Promoting respect as a solution to workplace harassment

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite organizational policies aimed at harassment prevention, harassment based on gender and ethnicity remains pervasive in places of work. Although previous research has identified other antecedents such as harassment climate, the purpose of this paper is to consider whether a climate of respect leads to reductions in identity-based harassment.

Design/methodology/approach – In a military sample of active duty men and women (Study 1) and a sample of working adults (Study 2), the authors use survey methods to test whether a climate of respect predicts the occurrence of two forms of identity-based abuse: sexual harassment (Study 1) and ethnic harassment (Study 2).

Findings – The authors find that a climate of respect uniquely predicts harassment based on sex and ethnicity, above and beyond effects of climate for harassment.

Originality/value – These results suggest that, while traditional harassment prevention efforts remain important for deterring identity-based harassment, promotion of a respectful work environment is also an effective tool.

Keywords Sexual harassment, Climate of respect, Ethnic harassment, Harassment prevention, Tolerance for harassment

Paper type Research paper

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made discrimination based on protected status, such as race and sex illegal. For over 50 years, these laws have shaped court decisions and informed organizational policies, reporting procedures and trainings aimed at prohibiting identity-based harassment. And yet, as exemplified by the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, harassment based on sex and race remains ubiquitous in the contemporary American workplace. According to a nationally representative study, about half of all working women have been sexually harassed on the job (Rospenda *et al.*, 2009). Men too can be sexually harassed; one study found that one-third of working men encountered at least one form of sexual harassment in the prior year (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2012). Though one study reported a decrease in workplace sexual harassment across time (US Merit Systems Protections Board, 2017), it remains unclear whether this decrease is due to a methodological artifact (e.g. a modification in survey methods over time) vs a true decline in incidence rates. Ethnic harassment is also prevalent: the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received over 9,000 charges of ethnic harassment discrimination in the fiscal year 2017, a 55 percent increase since 1997 (EEOC, 2017).

These statistics suggest that the anti-harassment policies and practices that have become common are not achieving their goals. Indeed, scholars in law and the social sciences have criticized these policies and practices for focusing primarily on the most egregious and overt forms of harassment, such as sexual coercion and racially motivated attacks (Hughes, 2002; Leskinen *et al.*, 2011; Schultz, 1998, 2003). Given these criticisms, along with increased national attention to workplace harassment, many organizations are seeking novel solutions. Lim and Cortina (2005) have posited that a "climate of general derision and disrespect" underlies harassing behaviors, with general hostility and mistreatment often preceding

overtly harassing behaviors. The organization's perceived climate for respect may therefore be an important antecedent to identity-based harassment. We put this possibility to an empirical test in the current paper, testing whether a psychological climate of respect relates to lowered harassment based on sex (Study 1) and ethnicity (Study 2).

Definitions of sexual harassment and ethnic harassment

Sexual harassment, referring to "behavior that derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual's sex" (Berdahl, 2007, p. 644), is a multidimensional construct with three interrelated yet distinct factors: sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention and gender harassment (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1988, 1995). Sexual coercion occurs when the perpetrator makes job-related threats or bribes to extort sexual favors (e.g. an employer who pressures a subordinate to engage in a sexual act by threatening termination). Although sexual coercion is the most widely recognized form of sexual harassment, it is the rarest (Langhout *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, it is a demeaning and terrifying experience that has been linked to increased levels of anxiety and symptoms of PSTD among targets (Langhout *et al.*, 2005; Schneider *et al.*, 1997, 2001). Unwanted sexual attention describes unsolicited and repeated acts of sexual pursuit that the recipient finds offensive. Examples include pressuring a fellow employee for dates, despite discouragement or touching someone in a sexual way without their consent. Because unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion both involve behaviors that aim to establish an unwanted sexual relationship, with the latter involving threats or bribes, previous research has combined these two factors under the broader term "sexual advance harassment" (Holland and Cortina, 2013; Leskinen *et al.*, 2011; Lim and Cortina, 2005). We followed that precedent in the current study, combining experiences of unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion into the category of sexual advance harassment.

