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Racial Bias in Perceptions of Sexual Violence

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## ABSTRACT

Sexual violence against women is highly prevalent in our world today. Black women are particularly at an increased risk for experiencing sexual harassment. Drawing from theories of intersectionality, dehumanization, contemporary racial bias, the current research explores the emergence of racial bias in perceptions of harm caused by sexual harassment. Across both studies, harm is significantly associated to perceptions of target credibility, victim blaming, perception of incident as sexual harassment and support for perpetrator punishment. Contrary to predictions, study 1 found no effects approached significance when it came to racial bias in perceptions of harm resulting from claims of sexual harassment when women wear sexualized (vs. non-sexualized) clothing. Study 2 also found no effects approached significance when it came to racial bias in perceptions of harm resulting from claims of sexual harassment when women strippers work in working class (vs. upscale) establishments. Both studies presented a significant main effect of participant gender: Compared to men, women were more believing and supportive of women's claims of sexual harassment.

*Keywords:* sexual violence, sexual harassment, intersectionality, dehumanization, racial bias, sexualization

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Sexual Violence.....	2
Dehumanization and Perceptions of Harm .....	3
STUDY 1 .....	9
Methods.....	10
<i>Participants</i> .....	10
<i>Design</i> .....	10
<i>Procedure</i> .....	10
<i>Dependent Measures</i> .....	11
Results.....	14
Discussion .....	18
STUDY 2 .....	20
Methods.....	20
<i>Participants</i> .....	20
<i>Design</i> .....	21
<i>Procedure</i> .....	21
<i>Dependent Measures</i> .....	22
Results.....	23
Discussion .....	26
GENERAL DISCUSSION .....	27
References.....	29
Appendix A : Stimulus Material .....	32
Appendix B : Dependent Measures .....	35

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 .....	7
Figure 2 .....	8

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1.....	15
Table 2.....	16
Table 3.....	16
Table 4.....	17
Table 5.....	23
Table 6.....	24
Table 7.....	24
Table 8.....	25

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally, around 852 million women aged 15 and older are estimated to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence (*Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018, 2021*). In addition, more than half of women in the United States have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace (Berdahl, 2007), which is likely to be an underestimate due to underreporting. Survivors often do not report instances of physical or sexual violence out of fear of or in response to negative reactions from others and the perpetrator. Survivors also fail to report because of the myths about sexual violence, that support negative perceptions of victims of sexual violence (Reich et al., 2021). Importantly, women of color are more frequent victims of sexual harassment than are White women (Berdahl, 2007).

The goal of this work is to examine whether White men and women will exhibit racial biases in perceptions of harm caused by an incident of sexual harassment. Specifically, the present research tested the hypothesis that, after reading claims of sexual harassment, White observers would perceive Black (vs. White) women as being less harmed by sexual harassment; harm, in turn, was predicted to be associated with perceptions of less target credibility, more victim blaming, less likelihood that reported behavior seen as sexual harassment and less support for perpetrator punishment. To consider these possibilities, I first discuss the conceptualization of sexual violence, with a particular focus on the historical linkages between racism and sexual violence. I then turn attention to psychological theories of racial prejudice, which specify the conditions under which liberal/lower prejudice Whites exhibit racial biases. I then define dehumanization and discuss the relation of dehumanization and perceptions of harm. Finally, I discuss the judgements and perceptions that follow from inferences about harm and, integrating

the aforementioned points, I present a set of novel hypotheses that the present research was designed to test.

### **Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence refers to acts in which someone is forced or manipulated into unwanted, unconsented sexual activity (*What Is Sexual Violence?*, 2010). Sexual violence has a strong cultural context, often resulting from men's exertions of men's power over women, who are perceived to be inferior (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). Sexual violence is primarily targeted at women who do not adhere to traditional gender roles or feminine ideals. For instance, women who identify as having stereotypic masculine attributes and/or succeed in a masculine domain requiring agency have been shown to be targets of sexual harassment (Berdahl, 2007; Dahl, Vescio, & Weaver, 2015). In addition, in the United States, prototypic women are White women and prototypic African Americans are men, with Black women being rendered intersectionally invisible (Purdie-Vaugh & Eibach, 2008; Zarate & Smith, 1990). Recent research has also shown that prototypic targets of sexual harassment are also White women (Goh et al., 2022). In reality, however, Black women are at a higher risk for harassment on multiple fronts due to their intersectional identities as both Black and Female (Berdahl, 2007; Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008). Yet, they are often left out of the discussion, as harassment of women is discussed majorly in terms of White woman experience and racial harassment expressed in terms of men experience (Berdahl & Moore 2006).

Sexual violence against Black women is deeply rooted in the history of the United States. Following the ban on the importation of enslaved Africans in 1808, a Black woman's body became exponentially more profitable, seen as one sixth to one fourth more valuable if they were capable of reproduction (Roberts, 1997). The exploitation of Black women sexually was used to



control the Black community as a whole. Continuing into the later 1800s, Black women were often legally seen as without virtue and thus “unrapable”, frequently resulting in Black women’s claims of assault leading to further harm rather than justice (Rosen, 2009). The legacy of dehumanization and unrapability continues to influence Black women’s reports of rape. Even today, when a Black woman reports rape, there are at least 15 more who decidedly do not report (*Black Women and Sexual Assault*, 2018). This comes as a highly unsettling number given that that 40% to 60% of Black girls are subject to coercive sexual contact by the time they reach age 18 (*Black Women and Sexual Assault*, 2018).

When it comes to reporting sexual violence, victims often feel that they are to blame or were deserving of the actions (Reich et al., 2021). Internal feelings of shame, embarrassment, and lowered self-worth leave them unwilling to disclose what happened. Many times, victims also anticipate victim-blaming reactions from those around them and or further harm / trauma.

