Empirical Research Paper

The Underestimation of Transgender Women's Vulnerability to Workplace Sexual Harassment

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Abstract

Despite experiencing sexual harassment more frequently and more severely than cisgender women, transgender women survivors'/victims' experiences of workplace sexual harassment are often omitted or ignored. Drawing from theorizing on victim prototypes and perceptions of sexual harassment, we show across six studies (total $N = 2{,}022$) that people incorrectly believe that transgender women are less likely to experience workplace sexual harassment compared to cisgender women. This effect is stronger among individuals who deny that transgender women are, in fact, women. We also show that people perceive harassment claims from transgender women who experience unwanted advances to be less credible than identical claims from cisgender women. Perceptions that transgender women are unlikely and non-credible victims of sexual harassment have important implications for understanding the erasure and neglect of transgender women survivors and the obstruction of transgender women's civil rights.

Keywords

sexual harassment, transgender women, identity denial, prototypes, transphobia

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Transgender women (women assigned male at birth) experience disproportionately high rates of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence relative to cisgender women (women assigned female at birth; e.g., Callander et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2011; Heino et al., 2020; Hoxmeier & Madlem, 2018; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019; Schuyler et al., 2020; Stotzer, 2009). Because sexual harassment is an interpersonal and structural form of gender-based violence driven primarily by hostility toward and a desire to punish and control marginalized group members (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008), transgender (trans) women's intersecting experiences of marginalization as both women and trans people causes them to be targeted more frequently (Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019). Yet, despite this increased vulnerability, trans women who experience harassment often encounter greater neglect, dismissal, and erasure than cis women experiencing the same harassment (Tambe, 2018; Westbrook, 2022; Wirtz et al., 2020).

The present research draws on theorizing about sexual harassment victim prototypes (Goh et al., 2022; Kaiser et al., 2022) to understand why trans women's experiences with harassment are ignored and discounted. Specifically, we test the hypotheses that people perceive trans (vs. cis) women as less likely to experience sexual harassment and perceive trans women's claims of harassment to be less credible than cis women's otherwise identical claims. This theorizing proposes that the relative erasure and neglect of trans women arises from a failure to connect trans women's experiences to sexual harassment because they fall outside of normative social prototypes of women. As such, we further test whether individuals who explicitly deny that trans women are, in fact, women are especially likely to underestimate trans women's vulnerability to sexual harassment and to discount the credibility of their claims.

The Invisibility and Neglect of Trans Women Who Are Sexually Harassed

Transgender women who experience sexual harassment are often subject to institutional and interpersonal erasure and

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neglect. Their experiences are often marginalized or even rendered invisible in harassment policy and legal frameworks, in scholarship, in advocacy and services, and in social movements (Boe et al., 2021; Tambe, 2018; Wirtz et al., 2020). Compared to cis women, trans women who experience sexual harassment are more frequently met with disbelief, disregard, punishment, and even criminalization, while also receiving less support from bystanders, employers, healthcare providers, and advocacy organizations (Hawkey et al., 2021; James et al., 2016; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019; Mezzapelle & Reiman, 2025; Schachtman et al., 2023; Seelman, 2015; Wirtz et al., 2020). The relative erasure and neglect of trans women survivors compared to cis women survivors can compound the psychological, physical, and financial harms caused by sexual harassment and can widen existing disparities in finances, health, justice, and safety (Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016; Jordan et al., 2020; Shires & Jaffee, 2015) based on gender modality (i.e., how a person's gender identity relates to their assigned gender at birth; see Ashley et al., 2024).[1] We suggest that much of this pattern of erasure and neglect can be understood through the lens of erroneously narrow prototypes of sexual harassment victims.

Narrow Victim Prototypes and Invisible Victims

Research drawing on the psychology of prototypes (i.e., individuals' typical mental representations of a given category; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Rosch, 1978) suggests that, because sexual harassment is largely represented and understood as a form of discrimination that targets women due to their membership in their gender group (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008), there is substantial overlap between prototypes of women and prototypes of sexual harassment victims. Consistent with this theorizing, people mentally represent sexual harassment victims as gender prototypical women on both within-category dimensions (e.g., as stereotypically feminine and attractive rather than stereotypically masculine and unattractive) and intersectional dimensions (e.g., as White rather than Black). People also believe that less prototypical women are less likely to encounter harassment (Goh et al., 2022; Kaiser et al., 2022).

This narrow victim prototype contributes to the erasure and neglect of less prototypical harassment victims. People perceive less prototypical women as less credible when they report harassment and as less harmed by harassment; people fail to identify harassment as such when less prototypical women are targeted; bystanders intervene less readily when observing harassment targeting less prototypical women; and less prototypical women's stories of harassment are less likely to be amplified and supported (Bandt-Law et al., 2021; Goh et al., 2022; Kaiser et al., 2022; Paganini & McConnell, 2024; Schachtman et al., 2023; for exceptions see Kulibert et al., 2024; Schachtman & Kaiser, 2024). These perceptions, especially of lower credibility, are key determinants of the legal standing of harassment cases and are essential predictors of institutional and interpersonal support (Epstein, 2020; Tuerkheimer, 2017).

Importantly, more prototypical women are actually *less* likely to experience harassment (Berdahl, 2007; Rossie et al., 2020). The emerging perspective on narrow prototypes and victim neglect thus highlights a "prototype paradox"—those who disproportionately bear the brunt of harassment (e.g., Women of Color, more stereotypically masculine women) are also those who are less commonly imagined to be the targets of sexual harassment and who receive greater neglect and marginalization (Kaiser et al., 2022). This paradox reflects both the history of sexual harassment law, policy, and advocacy, which for decades has centered prototypical women and prototypical representations of womanhood, and cultural representations of and narratives about harassment that marginalize or ignore less prototypical women who experience harassment (Bandt-Law et al., 2021; Crenshaw, 1992; Westbrook, 2022). And because people develop their victim prototypes from these narrow sociocultural representations of harassment (Kaiser et al., 2022; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Rosch, 1978), they may not accurately recognize statistical associations between victims' identities and their likelihood of experiencing harassment (contrasting with cases central to social role theorizing; Eagly et al., 2000).

Trans Women as Non-Prototypical Sexual Harassment Victims

Cis women are the dominant cultural representation of women and of sexual harassment victims and are typically perceived as more gender prototypical than trans women, including along the dimensions of femininity and attractiveness (as well as other dimensions such as normative heterosexuality and gender modality, expression, and performance; e.g., Gallagher & Bodenhausen, 2021; Gazzola & Morrision, 2014; Mao et al., 2019). Accordingly, theorizing on victim prototypes (Kaiser et al., 2022; Schachtman et al., 2023) predicts that trans women are perceived as less prototypical than cis women of the social category "sexual harassment victim." This perception may be especially likely for two types of sexual harassment, unwanted romantic and sexual advances and sexual coercion, as opposed to the third commonly delineated type of harassment, gender harassment (e.g., derogatory verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate hostile attitudes about gender, gender modality, gender expression, and sexual orientation).

