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Gender stereotypes, class, and race in attributions of blame for women's gender-linked mistreatment

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Abstract

In two survey experiments, three types of gender-based mistreatment, social class and race of the target, and gender-linked stereotypes of respectability (sexualization and irresponsibility) were assessed in relation to victim blame attribution. U.S. participants (Study 1: $N = 416$; Study 2: $N = 300$) read a vignette about a woman described as working- or middle-class, as Black or white, and as having experienced sexual assault, sexual harassment, or incivility in the workplace. Based on the ambiguity of the intent of the perpetrator, we anticipated that incivility would result in more victim blame; this was confirmed. Additionally, in both studies, perceived victim respectability mediated the relationship between class and blame. The working-class woman was seen as less respectable compared to the middle-class woman, and this was associated with greater blame attribution for mistreatment. Results confirm the importance of more attention to social class in research on perceptions of women exposed to mistreatment, as well as interventions to mitigate victim-blaming.

KEYWORDS
working-class women, respectability, victim blame

INTRODUCTION

Do gender stereotypes increase observers' tendency to blame women not only for their own experiences of sexual assault, but other forms of gender-based mistreatment? Gender stereotypes have been identified as relevant to the attribution of blame with respect to rape. These include stereotypes that represent women who experience mistreatment either as "respectable" or not. We examine whether these stereotypes operate in the same way in the face of three forms of mistreatment that we expected to differ in terms of the ambiguity of the perpetrator's intention: sexual assault, sexual harassment, and incivility. In addition, since in the United States gender stereotypes differ for women by race and class based on overlapping systems of oppression, particularly in terms of respectability, we consider whether women's intersecting race and class-based identities affect observers' reliance on gender stereotypes and those stereotypes' impact on attributions of blame. While some research on gender-based mistreatment has focused on the race of the woman as relevant, very little has considered the role of social class.

Blaming women for their own mistreatment

For over four decades social scientists have recognized that there is a tendency to attribute blame to those who experience misfortune (Lerner, 1980; Ryan, 1976), even when their misfortune is attributable to others' malice, structural inequality, or simply bad luck. These patterns include misfortunes such as being poor and being a victim of a crime; and apply to both men and women. However, this tendency was quickly recognized as especially pertinent in observers' reactions to women who experienced sexual violence, or rape.

Gender-based mistreatment

Victim-blaming has been most extensively researched for sexual assault. However, in this study, we are interested in considering whether women are also blamed for other forms of gender-linked mistreatment such as sexual harassment and workplace incivility; and whether the factors that predict blaming women are the same across these different forms of mistreatment.

Sexual assault

As noted above, considerable research has demonstrated that many observers blame women for their own victimization in sexual assaults (Campbell, 2008; Janoff-Bulman et al., 1985; Muehlenhard, 1988; Muehlenhard & Rodgers, 1993; Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014), and that this is true of both male and female observers (Acock & Ireland, 1983), and of victims themselves (Damrosch, 1985; Janoff-Bulman, 1979).

Researchers have also found that perceptions related to gender stereotypes are important in blaming victims for experiences of sexual assault. These include stereotypes that are associated with women's inability to meet gendered expectations for feminine respectability, including those that sexualize and sexually-objectify women. For example, in an experimental paradigm, Loughnan et al. (2013) found more victim blame attribution in the context of the sexual assault of a woman who was sexually objectified compared to a woman who was not. Other studies assessed

victim-blaming in the context of their perceived respectability in terms of number of sexual partners (Koss, 2011; Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981), level of intoxication (Stormo & Lang, 1997), and modesty of dress (Workman & Freeburg, 1999). Victims who were perceived as having had "poor judgment" (like walking alone at night) were subject to more stereotyping than were those who experienced a rape that was not the result of "poor judgment" (Howard, 1984).

Sexual harassment

Research on perceptions of sexual harassment similarly demonstrates that women are often blamed for their experiences of mistreatment. This blame is based on a number of factors such as perceived severity of the incident, whether the woman reported the harassment, and whether the woman labeled the incident as sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Klein et al., 2010; Lucarini et al., 2020; Marin & Guadagno, 1999; Shaver, 1970). There has also been research on the importance of the gender of the perceiver and past experiences of harassment, but these results have been somewhat mixed (Fitzgerlad et al., 1999; Rotundo et al., 2001; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Stockdale et al., 2002; Wiener et al., 1997).

In addition to these other important factors, research has demonstrated the importance of sexual objectification in judgments about women's responsibility for their own sexual harassment. For instance, in one study researchers found an increase in victim blame toward women described in real-life scenarios of sexual harassment following exposure to sexually objectifying content (Bernard et al., 2018). Similarly, Ferguson et al. (2005) found that participants were more likely to attribute blame and to see women as less traumatized and more responsible for experiences of sexual harassment when they were presented in promiscuous versus non-promiscuous ways. This literature clearly suggests that women are blamed more generally for experiences of harassment based on several scenario and characteristic considerations, and that perceptions of her promiscuity or sexualization are central to people's attributions of blame.

Incivility

Incivility "refers to rude, condescending, and ostracizing acts that violate workplace norms of respect, but otherwise appear mundane" (Cortina et al., 2017, p. 299). These kinds of experiences appear to be aimed at people as individuals, in contrast to "microaggressions," which are tied to a person's membership in a social group (Sue et al., 2007). Research has shown that although incivility (like microaggression) is not directly or explicitly tied to social group memberships, it is also not experienced equally by all individuals, even all women (Cortina, et al., 2001). In fact, it has been argued that incivility in the workplace is "selective," and is an emergent form of sexism and racism that allows discriminatory behaviors against certain groups of people to continue because the underlying bias is concealed by the fact that they occur in ordinary, non-"charged" situations and therefore are likely to be seen (both by targets and by observers) as relatively benign (Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2013).

Support for the theory of selective incivility has been found with respect to race and gender, as well as their interaction (Cortina et al., 2013). White women and minority employees experienced higher rates of incivility; moreover, African American women experienced the highest rates (Cortina et al., 2013). There is little research assessing victim-blaming of targets of incivility or microaggressions, though in one suggestive study Hershcovis and Barling (2010) showed

that those experiencing this kind of gender-based mistreatment in male-dominated environments were more likely to make *self*-blaming attributions than if they experienced sexual harassment, or experienced incivility in gender-neutral environments. Thus, an important contribution that our research makes is understanding how *others* attribute blame toward women who have experienced workplace incivility and how incivility fits in with other forms of gender-based mistreatment.

