deviance, and victimization a way of attracting sympathy, so rather than emphasize either their strength or inner worth, the aggrieved emphasize their oppression and social marginalization.

Victimhood cultures emerge in settings, like today's college campuses, "that increasingly lack the intimacy and cultural homogeneity that once characterized towns and suburbs, but in which organized authority and public opinion remain as powerful sanctions," they argue. "Under such conditions complaint to third parties has supplanted both toleration and negotiation. People increasingly demand help from others, and advertise their oppression as evidence that they deserve respect and assistance. Thus we might call this moral culture a culture of victimhood … the moral status of the victim, at its nadir in honor cultures, has risen to new heights."

According to the paper, the following social conditions allow the victimhood culture to get a foothold:

- *Self-help in the form of dueling or fighting is not an option.*

- *"The availability of social superiors—especially hierarchical superiors such as legal or private administrators—is conducive to reliance on third parties."*

- *Campaigns aimed at winning over the support of third parties are likeliest to occur in atomized environments, like college campuses, where one cannot*

> > *rely on members of a family, tribe or clan to automatically take one's side in a dispute.*
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> > • *Since third-parties are likeliest to intervene in disputes that they regard as relatively serious, and disputes where one group is perceived as dominating another are considered serious by virtue of their aggregate relevance to millions of people, victimhood culture is likeliest to arise in settings where there is some diversity and inequality, but whose members are almost equal, since "a morality that privileges equality and condemns oppression is most likely to arise precisely in settings that already have relatively high degrees of equality."*

So, basically, members of the victimhood culture that is emerging in America operate within a relatively privileged and sheltered environment and try to solve conflicts by tattling to authority figures so that they may gloat over their perceived aggressors.

At the end of the movie *The Last King of Scotland*, the doctor Nicholas Garrigan, who expects to lose his life, manages enough strength to utter these word to the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin: "You're a child. You have the mind and ego of an angry, spoiled, uneducated child. And that's what makes you so fucking scary."

No one will claim that the "honor" or "dignity" cultures described above were perfect. But I contend that the victimhood culture is much more scary precisely because it is childish.