Whereas sexual advance harassment is a "come-on," gender harassment is a "put-down" (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1988, 1997; Fitzgerald, Drasgow and Magley, 1999; Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow and Waldo, 1999; Stockdale, 2005; Stockdale *et al.*, 1999). Gender harassment refers to insulting, hostile and degrading behaviors and comments that are gendered in nature (Leskinen and Cortina, 2014; Leskinen *et al.*, 2011). These words and deeds can convey sexist hostility (e.g. sexist jokes, misogynistic name-calling and masculinity slurs) or sexual hostility (making sexually offensive gestures and displaying obscene photos). Although gender harassment is the least likely to be perceived as sexually harassing by lay people (Fitzgerald and Ormerod, 1991; Loredo *et al.*, 1995), it is by far the most frequent form of sexual harassment in the lives of working women (Langhout *et al.*, 2005; Leskinen *et al.*, 2011). Likewise, men report more experiences with gender harassment than sexual advance harassment, and they rate gender harassment as more upsetting than unwanted sexual attention (Berdahl *et al.*, 1996; Settles *et al.*, 2014; Waldo *et al.*, 1998). A meta-analysis of 88 studies found that gender harassment negatively influences women's occupational well-being to the same degree as sexual advance harassment (Sojo *et al.*, 2016). To be clear, we in no way mean to suggest that sexual advance harassment is not upsetting; rather, our point is that gender harassment can be just as distressing, despite common assumptions to the contrary. Due to the behavioral differences between gender harassment and sexual advance harassment, previous research has examined them separately (Holland and Cortina, 2013; Leskinen *et al.*, 2011; Nye *et al.*, 2014), a model we follow here.

Ethnic harassment refers to unwanted or unwelcome differential treatment based on race or ethnicity that creates an intimidating, offensive or hostile environment for targets (Bergman *et al.*, 2012; Harrick and Sullivan, 1995). Though people of color experience greater levels of ethnic harassment on average, Whites can also encounter workplace harassment based on their ethnicity (Bergman *et al.*, 2007; McCord *et al.*, 2017; Schneider *et al.*, 2000). Ethnic harassment includes overtly hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, such as

racialized exclusion from work and social activities, racial slurs and ethnic jokes (Schneider *et al.*, 2000). More common, though, are covert displays of disrespect that make no explicit reference to race or ethnicity (e.g. unprofessional terms of address; Cortina *et al.*, 2013). Overt and covert forms of harassment, however, have the same corrosive effects on work and well-being (Jones *et al.*, 2016). This may be because targets of covert discrimination are more likely to make internal attributions for the negative behavior (Crocker *et al.*, 1991; Salvatore and Shelton, 2007; Singletary, 2009).

Recent years have seen subtle forms of ethnic harassment conceptualized as selective incivility (Cortina, 2008; Cortina *et al.*, 2013; Kabat-Farr and Cortina, 2012). This refers to workplace conduct that is rude but subdued, and disproportionately targeted at members of particular identity groups. A veiled expression of prejudice, selective incivility is the "place where sexism, racism, and incivility collide" (Kabat-Farr and Cortina, 2012, p. 109). Other scholars use the term racial microaggressions, defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue *et al.*, 2007, p. 271). In addition to verbal and non-verbal behaviors, microaggressions may also manifest environmentally – for example, via displays of racist media (e.g. blackface caricatures of African Americans). Selective incivilities and microaggressions are variants on the same theme, being discriminatory but subtle in nature and ambiguous in intent. This makes the conduct exceedingly difficult to identify and regulate. Nevertheless, employees (of all ethnicities, including White) experience all of these varieties of ethnic harassment as demeaning and invalidating (Cortina *et al.*, 2013; Schneider *et al.*, 2000; Sue *et al.*, 2007).

Organizational context and climate as antecedents to harassment

Organizational context and climate are the most well-established antecedents to identity-based harassment (Willness *et al.*, 2007). Regarding sexual harassment, the "job–gender context" is salient; this includes the gender ratio of those who work there and the gendered nature of the work tasks (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1997). Sexual harassment rates are higher in contexts where men outnumber women and job duties are traditionally performed by men (e.g. military, police and firefighting; Carter Collins, 2004; Department of Defense Inspector General, 2005; Rosell *et al.*, 1995). Applying a similar model of organizational antecedents to predict racial harassment, Bergman *et al.* (2012) found that imbalances in the racial composition of an organization relate to racial harassment rates, such that the more uncommon racial/ethnic minorities are, the more racial/ethnic harassment occurs. One explanation for these patterns lies in Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism. Kanter (1977) argued that women "tokens" (i.e. those working in mostly male contexts) are more visible than other women, and thus more stereotyped and more mistreated. In line with this logic, researchers have reported that numerical underrepresentation amplifies women's risk for sex-based harassment on the job (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1997; Kabat-Farr and Cortina, 2014). The same may apply to people of color working in predominantly White workplaces, with numerical scarcity raising the risk of ethnic harassment.