It is characteristic of incivility that it is unclear whether the uncivil action is intentionally disrespectful of the other person, or if the actor is simply generally rude or doesn't understand the impact of their actions. Thus, compared with both sexual assault and sexual harassment, incivility is the most ambiguous with respect to the intent of the action and the perpetrator (Cortina, 2008). In fact, Dipboye and Halverson (2004) noted about incivility that "Much of today's discrimination has slipped out of the light…" (p. 132), making it difficult to recognize or address. Though perpetrator intent is sometimes ambiguous in experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault, it is this feature of incivility—the recognized ambiguity of the perpetrator's intention in general—that has been well establishing in the incivility literature that we feel it is particularly likely to elicit victim-blaming.

Given that workplace incivility is often experienced by those with more marginalized identities (e.g., women, Women of Color, People of Color, low-level workers, etc.) it is important to understand the ways in which stereotypes about sexualization and responsibility might affect the automatic characterization and treatment of these groups as has already been documented in the harassment and assault literature. Further, given that this is another form of mistreatment disproportionately aimed at women and Women of Color and that it is often difficult to address because of its presumed ambiguity, it is also important to try to understand how people perceive these women's experiences of mistreatment in relation to other forms of gender-based mistreatment that are more generally understood as being unacceptable.

Social class, race, and gender stereotypes

Despite evidence that Women of Color and low-income women experience higher rates of gender-based mistreatment than other women and are often not seen as proper victims, the literature has generally focused on how gender stereotypes affect observers' attributions of blame to female victims of gender-based mistreatment in general, rather than on the ways that women who differ in terms of their social locations—such as by race or class—might be stereotyped and blamed differently (Cortina et al., 1998; Fessler, 2018; Foley et al., 1995; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Kane, 2020; LaFree et al., 1985; MacKinnon, 1979; Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault [Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assaula MCASA], n.d.).

In this study, we draw on intersectionality theory which proposes that women (and people more generally) are not viewed solely in terms of single social positions such as gender or race or class but instead are simultaneously recognized and understood based on these in terms of overlapping power hierarchies (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1995; Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984; Moradi & Grzank, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006). According to this theory, observers' expectations and judgments of women who experience mistreatment with different intersecting social identities (e.g., Black working-class women vs. white working-class women) are qualitatively different as a function of the women's different social positions (Cole, 2009; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). Thus, for example, white working-class women have access to some race-related privilege that Black working-class women do not; for that reason, they may be viewed differently

by observers. In the same way, Black middle-class women have access to class privilege that their working-class counterparts do not (see Bowleg, 2008 for examples re race, sexuality and gender; see also Cole, 2009; Collins, 2015).

There has been little research on how both race and class matter to people's perceptions of women's mistreatment (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012). In U.S. culture, race and class are often conflated—with whiteness assumed to be associated with middle-classness and Blackness assumed to be associated with working or lower-classness (Morales, 2014; Moss, 2003; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Therefore, in the current study we aim to assess how perceptions of a woman's race and class based on the overlapping systems of oppression (classism, sexism, and racism) might lead to differential assessments of her mistreatment while considering them in combination.

Race and gender stereotypes

Experiences of gender-based mistreatment, including sexual harassment and assault have been estimated at high rates among Black women (Cortina et al., 1998; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; MacKinnon, 1979; MCASA,n.d.). Given the long history of institutional mistreatment and the resulting mistrust of institutions among Black people and other People of Color in the U.S., these rates are likely underestimates, due to lack of reporting to these formal institutions (MacKinnon, 1979; Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA), n.d.; Wyatt, 1992; Wyatt & Riederle, 1995). While these experiences occur at exceptionally high rates, experiences of mistreatment among Black women are often met with skepticism and a lack of urgency compared to these experiences among white women (Foley et al., 1995; Kane, 2020; LaFree et al., 1985.

Racialized gender stereotypes affect how observers react to reports of gender-based mistreatment of Black versus white women. Longstanding ideas about (white) femininity stress the importance of modesty, respectability, and submissiveness whereas expectations historically applied to Black women include presumptions of hypersexuality (Jezebel stereotype) and aggressiveness (Sapphire stereotype) (Collins, 2000). Research has also shown that these stereotypes are still dominant and surround young Black women today (Jerald et al., 2016; West, 2008). Further, there is some evidence supporting the role of the Jezebel stereotype and ideas about hyper sexualization in people's perceptions of blame for Black women in their experiences of rape, and in Black women's lived experiences of harassment as well (Buchanan et al., 2008; Donovan, 2007; Donovan & Williams, 2008).

If seen in the context of ideas about white femininity, these stereotypes about Black women may result in them being seen as less respectable than white women and thus more to blame. In one study, respectability was an important predictor of victim blame attribution for Black women, but not for white women (Dupuis & Clay, 2013; Gravelin et al., 2019). Subsequent research has also demonstrated the importance of racism in people's perceptions of a woman's culpability for rape (George & Martínez, 2002).

Of course, we are aware that white women are not immune from the damaging impact of gender stereotypes. Though they may be seen as respectable, they are often also expected to be sexually available and submissive (see Conley, 2013)—a combination that might leave them vulnerable to blame.

Social class and gender stereotypes

Although respectability in general has not been identified as an important predictor of white women's blame, considering social class among these women may make respectability important. For instance, research has already shown that respectability, including sexualization, is viewed as differentiating working- and middle-class women, including adolescents in particular. In one study in England middle-class girls were asked to describe working-class girls from lower-income neighborhoods. Middle-class girls thought of these other girls as lacking in the respectability traits of self-control and the ability to make moral choices (or being responsible) (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016, p. 659). Bettie (2000) noticed that U.S. teachers made similar distinctions between non-college prep girls who were mostly working-class and "college prep" girls who were mostly middle-class.

To date, we know of only one study that analyzes class-linked gender stereotypes about working-class women and victim blaming. Spencer (2016) employed vignettes in which class or socioeconomic status (SES) was manipulated in a sexual assault scenario. She found that when participants read about a low-SES woman's experiences with sexual assault compared with a higher-SES woman's identical experience, they were more likely to blame the woman, view her as more promiscuous, and have more negative attitudes about rape survivors.

In this study, we aim to understand whether race and class predict more ready applications of negative respectability stereotypes to targets of mistreatment (that is, stereotypes that the woman is not respectable), and if in turn applying those stereotypes predicts blaming the women for that mistreatment.

Intersections of race and class

Race, class and their intersections define social locations in which structures of privilege and oppression shape people's opportunities and experiences. At the same time, race and social class are often conflated, at least in the United States, rather than understood as defining different intersections of two separate social structures (Moss, 2003; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) argued that when individuals hold multiple marginalized identities or positions in social structures (female, working-class, and Black), they experience the risk of "intersectional invisibility" because they do not fit the prototype for any of the groups (specifically, the prototype of "woman" in the U.S. being white and middle class) (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012; Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Equally, since being white is prototypically associated with being middle-class, while being Black is prototypically associated with being working-class, these two intersections are the ones taken as normative among women. Thus, being white and working-class, like being Black and middle-class, may lead an individual to greater invisibility, and therefore more vulnerability to blame, for their own circumstances.