### **Dehumanization and Perceptions of Harm**

Throughout history, there is evidence of the dehumanization of Black people. Dehumanization is defined by the American Psychological Association (2018) as the practice of reducing humans to lesser than, especially by denying autonomy, which often involves the denial that Black people possess uniquely human attributes (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). In the U.S, this dehumanization and objectification was essential in justifying the treatment of Black people. Controlling images, dating back to slavery, are still used and essential to further justify uncivil treatment of Black women. The Jezebel image, as established by Patricia Collins, is a sexually aggressive Black women that operates to control the sexuality of Black women in collaboration with other controlling images, making social injustices and mistreatment appear normal and inexorable (Collins, 2009). When stereotypes of such are activated, these Black women are seen

as sex objects — less than human, less deserving of dignity, and less respect — and thus, compared to White women, harsher judgments are passed and their allegations are taken less seriously (Alley et al., 2019; Gervais & Eagan, 2017). Additionally, the frequency in which the aforementioned stereotypes have been used to assert power, privilege, and control over Black people has caused victim-blaming to become more widespread amongst both perpetrators and observers (Schoellkopf, 2012).

Dehumanization leads to reductions in perceived harm, which have implications for victim blaming and perceptions of sexual harassment. As a result of dehumanization, White people both experienced less distress when witnessing harm towards Black people and assume that Black people feel less pain than White people (Trawalter et al., 2012). Perceiving Black people as experiencing less harm would be expected to have implications for victim blaming and perceptions of sexual violence. This is because prior work has shown that increases in perceived harm and intent increase the likelihood that observers perceive an event as discriminatory and the perpetrator as prejudice (Swim et al., 2003). Inversely, decreased perceptions of harm and intent would be expected to be associated with lesser likelihoods of perceiving events as discrimination and prejudice. Extending these findings to sexual harassment, decreases in harm would be expected to be associated with increases in victim blaming and decreases in the perceived likelihood that an act was sexual harassment and perpetrators should be punished.

Integrating the foregoing points, I predict that when women make claims of sexual harassment, dehumanization of Black women relative to White women will be associated with lesser perceived harm caused to the victim and harm, in turn, is predicted to be associated with decreased target credibility, increased victim blaming, decreased perception that the act was sexual harassment, and decreased support for perpetrator punishment. Interestingly,

contemporary theories of racial prejudice suggest that racial bias, of the sort here predicted, may be most likely in situations in which negative evaluations can be attributed to secondary factors that are unrelated to race (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1988). Stated differently, liberal and/or lower prejudiced Whites, have egalitarian self-concepts that lead to bias free judgements in situations in which there are clear cues that point out the relevance of race to the judgments. By contrast, in the absence of racial cues, lower prejudice Whites—called aversive racists—show traditional patterns of anti-Black biases. In line with prior theory and research on racism, we predict that women will be perceived as less harmed by sexual harassment when they are Black than when they are White, particularly when there are race irrelevant factors in which blame can be attributed to. In the present research, we will look at two race irrelevant factors that may provide justifications for the relatively more negative evaluations of Black women, compared to White women, who make claims of sexual harassment: sexualized occupations and socioeconomic status.

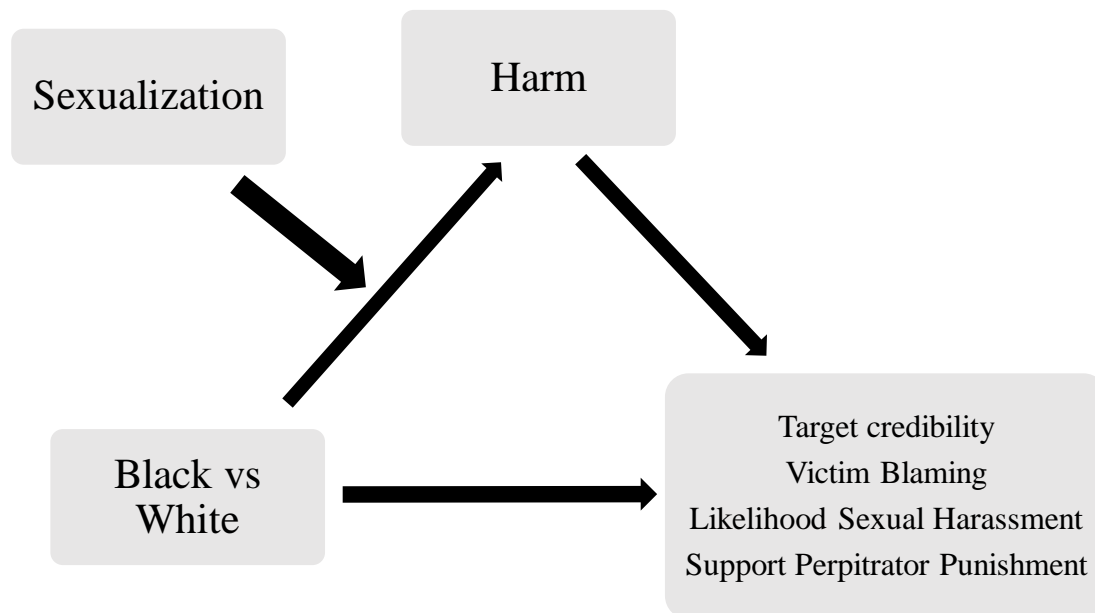
### **The Hypotheses and the Present Research**

When women make claims of sexual harassment, we predict racial biases in perceptions of harm resulting from the dehumanization of Black women compared to White women, particularly in situations that provide a race irrelevant justification for judging Black women more harshly than White women. This hypothesis has been tested in a previous set of studies. Consistent with predictions, previous research found that White men and White women are less likely to define the sexual harassment of Black (vs White) women to be problematic and harmful, particularly when women worked in occupations that facilitate victim blaming such as strippers rather than servers (Yamaguchi-Pedroza, 2023). This research linked perceptions of

harm to decreased target credibility, increased victim blaming, less likelihood of labeling the behavior as sexual harassment, and less support for perpetrator punishment.