Aside from the demographic makeup of the organization, the organization's climate or "tolerance" for harassment also predicts the occurrence of harassing conduct. Tolerance for harassment refers to shared perceptions among organizational members that the organization tolerates (permits) sexual harassment, for example, by failing to impose meaningful penalties against those who harass (Hulin *et al.*, 1996). Note that our operationalization of climate for harassment is most consistent with James and colleagues' definition of psychological climate, because it is measured based on individual-level perceptions (James *et al.*, 2008; James and Jones, 1976). When employees report low organizational tolerance for sexual harassment, they perceive their organization to take a

strong stance against sexual harassment: taking preventive measures, penalizing harassers, protecting complainants, etc. In contrast, in contexts seen to have high tolerance for harassment, employees perceive their organization to turn a blind eye to the problem (e.g. failing to sanction harassers or make it safe to report harassment). In line with previous research we hypothesize the following:

> *H1.* The psychological climate for sexual harassment will be negatively associated with sexual harassment frequency (*H1a*), and the psychological climate for ethnic harassment will be negatively related to ethnic harassment frequency (*H1b*), such that employees will report less harassment when they perceive the climate to be intolerant of harassment.

Beyond conventional policies and procedures

The policies, reporting procedures, penalties and trainings that makeup many organizational anti-harassment programs are necessary. At the same time, they are insufficient to address all forms of harassment, from the everyday to the extreme. Regarding sexual harassment, many company policies and trainings rely heavily on the US EEOC's (1980) definition, developed four decades ago. The definition reads:

> Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. (p. 74677)

The EEOC's (1980) definition is inadequate, because sexual harassment is not always "sexual" in its motivation (Berdahl, 2007) or manifestation (Langhout *et al.*, 2005; Leskinen *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, incivility (a non-gendered form of mistreatment that is low in intensity and ambiguous in nature; Andersson and Pearson, 1999) co-occurs with sexual harassment (Cortina, Fitzgerald and Drasgow, 2002; Cortina, Lonsway, Magley, Freeman, Collinsworth, Hunter and Fitzgerald, 2002; Lim and Cortina, 2005). For instance, Lim and Cortina (2005) found that working women experience sexual harassment and incivility together much more frequently than experiencing either one alone. In addition, it was more common for women who had been targets of sexual harassment to also experience incivility than vice versa. One possibility is that uncivil behaviors create a climate of general derision and disrespect, which sets the stage for more explicitly identity-based abuses.

Regarding ethnic harassment, organizational policies and practices tend to address only the most overtly racist forms of behavior. However, modern manifestations of prejudice are becoming less overt and increasingly subtle due to shifting societal norms (Cortina, 2008). Seemingly identity-neutral forms of mistreatment that do not overtly reference ethnicity or gender can nevertheless be discriminatory. For example, research has found that women and people of color (and in particular: women of color) encounter more "general" incivility than White people and men (Cortina *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, there is a moderate to high correlation between general bullying (behavior akin to incivility) and racial harassment among employees of color (Fox and Stallworth, 2005).

Taken together, the findings from the sexual harassment, ethnic harassment and incivility literatures demonstrate that there is a strong relationship between "generalized" disrespectful behavior and overtly identity-based harassment. Thus, organizational policies that continue to tackle harassment from a legalistic framework may be failing to target the underlying issue: a climate of disrespect. Instead of only focusing on sexually lewd and overtly racist behavior, anti-harassment efforts that take a more holistic approach by addressing broader dynamics of (dis)respect may be more efficacious.