Hypotheses

1. We assess whether blaming women for their own mistreatment varies as a function of the type of mistreatment women experience. The fundamental attribution error suggests that in instances of ambiguity, people generally attribute the cause of a result to the individual instead of considering the contextual factors that may have affected those results (Jones & Nisbett,

1971; Kelley, 1971; Ross, 1977). While we recognize that sexual harassment and sexual assault can carry equal levels of ambiguity, we hypothesize that victim-blaming will vary by type of mistreatment (Gravelin, 2016), and will be highest under the condition of interpretive ambiguity as documented by existing literature (in this case, the incivility condition) and will be lower under potentially less ambiguous conditions (e.g., sexual assault and harassment).

2. We also anticipate main effects of race and class on victim blaming attributions. Specifically, following the literature outlined previously, we expect participants to blame low-income women more than middle-class women and Black women more than white women.

3. Following the logic of intersectionality, which suggests that middle-class Black women and working-class white women may be more vulnerable to negative gender stereotypes of lower respectability, we will test the hypothesis that these two groups will face more victim-blame attribution.

4. Finally, we expect that gender stereotypes involving respectability will mediate the relationship between the conditions specifying race and class of victim and victim-blaming. Specifically, we anticipate that participants who read about the low-income woman or the Black woman will tend to see her as less respectable and will thus attribute more blame to her for her mistreatment.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

We recruited 464 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) after receiving IRB approval. This is an online data collection method in which online users are compensated for participating in surveys. Research suggests that paid convenience samples from MTurk are as representative of results gathered from "high-quality commercial samples" (Thomas & Clifford, 2017). There were no constraints on citizenship for participants, although we required them to be 18 years or older to complete the survey. For the purpose of the current study, we restricted our sample to participants residing in the United States to ensure that understandings of the variables studied here were confined to one national context. We dropped 20 participants who completed the study outside the U.S. Another 28 participants were dropped due to incomplete data. Our final sample was 416. These are all the data exclusions we have to report related to the participants in this manuscript.

Participants were asked to respond to a series of six questions regarding demographic information about themselves, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and educational background. A little more than half of our sample identified as men (54.3%) and most participants were between ages 25 and 34 (49.3%). Most participants were single, never married (51.5%), followed by being married or in a domestic partnership (40.2%). Most of the participants where Caucasian/white (74.9%); African-Americans made up about 7%; Asian/Asian Americans made up about 7%; Latinos/Latinas/Hispanics made up about 8%; Native Americans made up about 1%; Middle Eastern individuals made up less than half a percent of our sample; and biracial/multiracial individuals made up about 1%. Unfortunately, because a large majority of the sample was white, for the preliminary analysis of the impact of race-ethnicity on judgments, we could only define race-ethnicity as white versus not white.

Most of the sample identified their sexual orientation as straight (88.8%), while another 11% identified as bisexual, gay/lesbian, or other. About 40% of the participants had completed a Bachelor's degree, and about 9% had more advanced degrees. About 12% of the sample had completed an Associate's degree or some college, while about 14% had a high school degree or equivalent (GED), and less than 3% had not completed high school or had completed trade/technical/vocational training.

Income and social class

Participants were also asked to respond to a question assessing their self-reported social class. Participants were asked to choose from list of five social class identities (working-class, lower middle-class, middle-class, upper middle-class, upper-class) how they self-identify their social class position. About 24% chose working-class, 26% chose lower-middle class, 43% chose a middle-class identity, and about 7% chose an upper-middle class identity.

Survey experimental procedure

Following the pilot study described below, we recruited participants from Amazon's MTurk. Each participant was randomly assigned to read only one vignette, and then was asked to respond to the statements about perceived respectability (sexualization and responsibility) and victim blame attribution for the woman presented in the vignette they read.

Experimental design

Participants were shown one of 12 vignettes in which class, race, and incident type were manipulated individually. All vignettes and results related to this manipulation are reported in this manuscript. Identical vignettes were presented that varied only in terms of whether the woman who experienced the incident was presented as either working-class or middle-class, and as either Black or white. Individuals were presented with only one scenario representing an incident of incivility in the workplace, sexual harassment in the workplace, or sexual assault in the woman's home. The vignettes were prepared for this study, building on the research by Spencer (2016). Spencer similarly manipulated where the woman worked (either as a cashier or an accountant) and lived (either an apartment or a house) as cues to social class. Full examples of the vignettes are provided in Table 1.

Manipulation check

Our primary concern about our manipulations was whether participants would recognize the target's social class identity. An initial pilot assessment of the class manipulation was run using 223 MTurk participants recruited using the same procedures described for collecting participants for the full experimental sample. Manipulation checks were not re-tested with the full samples of data. We asked participants to respond to the question "Which class do you think Karen belongs to?"; options included "working-class," "middle-class," and "upper-class." We ran a chi-square analysis to ensure our class manipulation was clear to participants. Results supported our manipulation. Participants who read about the working-class woman were significantly more likely

TABLE 1   Example of vignettes provided to participants

Incident	Example vignettes
Incivility	*Karen a 27-year-old Black woman, works for a prestigious law firm and earns a stable income, plenty to keep a nice house for herself in the best part of town, where all of the houses are neat, and kept beautiful all year long. Karen, went right from high school to earning her bachelor's degree, then to law school. One day, Karen is working and is having trouble with a difficult client. She goes to her boss, Mr. Keller, to ask for help, but before she can finish telling him what is happening, he interrupts her by saying, "I'm busy; take care of it yourself" in a very rude and rushed way.*
Sexual harassment	*Karen a 27-year-old White woman, works at McDonald's and makes just enough money to keep a run-down trailer for herself on the side of town where the houses don't look so nice, and many are abandoned. Karen didn't obtain a high school diploma, so this is the best she can do for herself. One day, Karen is working late and a male employee joins her in the cleaning closet. They start talking about how their day was and Karen bends over to grab the mop bucket, and the other employee grabs her butt commenting, "nice ass".*
Sexual assault	*Karen a 27-year-old Black woman, works for a prestigious law firm and earns a stable income, plenty to keep a nice house for herself in the best part of town, where all of the houses are neat, and kept beautiful all year long. Karen went right from high school to earning her bachelor's degree, then to law school. Karen invites her male friend Gabe over, after a long work week for some drinks and a movie. They have dinner and then are enjoying their movie when Gabe reaches over to kiss Karen. She reciprocates, but Gabe tries to push things further. Karen refuses, but Gabe continues. Karen tells him that she doesn't want to do this, but they have sex anyway.*

to report that she belonged to the working-class as opposed to the middle- or upper-class, χ^2 (2, $N = 233$) $= 184.22$, $p = .001$. The effect size for this result using Cramer's V was large, .89 (Cohen, 1988). Because there were more than two groups to compare, we used adjusted standardized residuals to test the differences between the observed and expected frequencies for each of the groups. Participants who read about the working-class woman were significantly more likely to report that the woman was indeed working-class ($z = 13.6$) comped to middle- ($z = -7.3$) or upper-class ($z = -8.3$). Participants who read about the middle-class woman were significantly more likely to report that the woman was either middle-class ($z = 7.3$) or upper-class ($z = 8.3$) compared to working-class ($z = -13.6$).