The present research seeks to replicate and expand upon the research Yamaguchi-Pedroza (2023). A victim of sexual harassment is often blamed because of the way they dressed or because of their previous behaviors (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). In study 1, as shown in Figure 1, we examined whether racial bias would be greater when women wore sexually revealing (vs. conservative) clothing. It was predicted that there will be racial bias in perceptions of harm resulting from claims of sexual harassment when women wear sexualized (vs. non-sexualized) clothing. Specifically, when wearing sexualized clothing Black (vs. White) women are predicted to be perceived as less harmed by sexual harassment; harm, in turn, is predicted to be associated with less target credibility, more victim blaming, less likelihood to define instance as sexual harassment, and less perpetrator punishment.

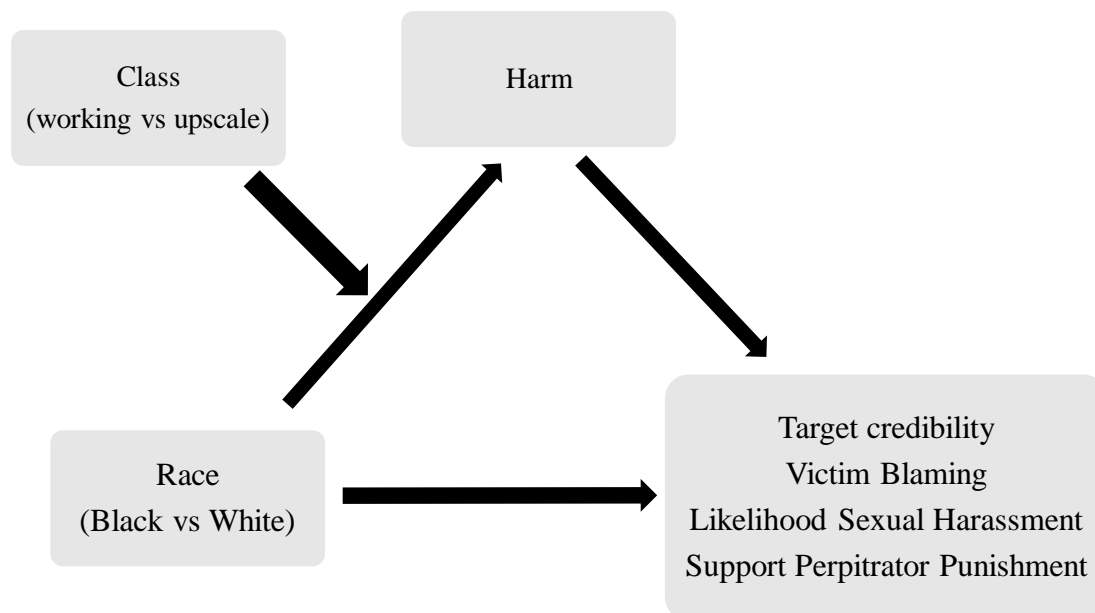
Figure 1

*Predicted Moderated Mediation of Sexualization on Dependent Variables, Study 1*

Study 2 served to replicate the findings of Yamaguchi-Pedroza (2023) within the condition of a stripper, using socioeconomic status as a mediator. We predicted that there will be racial bias in perceptions of harm resulting from claims of sexual harassment when women worked in a working class (vs. upscale) strip club. Specifically, when working in a working-class strip club, Black (vs. White) women are predicted to be perceived as less harmed by sexual harassment; harm, in turn, is predicted to be associated with less target credibility, more victim blaming, less likelihood to define instance as sexual harassment, and less perpetrator punishment.

**Figure 2**

*Predicted Moderated Mediation of Socioeconomic Status on Dependent Variables, Study 2*



## STUDY 1

The goal of study 1 is to replicate and extend prior work showing that Black women were perceived as less harmed than White women when they were strippers but not when they were servers (Yamaguchi-Pedroza, 2023). To test predictions, Yamaguchi-Pedroza used a 2 (target race: White or Black) X 2 (target occupation: server vs. stripper) X 2 (participant gender: man vs. woman) between-participants factorial design; participants were then presented with a vignette and reported their perceptions of harm, target credibility, victim blaming, support for perpetrator punishment, likelihood the event was sexual harassment, and perpetrator intent.. As noted, Yamaguchi-Pedroza documented racial biases when women were strippers but not servers. In other words, Black women were perceived as less harmed by sexual harassment than were White women when they were strippers and harm, in turn, predicted perceptions of target credibility, victim blaming, support for perpetrator punishment, and likelihood the event was sexual harassment. In the work of Yamaguchi-Pedroza, perceptions of intent did not predict these outcomes.

In study 1, we focus on the condition of a server, where racial biases were not documented in the original work of Yamaguchi-Pedroza (2023), and we examine whether racial biases emerge among servers who are sexualized (vs not sexualized). To do so, we manipulate the study via the inclusion of images of Black and White women servers who are dressed in sexualized or non-sexualized uniforms.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

We sought 50 participants per condition for men and women ( $N = 400$ ). Participants were from Pennsylvania State University and were recruited from the department of psychology subject pool. Only participants who identified as either man or woman and White were included in the study ( $N = 220$ ). We did not include anyone who identified as other than man or woman and identified as biracial ( $N = 142$ ). Additionally, anyone who completed less than 60% of the study was not included. The final sample consisted of 220 participants (89 Men, 131 Women)

### ***Design***

This study used a 2 (target race: White vs. Black) X 2 (Clothing type: revealing vs. nonrevealing) between-participants design. Self-identified White women and White men were assigned randomly to one of the four conditions created by crossing target race and target clothing type.