The role of psychological climate for respect in workplace harassment prevention

Employees consistently rank respect as one of the most important, valuable and desirable work values (Van Quaquebeke *et al.*, 2009), because it fulfills our basic human needs for belonging and positive valuation of the self (De Cremer and Mulder, 2007). Respect can be generalized or particularized (Rogers and Ashforth, 2017). Based on Immanuel Kant's (2011) philosophical argument for respect as a moral and ethical imperative, generalized respect is rooted in the notion that respectful treatment ought to be a fundamental human right. Organizational scholars have defined it as the "perceived worth accorded to one person by one or more others which is owed to everyone simply as a function of their being persons" (Rogers and Ashforth, 2017, p. 158). Thus, in the context of work, generalized respect translates to a norm of respectful treatment by and toward all employees; no single employee is more or less deserving of respect (Grover, 2014). On the other hand, particularized respect describes respectful treatment that is conditional upon the target's status, individual characteristics and/or achievements (Rogers and Ashforth, 2017). Employees who work in an organization where particularized respect is the norm may view those with less social status (e.g. women and people of color) as deserving of less respect than those in the majority (e.g. men and White people). In the current study, our focus is generalized respect, calling for the equitable treatment of all employees.

Though respect can be thought of as a dyadic process involving a sender and receiver, several studies assert that employees also develop an overall sense of the extent to which people in the organization are treated respectfully (Ramarajan *et al.*, 2008; Tenbrunsel *et al.*, 2003). In other words, there exists a psychological climate for respect (James *et al.*, 2008; James and Jones, 1976). In our study, a psychological climate of respect refers to "individual perceptions regarding the extent to which employees in the organization, including but not limited to the self, are treated with dignity and care for their positive self-regard through approval and positive valuation" (Ramarajan *et al.*, 2008, p. 5). These perceptions are informed by meanings attached to the policies, practices and procedures related to respect and observations of the kinds of behaviors that are rewarded and punished (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978).

While the construct of respect has roots in ethical and moral philosophy (Kant, 2011), it differs from an ethical climate. Ethical climate is a much broader construct than respect climate, expanding beyond interpersonal treatment to also include organizational norms about how the company should conduct business. Climate for respect also differs from a climate intolerant of harassment, in that the latter addresses a narrower domain. The primary focus of this sort of intolerant climate is the prohibition of bad behavior via enforcement of policies and procedures. In a context with a strong climate of intolerance for harassment, employees typically receive messages about how they should not treat one another and what behavior constitutes inappropriate, impermissible misconduct. However, they often receive little if any information about how they should treat one another and what behavior constitutes appropriately respectful treatment.

Whereas a harassment climate can reduce the chance that harassment occurs, it does not necessarily ensure respectful conduct toward all employees. This is an important distinction because the absence of harassment is not the same thing as the presence of respect. Respect requires active behaviors that convey the target's positive social value and worth (Ramarajan *et al.*, 2008). To illustrate, in an organization where there is a high climate for harassment (harassment is not tolerated) but a low climate for respect, co-workers may not harass others, but they may merely tolerate women and other members of marginalized groups and engage in subtle exclusionary behaviors that do not rise to the level of harassment. Thus, a climate for respect differs from a climate for harassment, in that it focuses on promotion of positive interpersonal behaviors and norms of respectful treatment for all employees.

We argue that norms of respectful treatment for all employees may be important for preventing identity-based harassment, because previous research has shown that when employees work in a positive, just or civil climate they are less likely to mistreat others and more likely to behave with civility, a behavioral manifestation of respect (Hertzog *et al.*, 2008; Rubino *et al.*, 2018; Timmerman and Bajema, 2000). This is especially critical to members of stigmatized groups, such as women and people of color, who are sensitive to respectful treatment because of historical legacies of exclusion and discrimination in the workplace (Henry, 2011). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H2. The psychological climate for respect will be negatively related to identity-based harassment frequency, such that individuals working in high respect climates will report less sexual harassment (*H2a*) and less ethnic harassment (*H2b*) targeted at themselves personally.

The current studies

We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. In the first study, we used a military sample to examine whether respect climate and sexual harassment climate each uniquely predicted the occurrence of gender harassment and sexual advance harassment. In the second study, we investigated whether the model generalized to ethnicity, testing in a working-adult sample whether respect climate and ethnic harassment climate each uniquely predicted the occurrence of ethnic harassment. Both studies also took into account other known predictors of identity-based harassment, namely, target identity (gender, race and rank), demographic composition of the unit, and diversity-related training in the unit.