In addition, we checked the reliability of our race and scenario manipulations. We asked participants, "What racial/ethnic identity did Karen have in the scenario you read?" They could choose from the following options: "Black, white, Asian, Hispanic, Other" with a fill-in option. A Pearson chi-square analysis showed that participants significantly differed in their likelihood of identifying the race of the woman in the scenario based on what condition they were in, χ^2 (4, $N = 233$) $= 181.06$, $p = .001$. The effect size for this result using Cramer's V was large, .82 (Cohen, 1988). Our adjusted standardized residuals showed that participants who read about the white woman were significantly more likely to correctly identify her as being white ($z = 11.9$) compared to Black ($z = -12.3$) and vice versa for those who read about the Black woman.

For our scenarios, results showed that participants did significantly differ in their likelihood of identifying one scenario over another based on the condition that they read about, χ^2 (6, $N = 233$) $= 205.13$, $p = .001$. The effect size for this result using Cramer's V was large, .66 (Cohen,

1988). Our adjusted standardized residuals showed that participants were significantly more likely to report the incident they read about was incivility if they read about the incident of incivility ($z = 12.4$) compared to sexual assault ($z = -8.1$) and sexual harassment ($z = -4.6$). Participants who read about the incident of sexual harassment were significantly more likely to report that they read about sexual harassment ($z = 7.7$) compared to incivility ($z = -5.8$) but not compared sexual assault ($z = -.6$). Lastly, participants who read about sexual assault were significantly more likely to report they read about sexual assault ($z = 8.5$) compared to both sexual harassment ($z = -3.0$) and incivility ($z = -6.6$). So, while participants who read about the incident of sexual harassment had a somewhat harder time correctly identifying it as sexual harassment compared to sexual assault, our manipulation of the three scenarios generally holds up across participants.

Survey measures

All measures used to assess the manipulation of the woman in the vignette are reported in this manuscript.

Gendered respectability stereotype
Next participants were asked to respond to two questions regarding the target's respectability by indicating how strongly they believed each statement on a 5-point, Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree with a neutral option in the middle. The two items were combined to create a single measure of respectability ($\alpha = .77$). Respectability was defined by participant perceptions of the woman in the vignette's overall irresponsibility and her sexual availability ("In her everyday life, Karen is irresponsible" and "In her everyday life, Karen engages in promiscuous behavior").

Victim blame scale
In the MTurk survey, following the vignettes, participants were asked questions regarding how much they blamed the woman for what happened to her in the incident. Ward's (1988) Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale was adapted to create three scales that reflected the condition that participants were in (sexual assault, sexual harassment, or incivility). All items in all three scales were presented on a 5-point Likert-Scale. From the larger scale, we identified five items to assess blame that had comparable meaning for all three kinds of mistreatment. The resulting scale was reliable across all three incidents ($\alpha = .73$ for incivility; $\alpha = .75$ for sexual harassment ($\alpha = .76$) for sexual assault). See Table 2 for more details.

Preliminary analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess potential *participant group differences* on the measure of participant victim blame attribution, though none had been predicted. A three-way ANOVA was conducted to test differences in victim blame attribution based on participant race-ethnicity, gender, and self-reported socioeconomic status. No significant differences emerged as a function of participant gender $F(1, 372) = 1.55$, $p = .21$, $\eta^2 p = .005$, race-ethnicity $F(7, 372) = 1.57$, $p = .14$, $\eta^2 p = .031$, or self-reported social class $F(3, 372) = .66$, $p = .58$, $\eta^2 p = .006$. We additionally ran all our analyses with these participant identities as controls and no differences emerged. Since there were no significant race-ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic participant group differences, these group identifications were not included in the remainder of the analyses.

TABLE 2   Parallel Items from adapted from Ward's (1988) attitudes toward rape victim scale

Sexual assault items	Sexual harassment items	Incivility items
A raped woman is a less desirable woman	*A woman who has been sexually harassed is a less desirable woman*	*A woman who is treated rudely or ignored at work is less desirable*
Women do not provoke rape by their appearance or behavior	*Women do not provoke sexual harassment by their appearance or behavior*	*Women do not provoke being treated rudely or being ignored by their appearance or behavior*
A woman should not blame herself for rape	*A woman should not blame herself for sexual harassment*	*A woman should not blame herself for being ignored or treated rudely*
Many women who report rape are lying because they are angry or want revenge on the accused	*Many women who report sexual harassment are lying because they are angry or want revenge on the accused*	*Many women who report being ignored or treated rudely are lying because they are angry or want revenge on the accused*
In most cases when a woman was raped, she deserved it	*In most cases when a woman was sexually harassed, she deserved it*	*In most cases, when a woman was ignored or treated rudely, she deserves it*

Additionally, a priori analyses to determine the appropriate sample size in hopes of finding a small effect size were calculated using *G*Power* (Erdfelder, Faul & Buchner, 1996) . Based on the assumption that we would want to detect a medium effect (.25) or larger using a power level of .80, the software helped us determine that we would need a sample size of at least 158 participants or more.

Results

Victim blame attribution

The first three hypotheses were tested with a 3-way ANOVA (incident type by race of target × social class of target), controlling for the variance attributed to perceived respectability. Results confirmed a significant main effect of incident on blame attribution, $F(2, 375) = 9.43$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 p = .049$. Follow-up analyses using a Bonferonni approach revealed that blame perceptions were significantly lower among participants who read about the incidents of sexual assault ($p = .001$) and sexual harassment ($p = .001$) compared to those who read about the incident of incivility, while the scenarios of sexual assault and sexual harassment were not significantly different from one another ($p = .80$). Consistent with our first hypothesis, blame attribution was highest for the condition most ambiguous with respect to perpetrator intent–the incivility condition ($M = 2.18$, $SE = .06$), while blame attribution was lower for both sexual assault ($M = 1.80$, $SE = .07$) and sexual harassment ($M = 1.78$, $SE = .07$). See Table 3 for more details.

Contrary to our second hypothesis, there were no significant differences in blame attribution based on the race ($F(1, 375) = 0.13$, $p = .72$, $\eta^2 p = .002$) or the class ($F(1, 376) = .84$, $p = .36$, $\eta^2 p = .000$) identity of the target woman. Additionally, contrary to our third hypothesis no interaction of race and class were found ($F(1, 375) = .49$, $p = .48$, $\eta^2 p = .001$).