### ***Procedure***

Participants were shown an image of a female server who was reporting sexual harassment from a customer. They were asked to read an associated vignette describing her complaint. Participants were randomly assigned to observe an image and read claims of sexual harassment made by a Black woman or a White woman who was dressed in sexualized clothing or non-sexualized clothing (see Appendix A). We identified sexualized clothing as tighter fit pieces, shirts with cleavage, and short shorts. Non-sexualized clothing was identified as loose fitting, long sleeve shirt, and modest. In other words, the present study used a 2 (target race) X 2 (target clothing) between participants design, resulting in four conditions: A White woman wearing revealing clothes, a White woman wearing nonrevealing clothes, a Black woman



wearing revealing clothes, or a Black woman wearing nonrevealing clothes (Appendix A). All participants read the same description of a restaurant and a server's claim that a customer was sexually harassing, within only the servers name and the corresponding image being altered. The description is as follows:

Imagine a restaurant in a small city. This restaurant serves New American cuisine with entrees costing around \$15-25. This restaurant has been in business for 35 years.

Janiya Jackson [Emily Smith] is a woman in her 20s working as a server at this restaurant. Last month, Janiya [Emily] claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Janiya [Emily] reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Janiya [Emily] made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

After observing an image and reading the vignette, participants completed questions measuring perceptions of harm to the target, perpetrator intent, target credibility, perception that the event occurred was sexual harassment, level of victim blaming, and support for perpetrator punishment (Appendix B). Participants also reported their perceptions that sexual harassment is a problem in society, providing us with a potential covariate. All dependent measures were as used by Yamaguchi-Pedroza (2023). Lastly, participants reported demographics, read a debriefing statement, and were given course credit for compensation.

### ***Dependent Measures***

**Perceptions of Harm to Target.** Three items were used to assess the participants' perceptions of harm to the target: "The employee was harmed by the male customer's actions," "The male customer's actions were stressful to the employee," and "It is likely that the male

customer's actions made the employee feel unsafe." Participants rated on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). We created a perceptions of harm variable by taking the average across the three items ( $\alpha = .78$ ). Higher numbers indicate greater perception of harm to the target.

**Perceptions of Perpetrator Intent.** Three items were used to assess the participants' perceptions of the perpetrator's intent: "The customer intended to make the employee uncomfortable," "The customer intended to make the employee feel unsafe," and "The customer intended to harm the employee." Participants rated on a seven-point scale 7 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). We created a perpetrator intent variable by taking the average across the three items ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Higher numbers indicate greater perception of perpetrator intent.

**Target Credibility.** Four items were used to assess the participants' perceptions of the target's credibility: "Do you think the employee is believable?", "Do you get the impression that the employee is telling the truth?", "Does the employee's statement seem like a good source of information?", and "Do you think that the employee is making a false statement?" [reverse coded. Participants rated on a seven-point scale 7 (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *absolutely*). We reverse coded the necessary items and created a target credibility variable by taking the average across the four items ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Higher numbers indicate greater target credibility.

**Victim Blaming.** Ten items were used to assess the participants' victim blaming. Five of them assessed general victim blaming: "A woman who has been sexually harassed is a less desirable woman," "Woman do not provoke sexual harassment by their appearance or behavior" [reverse coded], "A woman should not blame herself for sexual harassment" [reverse coded], "Many women who report sexual harassment are lying because they are angry or want revenge on the accused," and "In most cases when a woman was sexually harassed, she deserved it." (1 =

*strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*,  $\alpha = .77$ ). The remaining five assessed specific victim blaming: “The employee is to blame in this situation,” “The employee brought the situation upon herself,” “The employee probably gave mixed signals,” “I think it required courage for the employee to come forward” [reverse coded], and “The employee could have done something to prevent this situation.” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*,  $\alpha = .87$ ). We reverse coded the necessary items and created a victim blaming variable ( $\alpha = .90$ ) by taking the average across all ten items. Higher numbers indicate greater victim blaming.

**Support for Perpetrator Punishment.** Three items were used to assess the participants’ support for perpetrator punishment: “I think the male customer should be banned from the establishment,” “I think the male customer’s access to the establishment should be limited,” and “The male customer should be required to apologize to the employee before returning to the establishment.” Participants rated on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). We created a support for perpetrator punishment variable by taking the average across the three items ( $\alpha = .70$ ). Higher numbers indicate greater support for punishment.

**Perceptions of Sexual Harassment as a Problem.** We included four items to assess whether participants viewed sexual harassment as a problem in society, more generally, to use as a potential covariate. These include: “I think sexual harassment is a major issue in the workplace,” “I think the majority of women face sexual harassment in the workplace,” “I think it is just a small minority of women who actually face sexual harassment” [reverse coded], and “I think a lot of women falsely claim sexual harassment” [reverse coded]. Participants rated on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). We reversed the necessary items and created perceptions of sexual harassment as a problem variable by taking the average across the four items ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Higher numbers indicate greater perception of it being a problem. Analyses

using this variable as a covariate produced findings parallel to those reported in the text. Therefore, this variable will not be mentioned further.

**Likelihood of Sexual Harassment.** Six items were used to assess the likelihood of sexual harassment. Three of them were rated on a seven-point scale where 1 = *extremely unlikely* and 7 = *extremely likely*: “In your opinion, how likely was it that the customer sexually harassed the employee?”, “In your opinion, how likely was it that the customer showed inappropriate sexual interest in the employee?”, and “In your opinion, how likely was it that the customer was simply being friendly toward the employee?” [reverse coded]. The other three were rated on a seven-point scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*: “In my opinion, the employee experienced sexual harassment from the customer,” “In my opinion, the customer showed inappropriate sexual interest in the employee,” and “In my opinion, the customer did not sexually harass the employee” [reverse coded]. We reverse coded the necessary items and created a likelihood of sexual harassment variable ( $\alpha = .85$ ) by taking the average across all six items. Higher numbers indicate greater perception of the incident as sexual harassment.