Study 1 method

Participants and procedures

We conducted a secondary analysis of the Department of Defense's (DoD)'s 2010 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members. For this survey, the DoD sampled even numbers of individuals across gender, service branch, paygrade and race. This sampling procedure resulted in a greater proportion of women in the sample than is represented in the military. For an in-depth review of sampling and survey procedures, see Defense Manpower Data Center (2010).

Researchers administered the survey online and on paper to 90,391 active duty service members; 26,505 successfully completed the survey. The final sample consisted of 10,646 (40.2 percent) women and 15,859 (59.8 percent) men. The sample was racially diverse; among those in the Army, Navy, Marines or Air Force[1], 14 percent were Hispanic, 16 percent were Non-Hispanic Black, and 9 percent identified with another non-White racial group. Regarding rank, 8,351 (31.5 percent) of the sample were junior enlisted personnel (E1-E4), 8,937 (33.7 percent) were senior enlisted personnel (E5-E9), 1,895 (7.1 percent) were warrant officers, 3,981 (15 percent) were junior commissioned officers (O1-O3) and 3,341 (12.6 percent) were senior commissioned officers (O4-O6). This included 6,963 (26.2 percent) members of the Air Force, 6,703 (25.3 percent) soldiers in the Army, 5,330 (20.1 percent) members of the Navy, 5,033 (18.9 percent) members of the Marine Corps and 2,476 (0.09 percent) members of the Coast Guard.

Measures

Among other measures, the survey assessed demographic characteristics of the participants, experiences of mistreatment (e.g. sexual harassment), perceived climate for sexual harassment, and participation in sexual harassment training. All scales were scored such that higher values represent higher levels of the underlying construct. For the climate

measures, higher values indicate a more positive climate. Scale means, reliabilities and correlations appear in Table I.

Controls. Based on previous research about the contextual antecedents of sexual harassment, we controlled for gender, job–gender context, sexual harassment training and rank in all analyses. Fitzgerald *et al.*'s (1997) model of organizational antecedents of sexual harassment has shown that sexual harassment is more prevalent in organizations where men outnumber women. Some studies have found that anti-harassment training can have significant effects, such as improved ability to identify instances of sexual harassment (Antecol and Cobb-Clark, 2003). At last, because sexual harassment is an enactment of power, individuals who hold more organizational power are less likely to be sexually harassed (Buchanan *et al.*, 2008; Settles *et al.*, 2012).

Job–gender context was assessed with a one-item measure that asked, "Are you currently in a work environment where members of your gender are uncommon?" In response, participants could indicate yes or no.

Sexual harassment training was measured with seven items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants indicated their agreement with statements regarding the content of sexual harassment training they received, such as "provides a good understanding of what words and actions are considered sexual harassment," "gives useful tools for dealing with sexual harassment" and "provides information about policies, procedures, and consequences of sexual harassment." Participants who indicated that they did not receive any sexual harassment training from the military in the past year were coded as 0 on the sexual harassment training scale.

Survey administrators used military records to determine participants' rank (i.e. paygrade), which ranged from junior enlisted officers to senior commissioned officers.

Sexual harassment climate. As a measure of perceived climate for sexual harassment, we relied on items created by the military to assess perceptions of leadership efforts to combat sexual harassment. Participants were asked to evaluate separately whether their immediate supervisor, senior leadership of their installation/ship and senior leadership of their service "made honest and reasonable efforts to stop sexual harassment." To each of the three items, they could answer no=0, do not know=1 or yes=2 in response.

Respect climate. To assess perceived climate for respect, we created a composite based on two items. Participants used a five-point (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) scale to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following statements about their leaders:

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	0.39	0.49	–							
2. Job–gender context	0.17	0.37	0.37**	–						
3. Rank	2.46	1.40	−0.13**	−0.07**	–					
4. Sexual harassment training	4.21	1.23	−0.05**	−0.06**	−0.01	0.97				
5. Climate for sexual harassment	1.71	0.52	−0.15**	−0.10**	0.16**	0.26**	0.90			
6. Climate for respect	3.89	0.90	−0.13**	−0.09**	0.21**	0.20**	0.38**	0.52		
7. Gender harassment	1.24	0.54	0.30**	0.26**	−0.11**	−0.19**	−0.37**	−0.31**	0.93	
8. Sexual advance harassment	1.06	0.28	0.17**	0.14**	−0.12**	−0.17**	−0.26**	−0.18**	0.64**	0.92

Notes: n=23,241. Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's α) are shown in italic along the diagonal. Gender is dummy coded such that 0=men and 1=women. Job–gender context is dummy coded such that 0=members of your gender are common; 1=members of your gender are uncommon. **p<0.01

Table I.
Descriptive statistics of Study 1 variables

"Your supervisor ensures that all assigned personnel are treated fairly"; "The leaders in your work group are not concerned with the way that service members treat each other as long the job gets done." The second item was reverse-coded, so that higher numbers would indicate a greater perception that leaders promote respect.