Unwanted advances and sexual coercion are the behaviors lay perceivers typically label "sexual harassment" and typically think of when imagining sexual harassment (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008), and they are more closely associated with gender prototypical women, including cis women (Brassel et al., 2019; Cortina & Berdahl, 2008; Mezzapelle & Reiman, 2022). People may also be especially likely to mistakenly

believe that unwanted advances and coercion are motivated by romantic or sexual interest (as opposed to power, control, and prejudice; McDonald, 2012), which could increase the overlap between prototypes of victims and prototypes of women (e.g., in terms of femininity and attractiveness). Hence, given that trans women tend to be perceived as less attractive and as less likely subjects of people's romantic and sexual attraction (Blair & Hoskin, 2018; Gallagher & Bodenhausen, 2021), people may be particularly likely to exclude trans women from their victim prototype for unwanted advances and sexual coercion, whereas they may more readily imagine trans women experiencing (transphobic) gender harassment. Indeed, when learning of an unspecified harassment incident, people have been found to more commonly imagine unwanted sexual or romantic attention when imagining a cis woman's experience while more commonly imaging gender harassment when imagining a trans woman's experience (Mezzapelle & Reiman, 2024). And as the forms of sexual harassment that receive most attention in media, scholarship, social movements, and laws and policies (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008; Schultz, 2018), unwanted advances and sexual coercion may be especially relevant to gender modality-based disparities in victim visibility and support.

Thus, in the present research, we study the potential neglect of trans women who experience the two types of harassment for which they may be perceived as especially non-prototypical. If people have greater difficulty associating trans women with unwanted advances and sexual coercion, they may perceive trans (vs. cis) women as less probable victims of such sexual harassment and may be less likely to believe trans (vs. cis) women when they claim they were sexually harassed. In line with this theorizing, we propose and test the hypotheses that, compared to cis women, trans women will be perceived as less likely targets of sexual harassment involving unwanted advances and sexual coercion (*H1*) and their claims of such sexual harassment will be perceived as less credible (*H2*).

Identity Denial and Misperceptions of Trans Women's Harassment Experiences

The present research is situated in a sociopolitical context of heighted political discourse about and hostility toward trans women in the United States. Explicit denial of trans women's womanhood underlies much of the recent discriminatory rhetoric, legislation, policy, and judicial decision-making on trans issues that aim to restrict trans women's rights (ACLU, 2022; Atwood et al., 2024; Hasenbush et al., 2019; Morgenroth, Axt, & Westgate, 2024). Because perceptions of sexual harassment victims are shaped by people's prototypes of women, and particularly by the degree to which victims are perceived to conform to or deviate from prototypes of women (Goh et al., 2022), we theorize that identity denial will magnify the misperception of trans women's experiences of harassment.

Identity denial is a form of transphobia involving stereotypical and restrictive beliefs about women and trans people, such as gender essentialism and misconstruing transness as appropriative and pathological (Nagoshi et al., 2008; Winter et al., 2009), to deny that trans women are women. This between-category (woman vs. non-woman) evaluation of trans women is conceptually distinct from, but may be associated with, within-category perceptions of trans women's gender prototypicality. Because those perceived to be women more closely resemble the woman prototype compared to those perceived not to be women, individuals who explicitly deny that trans women are, in fact, women may have even greater difficulty linking trans women with the sexual harassment victim prototype (i.e., the prototypical woman; Kaiser et al., 2022), further heightening perceptions of trans women as unlikely victims of harassment and as less credible claimants. Thus, we theorize that identity denial of trans women will moderate the effect of gender modality on perceived harassment likelihood and credibility, such that individuals who deny that trans women are women will perceive trans (vs. cis) women's claims of harassment as especially less credible (*H3*) and perceive trans (vs. cis) women as even less likely (*RQ1*[2]) victims of sexual harassment.

Additionally, our theorizing is that identity denial plays a *specific* role in misperceptions of trans women's harassment experiences and does not merely reflect individual differences in political orientation (namely, conservatism, which may predict transphobia but is conceptually distinct from identity denial). Indeed, although there is a partisan divide on prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes toward trans women (Parker et al., 2022), individuals across the political spectrum may deny that trans women are women (Burns, 2017; Holzman, 2022). We therefore expect that the predicted moderating effect of identity denial will emerge even when controlling for political orientation.

The Present Research

In the following six studies, we investigated whether people think that trans women are less likely victims of unwanted advances and sexual coercion and whether people perceive trans women's claims of such harassment as less credible than cis women's otherwise identical claims. We also tested whether these effects are moderated by identity denial of trans women, such that individuals who explicitly deny the woman identity of trans women may be especially likely to perceive trans women as less likely victims of sexual harassment than cis women and especially likely to perceive trans women's claims of harassment as less credible than cis women's, even when controlling for political orientation.

Studies 1 to 5 examined whether people think that trans women are less likely victims of unwanted attention and

sexual coercion than cis women. In Studies 1 and 2, participants read about sexual harassment scenarios involving unwanted advances and sexual coercion and were asked to rate how likely it is that each of these events would happen to either a cis woman or a trans woman in the workplace. In Studies 3 to 5, participants read about unwanted advances and sexual coercion scenarios and were asked to choose which woman (a cis woman or a trans woman) in the department where the harassment occurred experienced the harassment.

Study 6 examined whether people perceive trans women's harassment claims as less credible than cis women's otherwise identical claims, and whether those who deny trans women's gender identity are especially likely to think that trans women are less likely victims and especially likely to discount the credibility of their claims, even when controlling for political orientation. All studies were preregistered, and preregistrations, materials, data, and analysis code are available through the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/xq5yb/. All manipulations, measures, and exclusions are reported in all studies.

Studies 1 to 5

Overview of Approach

Our first five studies tested Hypothesis 1: that, compared to cis women, trans women are perceived as less likely to experience sexual harassment. In all studies, participants read about instances of harassment involving unwanted advances—including physical touch, commenting on physical appearance, and romantic advances—and sexual coercion. The items involving physical appearance and physical touch were closely adapted from Goh et al. (2022), whereas the romantic advances and sexual coercion items were developed for these studies based on real-world allegations. Because research on discrimination attributions suggests that moderators like target prototypicality have a greater influence on perceptions when discrimination is ambiguous (Major et al., 2002), the items in these studies were pre-tested to ensure they were ambiguous forms of sexual harassment. The harassment perpetrator was always identified as a straight man to control for inferences about the gender and sexual orientation of the harasser, and the occupation of the harassment target was matched across gender modality conditions to control for inferences about social class.

The key outcome for all five studies was the perceived likelihood that trans women would experience harassment compared to the perceived likelihood that cis women would experience harassment. Studies 1 and 2 measured perceived likelihood by having participants rate the likelihood that trans or cis women would experience harassment, and Studies 3 to 5 measured perceived likelihood by having participants choose which woman they thought was targeted by harassment, a trans woman or a cis woman. In Studies 4 and 5, images of potential harassment targets were included to examine whether the effect of gender modality on perceived harassment likelihood generalizes to "cis passing" trans women (Broussard & Warner, 2019) and across various racial groups.