TABLE 3 Study 1: Analysis of variance of victim average blame attribution as a function of class, race, and incident

Source	M	SE
Class	–	–
Working-class	1.96	.06
Middle-class	1.88	.06
Race	–	–
Black	1.93	.05
white	1.90	.05
Incident	–	–
Sexual assault	1.80	.07
Sexual harassment	1.78	.07
Incivility	2.18	.07
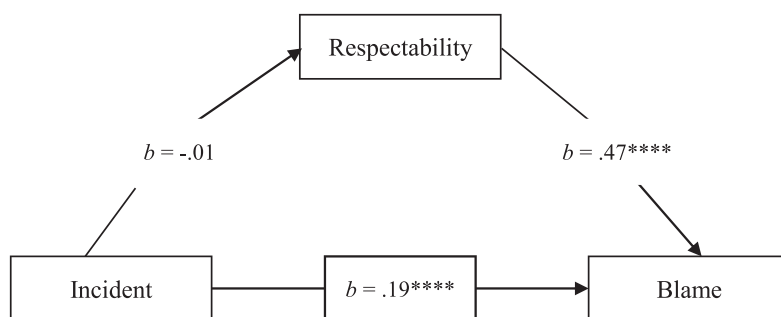
Significance: * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, ****p < .0001

FIGURE 1 Study 1: Mediation analyses assessing the effect of incident on blame while considering the contribution of stereotypes

Significance: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, ****$p < .0001$

Gender stereotypes

We tested the role of gender stereotypes in affecting attributions of blame, in mediation analyses assessing whether beliefs about respectability help explain potential relationships between incident, race and class. In order to understand how perceptions about class, race, and incident might affect blame attribution, we ran three mediation analyses. All mediation analyses were tested using the Hayes Process Macro (Hayes, 2017) using model 4. Models were estimated based on 95% confidence intervals (CIs) using 5000 bootstrap samples.

Incident mediation

Although there was (as shown in the first analyses) a direct effect of incident on blame $b = .19$, 95% CI [.11, .28], respectability did not mediate this *relationship* $b = -.01$, 95% CI [−.05, .04]. See Figure 1 for more information. This supports our assumption that the incidents differ in ambiguity
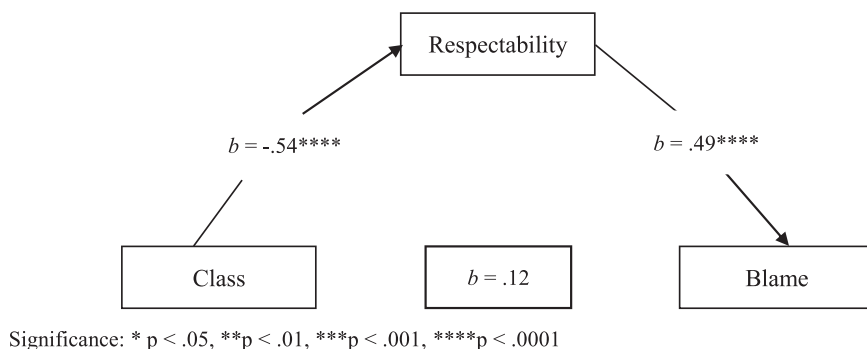
FIGURE 2   Study 1: Mediation analyses assessing the effect of class on blame while considering the contribution of stereotypes

Significance: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, ****$p < .0001$

about the perpetrators' intent, and further suggests that this assessment, rather than judgments about the target, influence differences in blame attribution by incident.

Class mediation

In contrast, results revealed that respectability significantly mediated the relationship between class and blame $b = −.27$, 95% CI [−.38, −.16]. Consistent with our fourth hypothesis, participants who read about the working-class woman were more likely to blame the woman for her experiences of gender-based mistreatment, and this relationship was mediated by their perceptions that the working-class woman was lacking in respectability (irresponsible and over-sexualized). Consistent with full mediation, we did not find a significant direct effect between class and blame $b = .12$, 95% CI [−.03, .27]. See Figure 2 for more information.
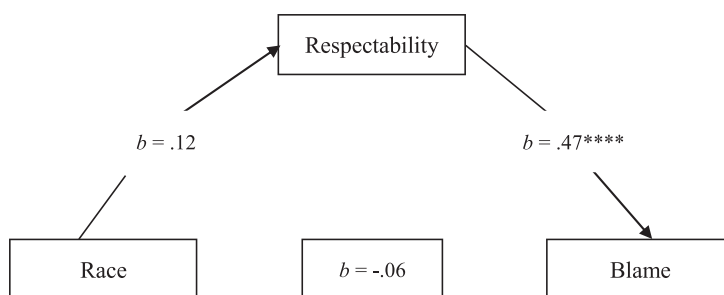
Race mediation

Contrary to our expectations presented in our fourth hypothesis, there were no direct effects $b = −.06$, 95% CI [−.20, .09] between race and blame or indirect effects of *respectability* $b = .06$, 95% CI [−.04, .15] on the relationship between race and blame. See Figure 3 for more information.

Discussion of study 1

Findings revealed that our first hypothesis was supported. Incident type affected participant victim blame attribution toward the woman they read about in the vignette. Specifically, those who had experienced incivility were blamed more than those who had experienced sexual harassment and sexual assault. Thus, the ambiguity of the intent of the perpetrator of incivility likely resulted in more blame of the woman in comparison with the other two incidents.

We did not find support for our second or third hypothesis that race, class, or the intersection of the two directly affected participant victim blame toward the woman in the vignette.

Our fourth hypothesis was that judgments of respectability would mediate between incident type, race and class, and attributions of blame. The mediation hypothesis was confirmed for social class: the working-class woman was seen as less respectable (more sexualized and irresponsible)

Significance: * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, ****p < .0001

FIGURE 3   Study 1: Mediation analyses assessing the effect of race on blame while considering the contribution of stereotypes

Significance: $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$, $****p < .0001$

than the middle-class woman and these perceptions were associated with greater victim-blame attribution toward the working-class woman. This hypothesis was not confirmed for incident (suggesting that with respect to incident types, judgments of perpetrator intent matter more than stereotypes of the victim), or for race.

None of these findings was affected by the gender, race or social class identity of the participant.

This study first extends the literature on blame attribution for gender-based mistreatment by considering that phenomenon in three different contexts. Importantly, we found that in fact blaming women for their own mistreatment occurs less often in the cases of rape and sexual harassment than in cases of incivility. Second, we showed that stereotypes about respectability mediated the effect of social class identity of the woman described in the vignette, but not incident or race.