## Results

Means and standard deviations for each variable are presented in Table 1. As can be seen on the top line of Table 1, on a 7-point scale, perceptions of harm were over six when women were both Black and White. This points to the possibility of a ceiling effect and little variability, which could work against predicted patterns of findings on harm as well as all the other outcomes that are predicted to follow from decreased perceptions of harm when women who are sexually harassed are Black than White.

**Table 1*****Means and Standard Deviations, Study 1***

Variable	Sexualized		Non-Sexualized	
	Black	White	Black	White
<b>Harm</b>	6.23 (.84)	6.16 (.94)	6.16 (.98)	6.07 (1.00)
<b>Intent</b>	4.00 (1.31)	3.93 (1.41)	4.13 (1.45)	4.07 (1.20)
<b>Credibility</b>	6.15 (1.06)	6.06 (1.15)	6.04 (1.14)	5.77 (1.28)
<b>Victim Blaming</b>	1.84 (.96)	2.00 (1.02)	1.90 (.95)	1.92 (.98)
<b>Perpetrator Punishment</b>	5.56 (1.25)	5.44 (1.34)	5.43 (1.32)	5.24 (1.27)
<b>Likelihood its Sexual Harassment</b>	5.66 (1.13)	5.61 (1.14)	5.71 (1.00)	5.51 (1.01)

We also estimated correlations among all variables in the overall sample, and separately based on the race of the woman claiming sexual harassment. These correlations are shown in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively. As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, each of the dependent variables were correlated with one another, and harm is strongly associated with each outcome, consistent with our predictions.

**Table 2*****Correlations of Overall Sample, Study 1***

	Participant Gender	Target Race	Clothing	Harm	Credibility	Victim Blaming	Punishment	Likelihood Sex. Har.	Intent
Participant Gender	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Target Race	.004	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clothing	.041	.006	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Harm	-.172***	.038	.040	1	-	-	-	-	-
Credibility	-.256***	.077	.085	.602***	1	-	-	-	-
Victim Blaming	.360***	-.048	.003	-.633***	-.705***	1	-	-	-
Punishment	-.160**	.061	.065	.440***	.408***	-.494***	1	-	-
Likelihood Sex. Har.	-.271***	.059	.012	.633***	.595***	-.722***	.616***	1	-
Intent	-.193***	.026	-.051	.261***	.104*	-.150**	.237***	.295***	1

*Note* : \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 3*****Correlations Separated for Men and Women, Study 1***

	Target Race	Clothing	Harm	Credibility	Victim Blaming	Punishment	Likelihood Sex. Har.	Intent
Target Race	1	.010	.132	.101	-.076	.024	.095	.075
Clothing	-.027	1	.029	.033	-.002	.079	.045	-.028
Harm	-.039	.040	1	.593***	-.584***	.385***	.635***	.250***
Credibility	.077	.160	.552***	1	-.679***	.331***	.557***	.119
Victim Blaming	-.029	.030	-.616***	-.656***	1	-.505***	-.673***	.003
Punishment	.085	.034	.487	.447***	-.458***	1	.552***	.160*
Likelihood	.031	-.042	.574***	.511***	-.687***	-.669***	1	.246***
Intent	-.046	-.112	.160	-.111	-.059	.245*	.191*	1

*Note* : \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; Correlations for women appear above the diagonal; correlations for men appear below the diagonal.

Each dependent variable was submitted to a participant gender (woman, man) X target race (White, Black) X target dress (sexualized, non-sexualized) between-participants Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). As shown in Table 4, a significant main effect of participant gender emerged on each variable. Compared to men, women were more believing and supportive of women's claims of sexual harassment. No other effects approached significance.

**Table 4**

*The Effects of Participant Gender on Dependent Variables, Study 1*

	Mean		<i>F</i> (1, 303)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
	Men	Women			
<b>Harm</b>	5.88	6.36	11.82	<.001	.064
<b>Credibility</b>	5.57	6.34	21.84	<.001	.112
<b>Victim Blaming</b>	2.39	1.61	27.75	<.001	.138
<b>Punishment</b>	5.17	5.62	6.76	.001	.037
<b>Likelihood Sex. Harass.</b>	5.21	5.94	23.40	<.001	.119
<b>Intent</b>	3.58	4.37	16.45	<.001	.087

If the mediation model (figure 1) were viable, then target race and target dress would show a significant interaction on harm. The central effect found did not approach significance,  $F(1, 303) = 0.03, p = .860, \eta_p^2 = .000$ . Therefore, the model is not viable and does not need any further testing.

## Discussion

The study we based our research on found that the race of the target had significant effects when it came to our dependent variables if the target was a stripper but not a server. The aim of this study was to replicate the effects within the server condition by manipulating clothing. Contrary to our predictions, the perception of harm had no significant interaction with target race nor target clothing.

Despite our failure to replicate prior work, we found that a main effect of participant gender emerged on each variable. Women perceived more harm than men and in turn showed a more supportive response. They had higher perceptions of the woman's credibility, the likelihood that sexual harassment occurred, the perpetrator intent, and showed less victim blaming. It was found that, despite this, there was no significant difference in support for perpetrator punishment between men and women.

A limitation that could have presented itself within this study was the design of the stimulus materials. Our study materials were identical to those used in the prior work, with one exception. We included images of servers, which showed a woman who was either Black or White and dressed in either a sexualized or non-sexualized way. These images were taken from the internet and not strictly controlled. Participants were randomly assigned to observe an image that went along with a vignette detailing claim of sexual harassment from one of the four potential conditions. These images were of conventionally attractive women—given heteronormative and Eurocentric beauty standards—and thus had the potential to humanize the described individuals. This humanization could be an explanation as to why we found a ceiling effect and little variability in our results.