Because of the similarity of the hypotheses and outcomes across Studies 1 to 5, we first briefly describe the specifics of each study and then use a meta-analytic approach to integrate across the studies when testing our hypothesis. Table 1 presents participant demographics and reports sample size information, including original sample sizes, preregistered exclusions (for failing an attention check and/or indicating random responding), and final samples used in analyses (participants in all studies were recruited from the United States using Amazon's Mechanical Turk [Mturk] or CloudResearch. Table 2 summarizes the power analyses, procedures, dependent measures, descriptive statistics, and the key effect for each individual study.

Study 1

In Study 1, which used a between-subjects design, participants read about three sexual harassment scenarios involving unwanted advances (her coworker told her "you look sexy today"; her coworker put his hand on her lower back while they were working together; her coworker asked her to go on a date multiple times. Each time she politely declined and he kept asking) and three scenarios involving sexual coercion (her supervisor told her that in order to be considered for a promotion, she had to have a drink with him; a supervisor promised her that he would give her a favorable performance review if she went on a date with him; her supervisor told her that the company was going to have a large reorganization soon and if she "played her cards right" she could have any job she desired. He then asked her to meet him at a hotel that evening). Participants rated how likely it is that each of these events will happen to either a cis woman or a trans woman in the workplace on a scale from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*very likely*). Trans [cis] employees were described as individuals who identify as women and were assigned male [female] at birth.

Study 2

Study 2 built on Study 1 by examining whether people perceive trans women to be less likely to experience unwanted advances or sexual coercion *specifically*, but not negative workplace interactions *in general*. Participants read about three unwanted advances scenarios and three sexual coercion scenarios as in Study 1. They also read about three non-harassment negative workplace scenarios (e.g., a supervisor gave her negative feedback on a report she wrote). If participants are using a narrow, trans-exclusionary sexual harassment victim prototype in their judgments, they should see harassment events as less likely for trans women, but they

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Information About Sample Size for Studies 1 to 5.

Characteristic	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	Study 4	Study 5
Gender							
Woman, *n* (%)	203 (46.6)		146 (52.5)		105 (51.9)	165 (57.3)	98 (56.1)
Man, *n* (%)	184 (52.3)		127 (45.7)		96 (47.5)	121 (42.0)	125 (43.9)
Nonbinary, *n* (%)	1 (0.0)		5 (1.8)		1 (0.5)	2 (0.7)	0 (0)
Age	$M = 39.72$		$M = 40.43$		$M = 41.13$	$M = 39.39$	$M = 38.69$
	$SD = 19.70$		$SD = 13.33$		$SD = 13.93$	$SD = 12.76$	$SD = 11.46$
Race/Ethnicity, *n* (%)							
Asian	30 (7.7)		23 (8.27)		14 (6.4)	15 (5.2)	22 (9.9)
Black	48 (12.4)		33 (11.87)		13 (6. 9)	26 (9.0)	17 (7.6)
Latinx	16 (4.1)		8 (2.8)		10 (4.9)	19 (6.6)	14 (6.6)
Native American	1 (0.2)		5 (1.79)		1 (.5)	2 (.01)	2 (.01)
White	287 (73.7)		199 (71.9)		157 (77.7)	230 (79.9)	163 (73.1)
Multiracial	6 (2.0)		7 (2.52)		5 (2.6)	10 (3.4)	5 (2.2)
Another	0 (0)		3 (1.1)		2 (0.9)	1 (0.01)	0 (0)
Political orientation	$M = 42.06$		$M = 43.35$		$M = 45.30$	$M = 40.94$	$M = 39.59$
	$SD = 30.55$		$SD = 31.07$		$SD = 30.02$	$SD = 28.86$	$SD = 30.83$
Sample size	Cis target	Trans target	Cis target	Trans target	(Within-subjects)	(Within-subjects)	(Within-subjects)
Initial *N*	224	219	156	158	222	300	236
N after exclusions	194	194	137	141	202	288	223
Excluded for failed attention check	20	17	10	12	18	8	11
Excluded for saying responded randomly	20	15	13	12	2	4	2
Passed manipulation check (%)	99.48	96.91	96.80	98.10	76.23	NA	NA

Note. Participants resided in the United States. Political orientation was rated on a scale from 0 (completely liberal) to 100 (completely conservative). All exclusions were preregistered. For the manipulation check, participants were asked whether the women they were asked about were cisgender or transgender.

should not necessarily see *all* negative events as less likely for trans women. For an additional comparison, participants also read about three neutral workplace scenarios (e.g., a coworker asks if she plans to attend a group meeting later in the day). For each event, participants rated the likelihood of it happening to either a trans woman or a cis woman in a between-subjects design mirroring Study 1.

Study 3

In Study 3, participants read about one incident of unwanted advances and one incident of sexual coercion that occurred in a workplace and were asked to choose which of the two women in the department where the harassment occurred, a trans woman or a cis woman, experienced the harassment. We defined "trans" and "cis" as in Studies 1 and 2 and did not include images of the women. To control for the possibility that participants in Studies 1 and 2 were relying on base rates about the population distribution of cisgender and transgender women (i.e., there are more cisgender women than transgender women in the United States and therefore there are more cisgender than transgender women victims of sexual harassment), we told participants these were the only women in the department and tested whether participants were less likely to choose the trans woman than would be expected based on chance (50%) given that there were only two women in the department.

Study 4

In Study 3, no images of the potential harassment targets were included, so the potential effect of gender modality on victim likelihood could be driven, as we hypothesized, by between-category differences in perceived prototypicality (i.e., cis vs. trans identity), but the effect could also be driven by inferred within-category differences in prototypicality, because trans women are often stereotyped and perceived as being less stereotypically feminine and less attractive than cis women (Gazzola & Morrision, 2014). In Study 4, to examine *only* the effect of between-category variation in prototypicality, we included images of White cisgender women who were matched on attractiveness, femininity, and masculinity that were counterbalanced across gender modality conditions. Thus, the images were of "cis passing" women (Broussard & Warner, 2019).

Participants chose which woman among five in the department (four cis women and one trans woman) was recently sexually harassed. Instead of explicitly labeling the

Table 2. Methods, Procedures, and Results From Studies 1 to 5.