STUDY 2

Given some of the findings from Study 1 were surprising, particularly the lack of main effects for class and race, and for intersectional invisibility, we attempted to do an exact replication of the study in a second round of data collection using identical methods. While there are other important factors to consider in future research, we felt it was important first to keep all methods and manipulations consistent between the two studies to assess the replicability of the unexpected findings from Study 1.

Research questions

First, we expected to replicate the significant effect of incident type on blame, with the incident with the greatest ambiguity about perpetrator intent (incivility) yielding the highest blame toward the woman.

Second, because in Study 1 we found that class and race did not directly affect participant victim blame attribution, we expected to replicate this previously un-expected finding here.

Third, based on results of Study 1, we expected to replicate the role of respectability as a mediator of the effect of class on blame, but not of race on blame. Specifically, we expected that low-income women would be seen as less respectable than middle-income women, and those perceptions would lead to greater participant victim blame attribution for their mistreatment.

Method

Participants

We recruited a new sample of 300 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Identical constraints to our population concerning age, citizenship, and residence were used in Study 2. Participants completed the same demographic measures and the sample's composition was very similar to that in Study 1. In fact, there were no significant differences between the two samples in terms of participant race X^2 (7, 706) = 12.29, p = .07, Cramer's V = .13, or self-reported social class X^2 (4, 440) = 2.74, p = .62, V = .06. While results showed a significant difference in gender between our two samples, X^2 (1, 710) = 6.59, p = .01, the adjusted standardized residuals showed that all potential differences were very weak contributors (Cramer's V was small, .10) (Study 1 men, z = 2.6; Study 1 women, z = −2.6; Study 2 men, z = −2.6, Study 2 women, z = 2.6).

Survey experimental procedure

The survey experimental procedure was identical to Study 1 and the manipulation check showed similar results. All measures were identical to those in Study 1. There are no additional measures or conditions to report related to this experiment. Further, there are no new data exclusions apart from those mentioned for Study 1.

Preliminary analyses

As in study 1, preliminary analyses were conducted to assess potential participant group differences on the measure of participant victim blame attribution, but none were found. There were no significant differences in the amount of blame attributed to the woman in the scenario based on gender F (2, 372) = .38, p = .69, $\eta^2 p$ = .003, race-ethnicity F (6, 372) = .38, p = .89, $\eta^2 p$ = .009, or self-reported social class F (4, 372) = .64, p = .63, $\eta^2 p$ = .010. Additionally, when included in our analyses, these participant identities did not change our results. Therefore, since there were no significant race-ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic participant group differences or contributions to our analyses, these group identifications were not included in the final report of our results.

Results

Victim blame attribution

Results from a 3-way ANOVA controlling for the variance attributed to perceived respectability revealed the expected significant main effect of incident on blame attribution, F (2, 299) = 6.35,

TABLE 4 Study 2: analysis of variance of victim average blame attribution as a function of class, race, and incident

Source	M	SE
Class	–	–
Working-class	1.94	.07
Middle-class	1.88	.07
Race	–	–
Black	1.86	.07
white	1.97	.07
Incident	–	–
Sexual assault	1.77	.08
Sexual harassment	1.81	.08
Incivility	2.15	.08

$p = .002$, $\eta^2 p = .042$. Follow-up analyses using a Bonferonni approach revealed a similar pattern as in Study 1. As in Study 1, we found in Study 2 that blame perceptions were significantly lower among participants who read about sexual harassment ($M = 1.81$, $SE = .08$, $p = .001$) and assault ($M = 1.77$, $SE = .08$, $p = .004$) compared to those who read about incivility ($M = 2.12$, $SE = .07$, $p = .72$) and thus consistent in both studies with our first hypothesis. There were no differences in blame perceptions between participants who read about the sexual harassment versus the sexual assault condition. Consistent with our second hypothesis based on findings from Study 1, there was again no main effect of class $F(1, 299) = 0.41$ $p = .52$, $\eta^2 p = .001$, or of race $F(1, 299) = 1.33$, $p = .25$, $\eta^2 p = .005$. Further, consistent with Study 1, the interaction between race and class was also not significant, $F(1, 299) = 3.66$, $p = 0.57$, $\eta^2 p = .01$. See Table 4 for more details.

Gender stereotypes

We tested again whether perceived gender stereotypes related to respectability would help explain potential relationships between incident, class and race with blame of the woman in the vignette. We ran three mediation analyses, with incident, class, or race predicting blame to try and understand these potential relationships. All mediation analyses were tested using the Hayes Process Macro (Hayes, 2017) using model 4. Models were estimated based on 95% confidence intervals (CIs) using 5000 bootstrap samples.

Mediation
Consistent with the ANOVA results and with those in Study 1, there was a direct effect of incident on blame $b = .21$, 95% CI [.12, .30], but there was not an indirect effect of *respectability b = −.01*, 95% CI [−.08, .06] on the relationship between incident and blame. See Figure 4 for more information.

Results revealed that respectability significantly mediated the relationship between class and blame $b = −.17$, 95% CI [−.31, −.03]. Consistent with Study 1 and our third hypothesis, participants perceived the working-class woman to be less respectable (more irresponsible and oversexualized) and this perception resulted in higher blame attribution toward for her mistreatment
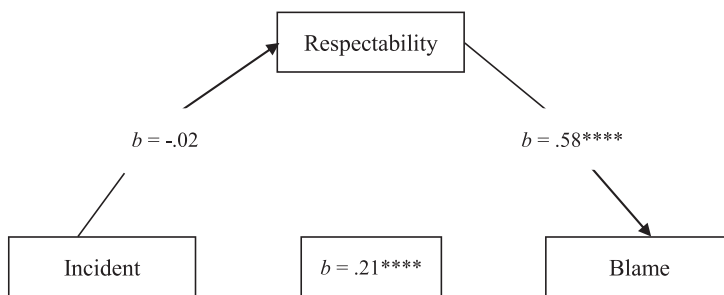
Significance: * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, ****p < .0001

FIGURE 4 Study 2: Mediation analyses assessing the effect of incident on blame while considering the contribution of stereotypes
Significance: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, ****$p < .0001$
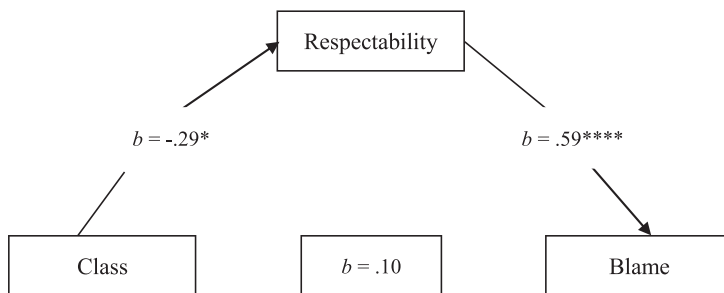
Significance: * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, ****p < .0001