Gender harassment. Experiences of gender harassment were measured with eight items from the gender harassment subscale of the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire DoD (SEQ-DoD; Fitzgerald, Drasgow and Magley, 1999; Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow and Waldo, 1999; Stark *et al.*, 2002), which has been proven to be a reliable and valid measure of sexual harassment across many studies. Service members were asked to indicate – on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) – how often in the past year their co-workers or supervisors engaged in harassing behaviors such as "Referred to you or people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms," "Treated you differently because of your gender (e.g. mistreated, slighted or ignored you)" and "Put you down or was condescending to you because of your gender." See Table II for a breakdown of gender harassment incidence rates by gender and race of the target (to calculate incidence rates, we computed the percent of each group that encountered one or more harassing behaviors during the past year).

Sexual advance harassment. Sexual advance harassment was measured by combining the unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion subscales of the SEQ. Participants responded to eight items that assessed how frequently their co-workers and supervisors engaged in behaviors such as "made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it" (an example of unwanted sexual attention) "made you feel like you were being bribed with some sort of reward or special treatment to engage in sexual behavior" (sexual coercion). Table II displays the gender-by-race breakdown of sexual advance harassment incidence rates.

Results

Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analyses to verify that climate for sexual harassment, climate for respect, gender harassment and sexual advance harassment were all distinct constructs. A good-fitting model is one in which is the RMSEA is less than 0.05, and CFI and TLI are 0.95 or greater (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015). Due to the categorical nature of the data, we used the weighted least squares mean-and-variance adjusted estimator in Mplus version 8.1. Results indicated that the four-factor model fit the data well (RMSEA=0.04, CFI=0.99, TLI=0.99), indicating that participants were able to differentiate among our four primary constructs of interest.

We used SPSS version 25 to test hypotheses. We tested two multiple regression models, one predicting gender harassment and the other predicting sexual advance harassment, while controlling for target gender, target rank, job–gender context and sexual harassment

| | Gender harassment | | | Sexual advance harassment | | |
| | Race | | | Race | | |
Gender	White (%)	People of color (%)	Total harassed (%)	White (%)	People of color (%)	Total harassed (%)
Men	20.1	23.0	21.0	3.3	5.0	3.8
Women	53.3	47.7	50.6	22.6	22.3	22.5
Total harassed	31.3	35.5	32.9	9.8	13.7	11.3

Notes: Gender harassment $n=25{,}627$, sexual advance harassment $n=25{,}397$. Percent values reflect the number of members harassed within a specified group. For example, 20.1 percent of White men experienced one or more instances of gender harassment within the past year

Table II.
Study 1 descriptive statistics of incidence rates for the past 12 months by gender and race of target

training. In both models, after entering the control variables, we tested the effects of sexual harassment climate and respect climate on harassment scale scores. Regression results appear in Table III.

Gender harassment

In the first model, we regressed the control and climate variables onto gender harassment. In support of *H1a* and *H2a*, results indicated that above and beyond the effect of the controls, both sexual harassment climate and respect climate were significant predictors. Greater perceptions that the organization was intolerant of sexual harassment ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$) and promoted respect ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$) were both independently associated with lower rates of gender harassment. Given the controls, these effects cannot be attributed to the gender of the target, rank of the target, gender composition of the context or the target's participation in sexual harassment training.

Sexual advance harassment

The same control and climate variables were entered into the regression model predicting sexual advance harassment. Consistent with *H1a* and *H2a*, both sexual harassment climate and respect climate were significant predictors. The more employees perceived the organization to be intolerant of sexual harassment, the less sexual advance harassment occurred ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.01$). Above and beyond the effect of sexual harassment climate, the more employees perceived that respectful treatment was the norm, the less people reported being a target of sexual advance harassment ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.01$). Once again, these results emerged after partialling out variance attributable to target gender, target rank, context gender and sexual harassment training.