Study	Power analysis	Design	Target images used	Dependent variable	Workplace scenarios participants read	Descriptive statistics and analysis of key effect		
						Trans target	Cis target	Key effect
Study 1	$N = 440$ ($d = 0.25$, $\alpha = .05$, power = 90%, independent samples *t*-test)	Between-subjects, continuous outcome	No images	How likely is it this will happen to cisgender/transgender woman in the workplace? (1 = *not at all likely*, 7 = *very likely*)	Unwanted advances ($\alpha = .89$, 3 items)	3.87 (1.56)	4.98 (1.46)	$t(386) = 7.23$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.73$, 95% CI [0.53, 0.94]
					Sexual coercion ($\alpha = .89$, 3 items)	3.59 (1.64)	4.37 (1.64)	$t(386) = 4.69$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.47$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.68]
Study 2	N = 316 ($d = 0.40$, $\alpha = .05$, 90%, independent samples *t*-test)	Between-subjects, continuous outcome	No images	How likely is it this will happen to cisgender/transgender woman in the workplace? (1 = *not at all likely*, 7 = *very likely*)	Unwanted advances ($\alpha = .94$, 3 items)	3.35 (1.58)	4.56 (1.40)	$t(276) = 6.73$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.81$, 95% CI [0.56, 1.06]
					Sexual coercion ($\alpha = .89$, 3 items)	3.11 (1.53)	4.19 (1.60)	$t(276) = 5.75$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$, 95% CI [0.45,.93]
					Neutral ($\alpha = .71$, 3 items)	5.31(1.18)	5.74 (1.07)	$t(276) = 3.26$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.39$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.62]
					Negative ($\alpha = .83$, 3 items)	4.83 (1.15)	4.63(1.17)	$t(276) = -1.50$, $p = .134$, $d = -0.18$, 95% CI [−0.42, 0.06]
Study 3	$N = 230$ ($w = 0.25$ $\alpha = .05$, 90%, df = 1, chi-squared goodness of fit)	Chi-squared (compared to chance: 50%)	No images	Which of these two women do you think experienced this sexual harassment?	Unwanted advance	8.42%	91.58%	χ^2 (1, 202) = 139.72, $p < .001$, $w = 0.83$, 95% CI [0.69, 0.97]
					Sexual coercion	5.45%	94.55%	χ^2 (1, 202) = 160.40, $p < .001$, $w = 0.89$, 95% CI [0.75, 1.00]
Study 4	$N = 300$ ($w = 0.25$, $\alpha = .05$, 90%, df = 4, chi-squared goodness of fit)	Chi-squared (compared to chance: 20%)	"cis passing" White women	Which employee was recently sexually harassed?	Multiple unwanted advances	12.15%	87.85%	χ^2 (1, 288) = 11.08, $p < .001$, $w = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.31]
					Multiple sexually coercive behaviors	11.81%	88.19%	χ^2 (1, 288) = 12.09, $p < .001$, $w = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.32]
Study 5	$N = 230$ ($w = .25$ $\alpha = .05$, 90%, df = 1, chi-squared goodness of fit)	Chi-squared (compared to chance: 50%)	"Cis passing" White, Black, Latina, or East Asian women	Which of these two women do you think experienced this sexual harassment?	Multiple unwanted advances (all targets)	24.21%	75.79%	χ^2 (1, 223) = 59.31, $p < .001$, $w = 0.52$, 95% CI [0.38, 0.65]
					Multiple sexually coercive behaviors (all targets)	16.59%	83.41%	χ^2 (1, 223) = 99.65, $p < .001$, $w = 0.67$, 95% CI [0.54, 0.80]
					Multiple unwanted advances (excluding White targets)	26.95%	73.05%	χ^2 (1, 167) = 35.50, $p < .001$, $w = 0.46$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.61]
					Multiple sexually coercive behaviors (excluding White targets)	19.16%	80.84%	χ^2 (1, 167) = 64.38, $p < .001$, $w = 0.62$, 95% CI [0.47, 0.77]

women as trans or cis, we manipulated gender modality by having participants view the purported Twitter accounts of women employees who are trans (indicated by a trans flag emoji after her name and "transgender woman" in her description among other hobbies and interests) and cis women (indicated by having no emoji or an emoji associated only with hobbies (e.g., book, guitar) and only information about hobbies and interests in the description). We examined whether participants were less likely to choose the trans woman than would be expected based on chance (20%). This provides a more conservative test of perceived likelihood than in Study 3, given the already-low rate of choosing the trans woman by chance.

Study 5

In Study 4, we only used images of White targets—not to imply that White is "neutral" or not a racial identity (Roberts & Mortenson, 2023), but rather to control for inferences about target race, as we were unsure whether people associate trans women or cis women with a particular racial group. Additionally, because of their more gender prototypical racial identity, White women are more likely to be perceived as victims of sexual harassment compared to Women of Color (Bandt-Law et al., 2021; Kaiser et al., 2022). Using White targets thus allowed us to test whether gender modality can influence the perceived likelihood of sexual harassment among women who are otherwise most likely to be perceived as victims of sexual harassment.

To examine whether the effect of gender modality on perceived harassment likelihood generalized across additional racial groups, in Study 5, we included images of White, Black, Latina, and East Asian women (all matched on attractiveness, femininity, and masculinity) as targets. We examined whether effects emerged when all targets are included in analyses and whether they emerged when we exclude White targets from analyses. As in Studies 3 and 4, participants read that unwanted advances and sexual coercion occurred, and chose which of two women in the department, a trans woman or a cis woman, experienced the harassment. Gender modality was manipulated with labels as in Studies 1 to 3. Target race was varied across participants, with the two women always depicted as belonging to the same racial group. We tested whether participants were less likely to choose the trans woman than would be expected based on chance (50%) given that there were only two women in the department.

Internal Meta-Analytic Results of Studies 1 to 5

We present the meta-analytic results of Studies 1 to 5 examining whether people think that trans women are less likely victims of sexual harassment than cis women (metafor R package; Viechtbauer, 2010). All of the studies we ran examining this research question were included in the meta-analyses. Consistent with H1, participants rated trans women as

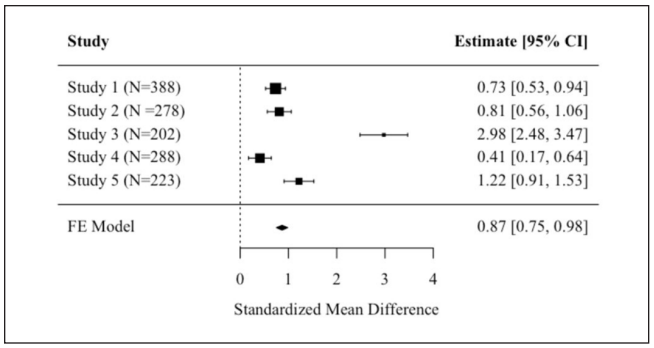

Figure 1. Internal meta-analytic result of the effect of gender modality (cisgender vs. transgender) on the perceived likelihood of experiencing unwanted advances.
Note. Participants rated the likelihood that a cisgender or transgender woman experiences unwanted advances (Studies 1 and 2) or chose the most likely target of unwanted advances among one or more cisgender women and a transgender woman (Studies 3–5).