Additionally, the Yamaguchi-Pedroza (2023) research on which this study is based revealed that Black women were perceived as less harmed than White women when they were strippers but not when they were servers (i.e., when a race irrelevant justification was present). Within this study, we looked at servers and questioned whether the sexualization of servers would lead to similar effects. In other words, we focused on the half of the design in which Yamaguchi-Pedroza did not find race differences and we attempted to create racial bias. Therefore, in study 2 we took the other half of the design, in which the presented women were strippers instead of servers and asked the inverse question. In situations in which racial bias is present, are the additional factors that may ameliorate the magnitude of that effect; namely, might thinking of a higher class “gentleman’s club” reduce the magnitude of bias, given that in Yamaguchi-Pedroza’s original research the strippers were assumed to be much lower income than the servers?

## STUDY 2

The study was reconstructed to focus on women who worked as strippers, where racial bias was documented in the original research. To include a factor that may increase the dehumanization of Black women, we manipulated socioeconomic status. Within a 2 (target race: White vs. Black) X 2 (class: working class vs. upscale) between-participants design, participants were presented with either a White woman stripper or a Black woman stripper working in either a working-class strip club or an upscale strip club. Again, we included sufficiently large samples of men and women and included participant gender as a factor in all analyses, however, we did not predict differences between White men and White women's responses. Rather, we predicted that White people—both men and women—would exhibit racial bias in perceptions of harm resulting from claims of sexual harassment when women worked in a working class (vs. upscale) strip club. Specifically, when working in a working-class strip club, Black (vs. White) women are predicted to be perceived as less harmed by sexual harassment; harm, in turn, is predicted to be associated with less target credibility, more victim blaming, less likelihood to define instance as sexual harassment, and less perpetrator punishment.

### **Methods**

#### ***Participants***

As per study 1, we sought 50 participants per condition for men and women ( $N = 400$ ). Participants were from Pennsylvania State University and were recruited from the psychology subject pool, SONA. Given the large number of students in Study 1, who belonged to underrepresented groups, we oversampled. Students who participated in Study 1 were not permitted to participate in this study. Only participants who identified as either man or woman and White were included in the study ( $N = 491$ ). Twelve participants did not identify their

gender. Given our predictions, and as in Study 1, we included only participants who identified as White and were not biracial, which resulted in the removal of data from 141 participants who self-identified as Black or African American ( $N = 28$ ), Hispanic or Latino/a ( $N = 24$ ), American Indian or Alaska Native ( $N = 2$ ), Asian or Asian American ( $N = 35$ ), or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ( $N = 2$ ). This left a working data set comprised of the responses of 338 White undergraduates ( $Ns = 183$  and  $155$  for women and men, respectively).

### ***Design***

This study was adapted from that of Study 1, using a 2 (target race: White vs. Black) X 2 (class: working class vs. upscale) between-participants design. Self-identified White women and White men were assigned randomly to one of the four conditions created by crossing target race and target workplace class.

### ***Procedure***

Because of the possibility that the images of women that were included in Study 1 may have been high in attractiveness, given heteronormative and Eurocentric standards, which could have increased perceptions of harm, participants in Study 2 were not shown an image. Instead, participants read a vignette depicting a stripper who was making a complaint of sexual harassment from a customer. Participants were randomly assigned one of four vignettes: A White woman working in a working-class strip club, a White woman working in an upscale strip club, a Black woman working in a working-class strip club, or a Black woman working in an upscale strip club (Appendix A). The vignettes are as follows:

If participants were assigned the condition of a working-class strip club, they read the following opening statement:

Imagine a strip club in a low-income urban community. This club has a bar, a stage, and offers lap dances. Patrons must be 18 years of age. This strip club has been in business for 35 years.

If participants were assigned the condition of an upscale strip club, they read the following opening statement:

Imagine an upscale strip club in a small city. This club features valet parking, large VIP rooms, multiple stages, and a dress code. This strip club has been in business for 35 years.

All participants read the following description:

Janiya Jackson [Emily Smith] is a woman in her 20s working as a stripper at this strip club. Last month, Janiya [Emily] claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Janiya [Emily] reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Janiya [Emily] made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

After reading the vignette, participants completed the same procedure and measurements from Study 1. Again, participants were given course credit for compensation.

### *Dependent Measures*

The same measures as in study 1 were used for this study.

**Perceptions of Harm to Target.** ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Perceptions of Perpetrator Intent.** ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Target Credibility.** ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Victim Blaming.** ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

**Support for Perpetrator Punishment.** ( $\alpha = .70$ ).

**Likelihood of Sexual Harassment.** ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

## Results

Analyses were performed to parallel those reported in Study 1. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations for each variable in each condition. Again, we estimated correlations among all variables, which are shown in Table 6 collapsing across participants and are shown in Table 7 separately for men and women.

**Table 5**

*Means and Standard Deviations, Study 2*

Variable	Upscale Strip Club		Working Class Strip Club	
	Black	White	Black	White
<b>Harm</b>	5.78 (.96)	5.75 (1.06)	5.89 (1.03)	5.72 (1.00)
<b>Intent</b>	3.48 (1.17)	3.62 (1.19)	3.48 (1.22)	3.54 (1.21)
<b>Credibility</b>	5.93 (.94)	5.72 (1.01)	5.86 (1.02)	5.75 (1.12)
<b>Victim Blaming</b>	2.14 (.95)	2.22 (1.05)	2.29 (.98)	2.24 (.88)
<b>Perpetrator Punishment</b>	5.20 (1.34)	5.04 (1.06)	5.27 (1.30)	5.11 (1.28)
<b>Likelihood its Sexual Harassment</b>	5.35 (1.16)	5.26 (1.13)	5.32 (1.10)	5.28 (1.13)