FIGURE 5 Study 2: Mediation analyses assessing the effect of class on blame while considering the contribution of stereotypes
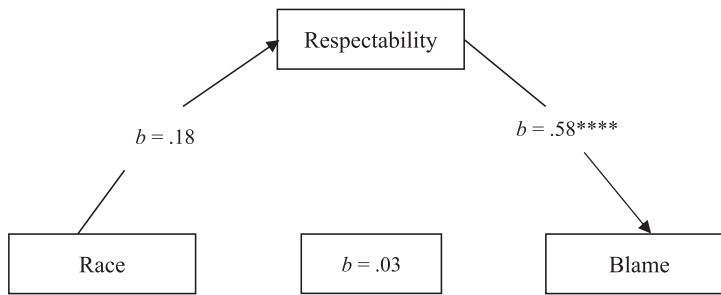Significance: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, ****$p < .0001$

across incidents of gender-based mistreatment. Consistent with full mediation, we did not find a significant direct effect of class on blame $b = .10$, 95% CI $[−.06, .25]$. See Figure 5 for more information.

Consistent with Study 1, there were no direct $b = .03$, 95% CI $[−.12, .19]$ or mediating effects of *respectability* $b = .11$, 95% CI $[−.03, .24]$ on the relationship between race and blame. See Figure 6 for more information.

Discussion of study 2

Results from Study 2 confirmed the patterns found in Study 1 we sought to replicate. We found that the type of incident a participant read about affected how much blame they attributed to the woman. Specifically, the woman was blamed most in the incident of incivility in the workplace.

Significance: * p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, ****p < .0001

FIGURE 6   Study 2: Mediation analyses assessing the effect of race on blame while considering the contribution of stereotypes
Significance: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, ****$p < .0001$

This is consistent with the research showing that women are blamed for some instances of gender-based mistreatment more than others (Cortina et al., 2013; Gravelin, 2016).

As in Study 1, we found that there was no direct effect of class or race on victim blame attribution.

Finally, we replicated the importance of participant perceptions about the woman's respectability in accounting for blame. Both Study 1 and 2 showed that perceptions of respectability helped explain relationships between the social class identity of the woman in the scenario and participant blame. The working-class woman was perceived to be less respectable—more irresponsible and sexualized—compared to the middle-class woman, and that perception was associated with greater victim blame attribution for their mistreatment. Finally, none of our findings in Study 2 varied as a function of participant gender, race or class.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

An important goal of this study was to extend the research on victim blame for rape to two additional forms of gender-based mistreatment: sexual harassment and workplace incivility. In addition, we hoped to test the hypothesis that because of the ambiguity of the intent of workplace incivility, it would be particularly likely to result in victim-blaming. This hypothesis was confirmed in both studies and is consistent with the conditions associated with the fundamental attribution error. Incivility has been described as ambiguous, because it is difficult for targets and observers to judge what the intentions are of the person being uncivil (Cortina et al., 2013). According to the fundamental attribution error, people are more likely to attribute the cause or result of situations to individuals (targets or victims) in instances of ambiguity, instead of recognizing how the environment (including perpetrators) may have contributed to the end result (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Kelley, 1971; Ross, 1977). In both studies, as predicted, people did attribute blame more to the situation that, in line with the literature, we viewed as posing more ambiguous (incivility).

We do note, though, that we accepted the argument in the literature that intent is particularly ambiguous in the case of incivility as plausible on its face, and did not in fact try to demonstrate that in the design of the two studies. Of course, assessing the intention of perpetrators is always an

issue in all forms of mistreatment, so it is possible that there are other reasons for the particular focus on victim blaming in the case of incivility.

We did not expect, and did not find, differences as a function of gender, race or class of the participants.

In Study 1 there were no significant differences in blame between the incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment. However, in Study 2 they were significantly different from one another, with the woman in the scenario of sexual harassment being more blamed than in the scenario of sexual assault. Because of these different findings, future researchers should consider the possibility that ambiguity of intent is relevant to judgments about sexual harassment (and perhaps also sexual assault) at least under some conditions. They may also need to examine other potential differences across and within instances of gender-based mistreatment. All of these results suggest that it is important to examine perceptions of a range of factors that influence victim-blaming for all forms of women's gender-based mistreatment, though our findings suggest that the ambiguity of perpetrator intent is particularly important to explore.

Based on existing findings about blame attributions, we predicted class and race differences in victim-blame in both studies. However, we found no main effects of race or class differences in victim-blame of the target in either study. We do not conclude from this that race and class play no direct role in blame attributions, but that in the case of these vignettes, features of the incident (the type of mistreatment) produced a very strong main effect suggesting a focus on perpetrator intent in blame attribution. This is not surprising, given the large literature that shows that observers assign more blame as a function of their judgments of the degree of responsibility borne by the victim (Howard, 1984). The literature does suggest that observers find incivility difficult to interpret as the result of perpetrator intent, leaving the situation open to the judgment that the target "must have" done something to provoke the incivility, and therefore is to blame for it (Cortina, 2008). We know that in fact many observers have no trouble also blaming women for sexual assaults and harassment; they just do so less often than in experiences of incivility, presumably because it is more difficult to argue that the actions involved were entirely "caused" by the victim. Moreover, the particular vignettes we used described harassment and assault actions that may have been particularly clear in locating at least some responsibility in the perpetrator.

We considered additional intersectional hypotheses. First, Spencer's (2016) research suggested that working-class white women would be blamed most, but intersectional invisibility theory (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) suggested that non-prototypicality would matter. According to these different logics, working-class white women and middle-class Black women would be blamed most. However, results of both studies did not confirm either pattern. We suspect this is a byproduct of both the lack of main effects for race and class on blame, and the unintentionally stronger priming of social class rather than race we believe is reflected in the mediation results discussed next.

We predicted that race and class would both be related to gender stereotypes associated with respectability (sexualization and irresponsibility), and that those stereotypes would in turn explain relationships between blame attribution and incident, race, and class. This hypothesis was supported for social class, but not race or incident. We believe it is a particularly important contribution to the literature that we found that participants who read the vignettes about the working-class woman were significantly more likely to blame them for their experiences of gender-based mistreatment; and that this relationship was mediated by their perceptions of the working-class woman as low in respectability (irresponsible and over-sexualized). This literature has not previously emphasized social class of the victim as an important factor in perceptions of victims, but we think it should.