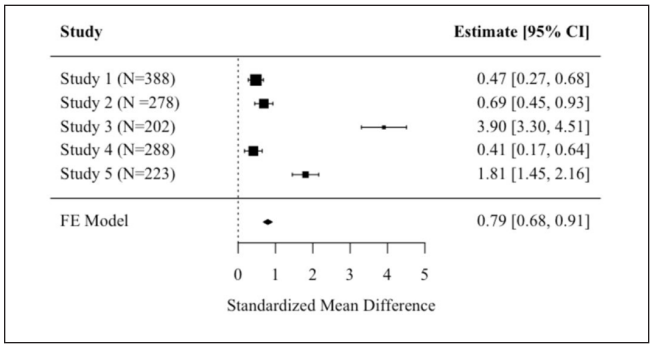

Figure 2. Internal meta-analytic result of the effect of gender modality (cisgender vs. transgender) on the perceived likelihood of experiencing sexual coercion.
Note. Participants rated the likelihood that a cisgender or transgender woman experiences sexual coercion (Studies 1 and 2) or chose the most likely target of sexual coercion among one or more cisgender women and a transgender woman (Studies 3–5).

less likely victims than cis women of unwanted advances, $g = 0.76$, $Z = 9.51$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.61, 0.92], and of sexual coercion, $g = 0.56$, $Z = 7.12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.40, 0.72] (Studies 1 and 2). Participants also were less likely to choose a trans (vs. cis) woman as the most likely victim of unwanted advances, $g = 0.99$, $Z = 11.13$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.82, 1.17], and of sexual coercion, $g = 1.13$, $Z = 11.89$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.95, 1.32] (Studies 3–5). Averaging across all five studies, the meta-analytic effect for unwanted advances, $g = 0.87$, $Z = 14.48$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.75, 0.98], and the meta-analytic effect for sexual coercion, $g = 0.79$, $Z = 13.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.68, 0.91], were both significant and relatively large (see Figures 1 and 2). Results of each individual study were all significant in the predicted direction and are presented in Table 2. Correlations among variables for each study and exploratory analyses of moderation by participant political orientation and gender are

reported in Supplemental Material. (Participant political orientation did not moderate any effects, and there was no consistent moderation by participant gender.)

Discussion of Studies 1 to 5

Consistent with our victim prototype framework, Studies 1 to 5 suggested that people think that trans women are less likely victims of workplace sexual harassment than cis women. Participants rated trans women as less likely victims of harassment than cis women (Studies 1 and 2) and were less likely to choose them as the victim of a harassment incident compared to cis women (Studies 3–5). We found the effect of gender modality on perceived harassment likelihood even when experimentally controlling for the potential roles of attractiveness, masculinity, femininity, and assumptions about social class and population base rates, as well as when using images of "cis passing" women that were counterbalanced across gender modality conditions.

The effect of victim gender modality was largest in Study 3, where a lack of accompanying images may have encouraged the largest imagined difference between a cis woman and a trans woman (e.g., if participants inferred substantial variability in other gender prototypical characteristics such as attractiveness and femininity; Gallagher & Bodenhausen, 2021). In contrast, Studies 4 and 5 included images to intentionally control for participants' mental representations (e.g., to control for attractiveness and femininity). The predicted effect of victim gender modality emerged across all study designs, and the significant meta-analytic effect emerged even when Study 3 was excluded from the meta-analyses (see Supplemental Material).

In Study 2, while the effect of target gender modality did extend to judgments of non-harassing neutral events, it did not extend to judgments about non-harassing *negative* events, suggesting that our findings do not simply reflect perceptions that trans women are less likely to experience adverse workplace interactions *in general*. Rather, the effect on the perceived likelihood of adverse workplace interactions is specific to perceptions of negative events involving sexual harassment victimhood, which are theorized to be shaped by perceptions of deviation from the social prototype of women.

We did not predict a priori that participants in Study 2 would judge the events we intended to be neutral as less likely for trans women. We speculate that these neutral events were perhaps somewhat positively valanced and that seeing them as less likely to happen to trans women might reflect perceived likelihood of exclusion (e.g., not being asked about attending a work meeting). If so, perceived *exclusion* is likely to differ from perceived *targeting for harassment* (see Ziano & Wang, 2025), and we see the non-harassing negative events as the more clearly interpretable control events in ruling out an alternative explanation that trans women are seen as less likely to experience negative events in general.

We found the predicted effect of gender modality when people evaluated White women, Black women, Latina women, and East Asian women as potential targets of sexual harassment and when just evaluating Black, Latina, and East Asian women as potential targets (i.e., when not including participants who evaluated White targets in analyses). We additionally found the effect when examining each racial group individually (see Supplemental Material). Thus, labeling the same woman as trans (vs. cis) can lead people to perceive her as less likely to be targeted by sexual harassment. This is a biased assessment, because trans women actually experience *higher* rates of sexual harassment than cis women in the workplace (Callander et al., 2019; Heino et al., 2020; Schuyler et al., 2020).

Having found support for H1, that people think trans women are less likely than cis women to experience harassment, we turned in the final study to perceptions of claim credibility (H2) and to the moderating role of identity denial (H3 and RQ1).

Study 6

The first goal of Study 6 was to extend our investigation to perceptions of the credibility of a victim's claim of sexual harassment. Perceived credibility of a claim is a central feature of rights-claiming systems in the United States and an important predictor of whether people who have been sexually harassed receive interpersonal and institutional support, redress, and justice (Epstein, 2020; Tuerkheimer, 2017). Because previous research has found that less prototypical women's claims of sexual harassment are perceived as less credible (Goh et al., 2022), we hypothesized that, if people perceive trans women to be less prototypical victims (as Studies 1–5 suggest), they also may perceive trans women's harassment claims to be less credible than cis women's same claims (H2). Moreover, because sexual harassment perceptions are theorized to be shaped by perceptions of conformity to or deviation from prototypical womanhood, we further hypothesized that people who explicitly deny that trans women are women should be especially prone to discount the likelihood of trans (vs. cis) women being harassed and to discount the credibility of trans (vs. cis) women's harassment claims (H3 and RQ1).

Thus, in Study 6, we tested the hypothesis that individuals perceive trans women's claims of sexual harassment to be less credible than cis women's otherwise identical claims. We further explored whether trans women are perceived to be less likely victims than cis women, and whether perceptions of claim credibility and harassment likelihood are moderated by the identity denial of trans women. Because there are individuals across the political spectrum who deny trans women's womanhood (Holzman, 2022), we investigated whether identity denial would moderate our effects even when controlling for political orientation. For exploratory purposes and without making specific directional

predictions, we also examined whether people perceive trans (vs. cis) women to be less psychologically harmed by the harassment, whether this effect is moderated by identity denial of trans women, and whether participant political orientation and gender moderated outcomes (see Supplemental Material for items and results of these analyses).

Whereas Studies 1 to 5 included either no images or images of "cis passing" trans women, in this study, we used AI-generated images (Morgenroth, van der Toom, et al., 2024) to examine perceptions of "non-passing" trans women (i.e., women who will likely not be identified as cis according to normative sociocultural gender norms; Broussard & Warner, 2019). Not all trans women want or seek feminizing gender-affirming care (Tristani-Firouzi et al., 2022) and many trans women in the US who would like to access care that may facilitate "passing" are unable to due to structural and interpersonal barriers to care. "Non-passing" trans women are especially likely to experience discrimination and neglect when they experience sexual violence (Grant et al., 2011; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019).