**Table 6*****Correlations of Overall Sample, Study 2***

	Participant Gender	Target Race	Class	Harm	Credibility	Victim Blaming	Punishment	Likelihood Sex. Har.	Intent
Participant Gender	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Target Race	-.002	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Class	.019	-.014	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Harm	-.162***	.014	-.032	1	-	-	-	-	-
Credibility	-.307***	.055	-.005	.562***	1	-	-	-	-
Victim Blaming	.426***	.005	-.054	-.479***	-.630***	1	-	-	-
Punishment	-.135**	.028	-.013	.482***	.376***	-.456***	1	-	-
Likelihood Sex. Har.	-.237***	-.022	-.005	.602***	.569***	-.631***	.652***	1	-
Intent	-.269***	-.042	-.029	.271***	.124*	-.189**	.335***	.371***	1

*Note* : \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 7*****Correlations Separated for Men and Women, Study 2***

	Target Race	Class	Harm	Credibility	Victim Blaming	Punishment	Likelihood Sex. Har.	Intent
Target Race	1	-.008	.025	.022	.057	.010	-.073	-.043
Class	-.021	1	-.067	-.050	-.097	.029	.028	.029
Harm	.001	-.024	1	.553***	-.536***	.475***	.577***	.228***
Credibility	.062	.015	.518***	1	-.630***	.317***	.516***	.074
Victim Blaming	-.034	-.022	-.387***	-.530***	1	-.414***	-.591***	-.146*
Punishment	.040	-.046	.481***	.400***	-.480***	1	.641***	.375*
Likelihood Sex. Har.	.009	-.025	.605***	.549***	-.610***	-.646***	1	.320***
Intent	-.056	-.070	.275***	.033	-.059	.256***	.342*	1

*Note* : \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; Correlations for women appear above the diagonal; correlations for men appear below the diagonal.

Each variable —Harm, target credibility, victim blaming, support for perpetrator punishment, and likelihood the event was sexual harassment— was also submitted to a 2 (target race: White vs. Black) X 2 (class: working class vs. upscale) X 2 (participant gender: women vs. men) between-participants ANOVA. The only significant effect to emerge from each analysis was a main effect of participant gender.

As shown in Table 8, a significant main effect of participant gender emerged on each variable. Compared to men, women were more believing and supportive of women’s claims of sexual harassment. No other effects approached significance.

**Table 8**

*The Effects of Participant Gender on Dependent Variables, Study 2*

	Mean		<i>F</i> (1,330)	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
	Men	Women			
<b>Harm</b>	5.61	5.96	10.57	<.001	.031
<b>Credibility</b>	5.51	6.13	30.31	<.001	.084
<b>Victim Blaming</b>	2.66	1.79	80.94	<.001	.197
<b>Punishment</b>	5.168	5.616	6.755	.001	.037
<b>Likelihood Sex. Harass.</b>	5.03	5.57	19.46	<.001	.056
<b>Intent</b>	3.22	3.85	25.56	<.001	.072

If the mediation model (figure 2) were viable, then target race and target class would show a significant interaction on harm. The central effect found did not approach significance,  $F(1, 330) = 0.42, p = .516, \eta_p^2 = .001$ . Therefore, the model is not viable and does not need any further testing.

## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to replicate previous findings that Black women were perceived as less harmed than White women when they were strippers and include a race irrelevant factor that could perpetuate racial bias. Contrary to our predictions, the perception of harm did not vary as a function of target race and target class. Despite our inability to replicate prior work, we found that a main effect of participant gender emerged on each variable. Women perceived more harm than men and in turn showed a more supportive response. They had higher perceptions of the woman's credibility, the likelihood that sexual harassment occurred, the perpetrator intent, and showed less victim blaming. It was found that, despite this, there was no significant difference in support for perpetrator punishment between men and women.



## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across both studies, we found harm to be significantly correlated to all dependent variables —target credibility, victim blaming, support for perpetrator punishment, and likelihood the event was sexual harassment— but harm had no significant interaction with target race nor target class. However, a main effect of gender emerged for the dependent variables of both studies. Women perceived more harm than men and in turn had higher perceptions of the woman’s credibility, the likelihood that sexual harassment occurred, the perpetrator intent, and showed less victim blaming. Despite this, men and women showed similar support levels for perpetrator punishment.

There are a few limitations of the present research that should be addressed in further study. In the occupation of a server, women do not get to select their own clothing. Instead, they are given a dress code and are required to wear specified dress. This occurrence could potentially undermine victim blaming and provide explanation as to why we are observing some of the results from study 1. Additionally, the design of the stimulus materials could have presented alternative results. Our study materials utilized vignettes rather than actual behavioral analysis. In study 1, we included images of servers, which showed a conventionally attractive woman who was either Black or White and dressed in either a sexualized or non-sexualized way. These women were deemed conventionally attractive on the basis of heteronormative and Eurocentric beauty standards. For example, the woman included for the condition of “Black woman wearing sexualized clothing” had long and straight hair. The woman included for the condition of “Black woman wearing non-sexualized clothing” was of a light skin tone. Both women were thin and had a healthy and clean appearance. All these traits align with Eurocentric beauty standards and could have had an effect in humanizing the targets to participants. Study 2, although not

including images, utilized simple vignettes detailing the establishment in which a stripper worked and her complaint of sexual harassment from a customer. The use of live behavior analysis could provide results that replicate that of previous findings that were unable to be replicated through simple description.

An important limitation to note is that we began research by focusing on the half of Yamaguchi-Pedroza's design in which race differences were not found and attempted to create racial bias—when presented women were servers. In study 2, we took the other half of the design, in which the presented women were strippers instead of servers, and asked are there additional factors that may ameliorate the magnitude of previously found effects. The Yamaguchi-Pedroza (2023) research on which this study is based revealed that Black women were perceived as less harmed than White women when they were strippers but not when they were servers (i.e., when a race irrelevant justification was present). When looking more closely at the results of Yamaguchi-Pedroza, the main effect of occupation (server vs. stripper) is large while the main effect of race is small. The interaction in follow up studies shows that race qualifies the occupation such that strippers are much more dehumanized than servers and this is a particularly strong effect for Black women. This suggests that occupation has a bigger effect on dehumanization than the racial factors. Further study should deeper examine the effect of occupation on perpetuating bias effects.