Perhaps the lack of race effects in our findings results from the relative presence of cues of social class and race in the vignettes. Within the vignettes, class was flagged in multiple ways whereas race was primed just once. Perhaps class is in fact the most salient factor given the conflation of race and class, or perhaps we overemphasized class cues. Although few studies have incorporated attention to both in studying victim-blame, there is considerable evidence of the tendency in the U.S. to conflate social class and race (Moss, 2003; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006). We suspect that at least some of the race effects in the literature are in fact a result of this conflation and that inclusion of class assessments would make this clear, as in this study. Of course, racialized gender stereotypes have some content that is different from the items we assessed, but their overall grounding in social class stereotypes is, we think, an important aspect of them that cannot be recognized in research that only looks at the race of targets (Morales, 2014). Further research should identify other factors—such as perceived fragility, which may be associated with whiteness versus strength, which may be associated with Blackness—that may matter in people's understanding of women's experiences of gender-based mistreatment. A final potential factor that could have led to these findings is that in post hoc power analyses of our mediation models, using the *pwr2ppl* package with the *medjs* function in R Studio, our power to detect a race mediation (unlike the class mediation) fell well below the 80% standard (Aberson, 2019).

The results for respectability also suggest that people's likelihood of blaming women for their experiences of mistreatment may be more complicated than previous studies have suggested. Not only should other gender stereotypes associated with class and race be studied in more detail, but so should other features of respectability (e.g., being married, being a parent, being employed full-time, participating in religious institutions, and citizenship practices such as voting, etc.).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There are some limitations to the current design that could be improved in future studies.

We noted that we assumed—based on the literature—that on average incivility poses more ambiguity of perpetrator intent than sexual harassment or assault. Future research could instead explicitly examine different levels of ambiguity of intent within and across these conditions. We noted that the details in the scenarios of sexual assault and harassment in the current study may have unintentionally increased the likelihood of observers holding the woman responsible for them. While the sexual assault scenario we provided is more common than the "real rape" paradigm of stranger rape, it is important to understand the features of sexual assault narratives that lead observers to be more or less victim-blaming. Future research should analyze the differences in blame attribution between more explicit and more ambiguous scenarios of all forms of gender-based mistreatment, as well as the nature of the perpetrator (stranger or acquaintance), class, and race.

A second limitation of the current study is related to the volunteer adult samples in both studies. Participants were recruited through an online platform that produces samples that are typically skewed toward more education and a left- leaning bias, which could have affected the results, particularly since our results did not confirm any gender difference among observers in the tendency to blame women. However, studies suggest that results from these samples do generally hold up in more representative samples (see Clifford et al., 2015 for a review of some studies). Future research should involve other kinds of samples (for example, samples with better representation of each of the racial-ethnic groups only weakly represented in this sample, and/or a more representative sample to ensure replicability and generalization).

Future research should analyze potential differences in treatment of women in the period following real experiences of the kind depicted in the scenarios. This is crucial because from vignette studies of victim blame, we cannot know how blaming perceptions affect women's lived experiences in the world. We need studies that examine the connection between attributions of blame and different groups of women's treatment by health care professionals, friends and family, as well as the police and other authorities.

Future research should consider some of the differences that are embedded within the experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. Given that the majority of sexual harassment that occurs in the workplace is gender-based harassment, which "aims not to elicit sexual cooperation, but rather expresses insulting, degrading, or contemptuous attitudes about women," it is important to understand this dynamic of workplace harassment as well as the more sexualized, but less pervasive kind of harassment examined here (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2018).

Finally, this study was conducted with a sample of participants from the United States. Similar patterns of perceptions toward working-class women have been found in Great Britain as cited in the literature review. However, our findings should be considered as pertaining to the cultural context of the U.S. (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016). We hope that future researchers will examine how these patterns of attribution are similar or different in other cultural contexts within and outside of the U.S.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

While we view it as the responsibility of all social scientists to consider the policy implications of our research, we are also mindful that in this research we are working in an area that cannot yet claim a large body of evidence to support detailed policy recommendations. That said, there are two major areas that we believe our data point toward not only for future research, but also for immediate uptake into policy.

First, our findings suggest that victim treatment is importantly affected by the perceived ambiguity of the cause of the treatment (or perpetrator intent). It has been argued, based on other evidence as well as our own, that individuals subject to uncivil treatment—whether because of their gender or other identities—are particularly likely to be perceived as having somehow "attracted" or somehow deserved that mistreatment. This is an important finding for workplace and classroom settings, where establishing strong workplace norms of inclusively civil and respectful treatment, as well as increased recognition of the selective nature of incivility, can improve the environment for everyone without any need to impugn the intentions of individuals who have engaged in uncivil behavior in the past. Shifting the focus from intent to effect can simply sidestep the issue of "who is responsible" by holding the community collectively to a standard of respectful and civil interaction.

Second, our findings suggest that gender stereotypes grounded in women's perceived social class are a much more important factor in victim-blame than has been recognized. According to our results, the reported social class of victims across these forms of mistreatment differentially mobilizes respectability stereotypes, which in turn increase or decrease victim-blaming. This is important not only in the context of workplace incivility, but in all cases of gender-based mistreatment, suggesting that medical and counselling personnel, police, legal representatives, family and friends all may be influenced by social-class-based stereotypes in their own treatment of victims. The data offered here augment the emerging picture from social science research on the power of social-class-based stereotypes in creating differential treatment of Women of Color in general

(regardless of their actual social class) and poorer white women as well (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017; Bullock et al., 2001; Durante & Fiske, 2017; Hancock, 2004; Loughnan et al., 2013; Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Mitigating the reliance on these stereotypes is an important priority for intervention in work settings, criminal justice practices, and mental health treatment approaches. Data-based interventions could be developed following some of the models already better developed to mitigate the impact of race stereotypes in some of these settings (e.g., Eberhardt, 2016, 2019; see other materials on the Stanford SPARQ website detailing efforts in different contexts both to mitigate bias and to assess the impact of those efforts: https://sparq.stanford.edu/).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the aim of this research was to expand our understanding of victim-blaming for gender-based mistreatment to include workplace incivility, to assess whether gender stereotypes are applied differentially to women based on their perceived social class and race in situations of gender-based mistreatment, and to deepen our understanding of why people may attribute blame differently depending on the type of situation experienced, and the class and race identities of the mistreated woman. Our results confirm that incivility should be understood as an important kind of gender-based mistreatment. Because incivility is marked by ambiguity about the intentions of the perpetrator and produced the highest level of victim-blame, ambiguity in assigning blame is clearly implicated for further study. For example, ambiguity of perpetrator intent may be an important factor in attributions of blame among targets of particular forms of sexual assault and harassment.

In addition, gender-linked stereotypes about respectability shaped perceptions of blame in relation to social class. Therefore, future analyses should continue to attend to race, class and stereotypes in analyzing how unique combinations of victim identities affect observers' blame attribution. We must also continue to analyze how these identities fit within a larger societal framework of privilege and oppression; this study suggests that it is not the identities themselves that result in differences in perception, but the stereotypes that are associated with the identities that lead to differential treatment: oppressing some, while others prosper.

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