Method

Participants. Using Cloud Connect, we recruited 669 participants from the United States to detect an interaction effect size of $f = 0.02$ with alpha = .05 and power = 90% in multiple linear regression. In total, 643 participants were included in analyses (26 respondents failed one or more attention checks or indicated that they responded randomly and, following our preregistration, were excluded from analyses). Ninety-seven percent of the participants included in analyses passed the manipulation check, which asked them whether the women they read about were cisgender or transgender. Participants identified as women (321, 49.92%), men (320, 49.76%), and non-binary (2, 0.31%); as transgender and/or non-binary (11, 1.71%); and as Asian (65, 10.11%), Black (63, 9.79%), Latino/a/x (58, 9.02%), Native American (5, 0.78), White (418, 65.01%), Multiracial (30, 4.65%) and another race/ethnicity (3, 0.47%). Participant age ranged from 18 to 80 ($M = 39.29$, $SD = 12.92$), and participant political orientation ranged from 0 (completely liberal) to 100 (completely conservative; $M = 37.94$, $SD = 29.99$).

Materials and Procedure. Participants read about two claims of sexual harassment that involved unwanted advances (e.g., she says that her coworker asked if she wanted to stay after hours to bond and get to know each other) and sexual coercion (e.g., she says that her supervisor told her "it looks like someone dressed up for her performance review today"). Participants saw one of two counterbalanced versions of unwanted advances and sexual coercion. The women making the claims were either described as cisgender or transgender. In the cisgender condition, people saw an AI-generated image of a face that was previously categorized as a woman and was edited to include long hair and makeup. In the transgender condition, people saw an AI-generated image of a face that was previously categorized as a man and was edited to include long hair and makeup (images are from Morgenroth, van der Toom, et al., 2024, and were originally developed using https://generated.photos/face). Thus, the images of the transgender women represent their appearance without potential gender affirming care such as hormone replacement therapy and facial feminization surgery. Within condition, the AI-generated image paired with each sexual harassment claim was counterbalanced. As in Studies 1 to 5, the harasser was described as a straight man, and the occupation of the woman who was harassed was standardized to avoid inferences about the harasser's gender and sexual orientation and the target's social class.

Perceived Likelihood. For each harassment scenario, participants rated how likely it is that something like this happens to a cisgender (cisgender condition) or transgender (transgender condition) woman in the workplace on a scale from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*very likely*).

Perceived Claim Credibility. For each harassment scenario, participants rated perceived credibility on a two-item scale ("How much do you believe that Jessica was sexually harassed by her coworker?"; "How confident are you that Jessica was sexually harassed by her coworker?"; Goh et al., 2022, Studies C1 and C2) ranging from 1 (do not believe at all/not confident at all) to 7 (definitely believe/extremely confident), with higher numbers indicating greater belief and confidence. These two items were averaged to create a composite claim credibility score for unwanted advances ($\alpha = .94$) and for sexual coercion ($\alpha = .95$).

Identity Denial. Participants completed an 8-item measure of identity denial of transgender women developed for this study based on transphobic messaging regarding trans women's gender identities as pathological and appropriative (Bassi & LaFleur, 2022). Participants rated their agreement with statements of identity denial (e.g., "transgender women are not really women"; "transgender women are delusional"; "transgender women will never really be women"; $\alpha = .95$) on a scale from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 7 (*definitely agree*).

Results

Preliminary Analysis. Before conducting our main analyses, we verified that our manipulation (gender modality of target) did not affect our predicted moderator (identity denial). There was no significant effect of gender modality condition on identity denial, $t(641) = 1.00$, $p = .315$, $d = 0.08$, 95% CI [−0.08, 0.23]. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Study 6.

	Trans woman target		Cis woman target	
Rating	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Likelihood of unwanted advances	4.75	1.73	5.51	1.46
Likelihood of sexual coercion	4.68	1.75	5.33	1.53
Credibility of unwanted advances	3.90	1.81	4.24	1.80
Credibility of sexual coercion	3.81	1.89	4.08	1.88

Note. Sample size is 324 for trans woman target condition and 319 for cis woman target condition. See Supplemental Material for correlations among outcomes.

Perceived Likelihood of Harassment. As in Studies 1 to 5, participants thought that trans women were less likely to experience an unwanted advance in the workplace than cis women (see Table 4, Model 1). This effect was moderated by trans identity denial (RQ1; see Table 4, Model 2) such that the effect of gender modality condition on likelihood was stronger among those higher in identity denial (+1 *SD,* $b = 1.09$, $SE = 0.16$, $t = 6.74$, $d = 0.53$, 95% CI [0.38, 0.69], $p < .001$) than among those lower in identity denial (−1 *SD,* $b = 0.33$, $SE = .16$, $t = 2.01$, $d = 0.16$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.31], $p = .045$). These moderation results hold when controlling for participant political orientation (see Table 4, Model 3).

For sexual coercion, participants again thought that trans women were less likely to experience sexual coercion in the workplace than cis women (see Table 4, Model 1). This effect was moderated by trans identity denial (see Table 4, Model 2), such that those higher in trans identity denial perceived trans women as less likely victims (+1 *SD,* $b = 1.05$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 6.28$, $d = 0.50$, 95% CI [0.34, 0.65], $p < .001$), but those lower in identity denial did not (−1 *SD,* $b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = 0.90$, $d = 0.07$, 95% CI [−0.08, 0.23], $p = .368$). These moderation results hold when controlling for participant political orientation (see Table 4, Model 3).

We also explored the interaction between gender modality and identity denial by examining identity denial as a predictor of likelihood of harassment at each level of gender modality. For unwanted advances and sexual coercion, identity denial was a stronger predictor of harassment likelihood for perceptions of trans women (unwanted advances, $b = −0.87$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = −10.49$, $d = −0.83$, 95% CI [−0.99, −0.67], $p < .001$; $b = −0.88$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = −10.25$, $d = −0.81$, 95% CI [−0.97, −0.65], $p < .001$) than for perceptions of cis women ($b = −0.49$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = −6.21$, $d = −0.49$, 95% CI [−0.65, −0.33], $p < .001$; $b = −0.44$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = −5.329$, $d = −0.42$, 95% CI [−0.58, −0.26], $p < .001$), even when controlling for political orientation (see Supplemental Materials).

Perceived Credibility of Harassment Claim. Confirming H2, participants thought that the same unwanted advances harassment claim was less credible when made by a trans woman compared to when it was made by a cis woman (see Table 4, Model 1). However, contrary to H3, identity denial did not moderate this effect (see Table 4, Model 2).

Contrary to H2 and H3, participants did not think that a sexual coercion claim was less credible when made by a trans (vs. cis) woman, and identity denial did not moderate perceptions of claim credibility for sexual coercion (see Table 4, Models 1 and 2).

Identity denial predicted perceptions of unwanted advances and sexual coercion claim credibility for both trans and cis women, and this effect was not moderated by gender modality (see Table 4, Model 2).