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## Appendix A : Stimulus Material

### Study 1

Please read the following scenario about Janiya Jackson's [Emily Smith's] experience at her workplace

#### *Condition 1 : White Woman x Non-Revealing Clothes*



Imagine a restaurant in a small city. This restaurant serves New American cuisine with entrees costing around \$15-25. This restaurant has been in business for 35 years.

Emily Smith is a woman in her 20s working as a server at this restaurant. Last month, Emily claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Emily reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Emily made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

#### *Condition 2 : White Woman x Revealing Clothes*



Imagine a restaurant in a small city. This restaurant serves New American cuisine with entrees costing around \$15-25. This restaurant has been in business for 35 years.

Emily Smith is a woman in her 20s working as a server at this restaurant. Last month, Emily claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Emily reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Emily made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

**Condition 3 : Black Woman x Non-Revealing Clothes**



Imagine a restaurant in a small city. This restaurant serves New American cuisine with entrees costing around \$15-25. This restaurant has been in business for 35 years.

Janiya Jackson is a woman in her 20s working as a server at this restaurant. Last month, Janiya claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Janiya reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest,

commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Janiya made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

**Condition 4 : Black Woman x Revealing Clothes**



Imagine a restaurant in a small city. This restaurant serves New American cuisine with entrees costing around \$15-25. This restaurant has been in business for 35 years.

Janiya Jackson is a woman in her 20s working as a server at this restaurant. Last month, Janiya claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Janiya reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Janiya made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at

work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

**Study 2**

Please read the following scenario about Janiya Jackson's [Emily Smith's] experience at her workplace

**Condition 1 : White Woman x Working Class Strip Club**

I Imagine a strip club in a low income urban community. This club has a bar, a stage, and offers lap dances. Patrons must be 18 years of age. This strip club has been in business for 35 years.

Emily Smith is a woman in her 20s working as a stripper at this strip club. Last month, Emily claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Emily reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Emily made an appointment with a manager

at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

***Condition 2 : White Woman x Upscale Strip Club***

Imagine an upscale strip club in a small city. This club features valet parking, large VIP rooms, multiple stages, and a dress code. This strip club has been in business for 35 years.

Emily Smith is a woman in her 20s working as a stripper at this strip club. Last month, Emily claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Emily reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Emily made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

***Condition 3 : Black Woman x Working Class Strip Club***

Imagine a strip club in a low income urban community. This club has a bar, a stage, and offers lap dances. Patrons must be 18 years of age. This strip club has been in business for 35 years.

Janiya Jackson is a woman in her 20s working as a stripper at this strip club. Last month, Janiya claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Janiya reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Janiya made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.

***Condition 4 : Black Woman x Upscale Strip Club***

Imagine an upscale strip club in a small city. This club features valet parking, large VIP rooms, multiple stages, and a dress code. This strip club has been in business for 35 years.

Janiya Jackson is a woman in her 20s working as a stripper at this strip club. Last month, Janiya claimed that a male customer was sexually harassing her. Janiya reported that there had been several instances of a particular male customer staring at her chest, commenting on the attractiveness of her body, touching her arm whenever she passes by, and trying to meet outside of business hours to "get to know each other better." Janiya made an appointment with a manager at her workplace to report the male customer's behavior, indicating it made her very uncomfortable at work. She requested that she not have to interact with this customer at work.



### Appendix B : Dependent Measures

#### Perceptions of Harm to Target (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*)

- The employee was harmed by the male customer's actions.
- The male customer's actions were stressful to the employee.
- It is likely that the male customer's actions made the employee feel unsafe.

#### Perceptions of Perpetrator Intent (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*)

- The customer intended to make the employee uncomfortable.
- The customer intended to make the employee feel unsafe.
- The customer intended to harm the employee.

#### Target Credibility (*1 = not at all, 7 = absolutely*)

- Do you think the employee is believable?
- Do you get the impression that the employee is telling the truth?
- Does the employee's statement seem like a good source of information?
- Do you think that the employee is making a false statement? (reverse-coded)

#### General Victim Blaming (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*)

- A woman who has been sexually harassed is a less desirable woman.
- Women do not provoke sexual harassment by their appearance or behavior. (reverse-coded)
- A woman should not blame herself for sexual harassment. (reverse-coded)
- Many women who report sexual harassment are lying because they are angry or want revenge on the accused.
- In most cases when a woman was sexually harassed, she deserved it.

#### Specific Victim Blaming (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*)

- The employee is to blame in this situation.
- The employee brought the situation upon herself.
- The employee probably gave mixed signals.
- I think it required courage for the employee to come forward. (reverse-coded)
- The employee could have done something to prevent this situation.

#### Support for Perpetrator Punishment (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*)

- I think the male customer should be banned from the establishment.
- I think the male customer's access to the establishment should be limited.
- The male customer should be required to apologize to the employee before returning to the establishment.

#### Perceptions of Sexual Harassment as a Problem (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*)

- I think sexual harassment is a major issue in the workplace.
- I think the majority of women face sexual harassment in the workplace.
- I think it is just a small minority of women who actually face sexual harassment. (reverse-coded)
- I think a lot of women falsely claim sexual harassment. (reverse-coded)

**Likelihood of Sexual Harassment** (*1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely*)

- In your opinion, how likely was it that the customer sexually harassed the employee?
- In your opinion, how likely was it that the customer showed inappropriate sexual interest in the employee?
- In your opinion, how likely was it that the customer was simply being friendly toward the employee? (reverse-coded)

**Likelihood of Sexual Harassment** (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*)

- In my opinion, the employee experienced sexual harassment from the customer.
- In my opinion, the customer showed inappropriate sexual interest in the employee.
- In my opinion, the customer did not sexually harass the employee. (reverse-coded)