Discussion

Study 6 investigated whether trans women are perceived as less likely victims of harassment and as making less credible harassment claims than cis women, and whether those who deny that trans women are women would be particularly likely to hold these perceptions. Replicating Studies 1 to 5, participants perceived trans women to be less likely victims of unwanted advances and sexual coercion. Importantly, the effect of target gender modality on the perceived likelihood of sexual harassment was moderated by identity denial, even when controlling for political orientation. Specifically, for unwanted advances, the effect of target gender modality on perceived likelihood was stronger among those who deny that trans women are women, whereas for sexual coercion, the effect only emerged among those who deny that trans women are women. That participants who denied that trans women are women were particularly prone to perceiving trans women as unlikely victims of harassment is consistent with our theorizing that perceptions are based on the overlap between victim prototypes and prototypes of women (Goh et al., 2022; Kaiser et al., 2022). Furthermore, these results suggest that even otherwise liberal individuals may perceive trans women as less likely to be targeted by harassment, especially when they deny trans women's womanhood.

We found partial support for our hypotheses about perceived claim credibility. Confirming H2, participants perceived a trans woman's claim of unwanted advances as less credible than a cis woman's otherwise identical claim. However, significant differences in perceived credibility did not emerge for sexual coercion (though they were directionally consistent). This suggests that, at least in some circumstances, trans women's reports of harassment will be perceived as less credible than cis women's—a fundamental barrier to social support and to organizational and legal recourse for harassment (Epstein, 2020; Tuerkheimer, 2017). It is possible that we did not see the expected effect for the credibility of a sexual coercion claim because people were more likely to correctly identify that sexual coercion is

Table 4. Regression Models From Study 6.

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
Predictor variable	*b* [95% CI]	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*b* [95% CI]	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*b* [95% CI]	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Unwanted advances likelihood												
GM condition	0.71 [0.48,0.93]	0.11	6.16	<.001	0.71 [0.48, 0.93]	0.11	6.20	<.001	0.70 [0.48, 0.93]	0.11	6.17	<.001
Identity denial	−0.67 [−0.78, −0.56]	0.18	−11.63	<.001	−1.25 [−1.61, −0.89]	0.18	−6.82	<.001	−1.17 [−1.54, −0.80]	0.19	−6.15	<.001
Condition × Denial					0.38 [0.15, 0.61]	0.11	3.34	.001	0.38[0.16, 0.60]	0.06	3.33	<.001
Political orientation									−0.12[−0.27, 0.02]	0.08	−1.66	.097
Sexual coercion likelihood												
GM condition	0.60 [0.37, 0.84]	0.12	5.03	<.001	0.60 [0.37, 0.83]	0.12	5.08	<.001	0.58 [−0.35, 0.81]	0.12	4.95	<.001
Identity denial	−0.65[−0.77, −0.53]	0.06	−10.83	<.001	−1.34 [−1.71, −0.96]	0.19	−7.01	<.001	−1.14 [−0.52, −0.76]	0.20	−5.85	<.001
Condition × Denial					0.45 [0.22, 0.68]	0.12	3.80	<.001	0.45 [0.21, 0.68]	0.12	3.83	.001
Political orientation									−0.30 [−0.44, −0.14]	0.08	−3.83	<.001
Unwanted advances credibility												
GM Condition	0.29 [0.03, 0.55]	0.13	2.17	.031	0.29 [0.03, 0.55]	0.13	2.17	.031	0.29[0.02, 0.55]	0.13	2.12	.034
Identity denial	−0.60 [−0.73, −0.47]	0.07	−8.98	<.001	−0.77 [−1.19, −0.34]	0.22	−3.56	<.001	−0.70[−1.13, −0.26]	0.22	−3.13	.002
Condition × Denial					0.11 [−0.16, 0.37]	0.13	0.81	.420	0.11 [−0.16, 0.37]	0.13	0.80	.423
Political Orientation									−0.10[−0.27, 0.07]	0.09	−1.18	.239
Sexual coercion credibility												
GM condition	0.23[−0.05, 0.51]	0.14	1.59	.112	0.23 [−0.05, 0.51]	0.14	1.59	.113	0.22 [−0.06, 0.50]	0.14	1.53	.125
Identity denial	−0.50 [−0.64, −0.36]	0.07	−6.98	<.001	−0.76 [−1.21, −0.30]	0.23	−3.27	.001	−0.70 [−1.17, −0.23]	0.24	−2.92	.004
Condition × Denial					0.17 [−0.12, 0.45]	0.14	1.16	.247	0.17 [−0.11, 0.45]	0.14	1.16	.248
Political orientation									−0.08 [−0.27, 0.10]	0.09	−0.92	.356

Note. Gender modality (GM) condition is coded 0 = trans woman, 1 = cis woman. Identity denial and political orientation were mean-centered. 90% Confidence intervals are reported in brackets. Degrees of freedom = 640 for Model 1, 639 for Model 2, and 637 for Model 3.

motivated by power and prejudice toward women (while unwanted advances typically are as well, but are often perceived as being more motivated by attraction; e.g., McDonald, 2012), which more closely matches people's expectations for harassment motivations targeting trans women (Brassel et al., 2019). Future work should continue to investigate how perceived claim credibility varies across different kinds of sexual harassment.

Contrasting with H3, we did not find that identity denial moderated perceptions of claim credibility. Instead, identity denial predicted a general tendency to see sexual harassment reports as less credible, regardless of the gender modality of the target (Table 4, Model 1). The main effect of identity denial, rather than moderation, may be driven by the fact that individuals who discount women's credibility in one domain (not believing women's stated gender identity) may be more likely to discount women's credibility in another domain (not believing women's claims of sexual harassment). Thus, identity denial of trans women may be associated with a general tendency not to believe women. It is also possible that identity denial partially reflects generally hostile and stereotypical views of women that can be applied to both cis and trans women, leading individuals to dismiss all women's experiences of sexual violence. Future work can further elucidate how identity denial shapes perceptions of targets of sexual harassment with different and overlapping identities. Indeed, though our measure and theorizing focused on the denial of trans women's identities, people can deny the gender identity of both trans and cis individuals (Morgenroth, van der Toom, et al., 2024).

General Discussion

The present studies sought to better understand why, despite trans women's disproportionate risk of sexual harassment, they experience widespread invisibility and neglect relative to cis women (Boe et al., 2021; Schachtman et al., 2023; Wirtz et al., 2020). In line with theorizing that people neglect sexual harassment victims who are less prototypical women (and thus less prototypical victims; Kaiser et al., 2022), participants perceived trans women to be less likely victims of sexual harassment. This effect emerged even when we used images to control for inferences about attractiveness, femininity, and masculinity. It seems that just labeling the same woman trans instead of cis can cause people to perceive her to be a less likely victim of both unwanted advances and sexual coercion. We also found some evidence that people find a trans woman's claims of sexual harassment to be less credible than an identical claim made by a cis woman—at least in the case of unwanted advances.

Also consistent with previous theorizing about prototypes and neglect was our finding that identity denial moderated perceptions of harassment likelihood. Individuals who deny that trans women are women were especially likely to see trans women as unlikely victims of unwanted advances and were the only participants to see trans women as less likely victims of sexual coercion (those low in identity denial did not differ in perceptions of cis women's and trans women's likelihood of experiencing sexual coercion). This pattern provides compelling evidence to support previous theorizing that sexual harassment perceptions are shaped by victims' deviation from prototypes of women (Goh et al., 2022). When perceivers do not see trans women as women, they may be especially likely to discount the likelihood of trans women's harassment because trans women are seen as even further from the prototype of women and of sexual harassment victims.

Theoretical and Applied Implications

The present research integrates theorizing about victim prototypes with research on perceptions of trans women to better understand the relative invisibility and neglect of trans women who experience sexual harassment. Our findings suggest that trans women are perceived as non-prototypical victims, and thus, people do not realize how likely it is that they experience sexual harassment. In fact, even low-identity-denial participants in Study 6 who perceived sexual coercion as equally likely for trans women and cis women underestimated trans women's relative vulnerability to sexual harassment, because trans women are not *equally* likely as cis women to experience coercion but rather *more* likely to. We also found that trans women's reports of unwanted advances are perceived to be less credible than cis women's, suggesting that discounting credibility could be an important factor in the widespread neglect of trans women who experience harassment, especially in light of the centrality of perceptions of credibility to rights-claiming systems in the United States.

The present work builds on and reflects contemporary sociopolitical attacks on trans women that question the legitimacy of trans women's womanhood, discount their vulnerability to sexual violence, and restrict their rights under the guise of protecting cis women from sexual violence. Such attacks often center and inflate cis women's risk of sexual violence while discounting trans women's risk of sexual violence (Hasenbush et al., 2019; Morgenroth, Axt, & Westgate, 2024; Serano, 2021). Our findings, especially the moderating role of identity denial, suggest that misperceptions of trans women's vulnerability to sexual harassment depend on the extent to which they are viewed as women. Trans-exclusionary rhetoric, legislation, policies, and judicial decisions that explicitly deny that trans women are, in fact, women likely perpetuate the perception that trans women will not experience harassment because of their non-prototypicality as women and as victims.

Denying the womanhood of trans women and positioning the experiences and priorities of trans vs. cis women as competing or conflicting undermines the solidarity that might otherwise emerge among all women in the movement against sexual harassment and other forms of sexism and misogyny.

Indeed, the current work suggests that endorsing the denial of trans women's identities is also associated with overlooking cis women's experiences of harassment. This finding is consistent with the view that the reasoning deployed to deny the womanhood of trans women (and to promote laws and policies targeting trans women) is in part rooted in stereotypical, restrictive, and essentialist beliefs about womanhood that also harm cis women (who these policies and laws purport to protect; e.g., Atwood et al., 2024) and converges with evidence that people may deny the gender identities of both trans and cis individuals (Morgenroth, van der Toom, et al., 2024).

Limitations and Future Directions

We focused on perceptions of unwanted advances and sexual coercion because we expected that they would be especially likely to elicit gender modality prototype biases compared to gender harassment (Goh et al., 2022; Mezzapelle & Reiman, 2022). However, future work should explore perceptions of additional and overlapping forms of sexual harassment targeting trans women, including hostility based on gender, gender modality, and gender expression (e.g., sexism, misgendering, pathologization; assigned predation; invasive questioning), as well how these perceptions are informed by identity denial and other forms of transphobia.

Additional mechanisms beyond narrow victim prototypes may be particularly important to understanding why trans women are neglected when they experience gender harassment, given that gender harassment is less commonly recognized as a form of sexual harassment (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008) and that people may readily imagine trans women as targets of gender harassment (Mezzapelle & Reiman, 2024). For example, transphobia and related prejudices may drive neglect because, though people *recognize* gender harassment and believe it is *likely* to target trans women, they feel less empathy or perceive less injustice compared to when cis women experience gender harassment. Moreover, we focused on identity denial because denying that trans women are women is central to excluding them from the prototype of women (and thus the prototype of sexual harassment victim), but other forms of transphobia, such as hate and disgust, may drive a general dismissal and discounting of the gendered violence experienced by trans women. Identity denial may *specifically* drive the neglect of trans women for types of harassment for which trans women are viewed as less prototypical victims because they are perceived as less prototypical women, whereas hate and disgust may drive neglect more *generally* across different instances of violence because of a generalized hostility toward trans victims.

An important limitation of the current work is the lack of intersectional perspectives, such as an examination of how other identities and characteristics, including sexual orientation, race, age, financial status, or occupation, interact with gender modality to shape perceptions of harassment. For example, though we specified that perpetrators were straight men in all studies, we did not provide specific information about targets' sexual orientation. It is possible that presumed differences in trans and cis women's sexual orientation contributed to participants' judgments, as heterosexual women are more closely associated with prototypical forms of harassment (Mezzapelle & Reiman, 2022), though previous research has shown that straight and lesbian cis women's claims may be viewed similarly (Kulibert et al., 2024). We also did not provide information about the targets' jobs or income, and in the three studies that included pictures of women, two included only White women. While we provided an initial demonstration that the effect of gender modality on the perceived likelihood of experiencing unwanted advances and sexual coercion generalizes to judgments about Black, East Asian, and Latina women (Study 5), we were not well-powered to examine whether target race *interacts* with target gender modality (Blake & Gangestad, 2020).

Using White targets whom participants potentially assumed were financially stable allowed us to test whether gender modality influences perceptions of women who are otherwise most likely to be perceived as prototypical victims in need of attention and care (Crenshaw, 1992; Kaiser et al., 2022). However, the trans women most vulnerable to sexual harassment and neglect are trans women who hold multiply marginalized identities and experiences, such as trans women who are queer, Women of Color, and disabled, work in lower-wage occupations and as sex workers, experience job and housing insecurity, and are in contact with the criminal justice system (Bryant & Leath, 2022; Grant et al., 2011; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019). A particular limitation of our approach is that we were unable to investigate how multiple stigmatized identities compound to magnify neglect, which is needed because intersectional discrimination may reflect not just the additive effects of different forms of marginalization but the multiplicative and unique effects of different intersections of stigmatized identities (Crenshaw, 1992; Hester et al., 2020).

Moreover, a narrow focus on only more privileged women's experiences in research risks not only reflecting but also perpetuating a similarly narrow focus in advocacy, healthcare, policy, and other applied contexts, in addition to excluding from research the experiences of those most impacted by both sexual harassment and the subsequent failure to recognize and address harassment. Future research must therefore examine perceptions of and responses to trans women (as well as trans feminine people, trans masculine people, and trans men) with different intersecting identities to more fully understand the factors that facilitate the neglect of the most vulnerable and marginalized victims of sexual harassment. Such research is urgently needed amid the increasing political attacks on trans women that deny their identities as women and dismiss their vulnerability to sexual violence as part of a larger movement to remove trans people from public life in the United States.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material is available online with this article.

Notes

1. "Gender modality" is a term that, compared to the term "gender identity," more accurately describes how a person's gender identity relates to the gender they were assigned at birth (Ashley et al., 2024). Whereas a trans woman's gender identity is woman, a trans woman's gender modality is trans. The present article examines neglect based on gender modality—being trans versus cis—rather than gender identity (both trans and cis women have the same gender identity—woman).
2. We preregistered that we would test whether identity denial moderates perceived likelihood in Study 6 but failed to explicitly outline the hypothesis that greater identity denial would be associated with perceiving trans women as especially unlikely victims. Accordingly, we label this possibility Research Question 1 rather than a specific hypothesis.

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