Study 2 method

Participants and procedures

A diverse sample of participants was recruited from Prolific, an online survey platform created by academics in the UK for the sole purpose of conducting academic research (Peer *et al.*, 2017). Prolific is very similar to Amazon's MTurk in that researchers post studies that participants take in exchange for payment. However, the two online platforms differ in that Prolific requires that researchers pay participants ethically ($7.50/hour), while there is no such requirement on MTurk (Pittman and Sheehan, 2016). Moreover, researchers have described Prolific

Variable	Gender harassment				Sexual advance harassment			
	β	B (SE)	LLCI	ULCI	β	B (SE)	LLCI	ULCI
Intercept	–	2.07 (0.02)	2.03	2.10	–	1.39 (0.01)	1.37	1.41
Gender	0.18**	0.20 (0.01)	0.19	0.22	0.09**	0.05 (0.00)	0.04	0.06
Rank	−0.01	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.01	0.00	−0.06**	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.01	−0.01
Job–gender context	0.15**	0.23 (0.01)	0.21	0.24	0.08**	0.06 (0.00)	0.05	0.07
Sexual harassment training	−0.08**	−0.03 (0.00)	−0.04	−0.03	−0.10**	−0.02 (0.00)	−0.03	−0.02
Climate for sexual harassment	−0.23**	−0.24 (0.01)	−0.26	−0.23	−0.18**	−0.09 (0.00)	−0.10	−0.09
Climate for respect	−0.16**	−0.10 (0.00)	−0.11	−0.09	−0.06**	−0.02 (0.00)	−0.02	−0.01
R^2		0.24**				0.11**		

Notes: *n* ranged from 23,795 to 23,991. LLCI and ULCI refer to the lower level 95% confidence interval and upper level 95% confidence interval. **$p < 0.01$

Table III.
Summary of regression results predicting gender harassment and sexual advance harassment

participants as less familiar with research tasks and more honest than MTurk samples, while providing quality data (Peer *et al.*, 2017). To be eligible to complete the survey, participants had to be 18 years old or older, currently reside in the USA, speak English and regularly interact with other people at work (i.e. they could not work alone from home). Once they qualified for the survey, participants filled out demographic information and survey items about their workplace climate and individual experiences of mistreatment. At the end of the survey, participants were thanked and compensated for their time ($1.63). Of the 580 participants who completed the survey, 2.4 percent of participants were excluded for failing attention check items, leaving a final sample of 566 participants. Of those participants, 46.8 percent were women and 53.2 percent were men. Although participants were given the option to identify as non-binary/genderqueer or write in a gender identity, no participants identified themselves as such. The sample was racially diverse; 11.3 percent identified as Latinx, 11.3 percent identified as Asian-American, 9.7 percent identified as Black, 2.3 percent identified as Bi-racial, 1.1 percent identified as Middle Eastern, 0.5 percent identified as Native American, 0.4 percent identified as Native Hawaiian; the remaining 63.4 percent of the sample identifying as White. The mean age of the sample was 34.14 with a standard deviation of 10.25.

Measures

Controls. The controls variables were job–race context, rank and diversity training.

Job–race context was assessed with one-item asking participants to indicate the racial makeup of the people that they worked with during a normal workday, on a scale from 1 (all or mostly people of color) to 5 (all or mostly White people).

We assessed rank by asking participants to select the category that best described their job position on a scale from 1 (entry-level individual contributor) to 6 (CEO/Owner).

Diversity training was measured with three items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Participants indicated their agreement with statements regarding the content and quality of diversity training they received such as "provides a good understanding of what words and actions are considered bias." Participants who indicated that they did not receive any diversity training in the past year were coded as 0.

Climate for ethnic harassment. Climate for ethnic harassment was assessed using items from Ormerod *et al.*'s (1998) organizational tolerance for racial harassment inventory. The organizational tolerance for racial harassment inventory includes three short vignettes that each of which describes an incident of ethnic harassment[2]. After reading each vignette, participants responded to three items indicating how their organization would respond if the incident had occurred in their workplace. The three items asked about the riskiness of complaining about the conduct portrayed in the vignette, the likelihood that complaints such as this would be taken seriously and the chances that the harasser would be punished; each of these three items had a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Climate for respect. We measured perceived climate for respect using an adapted version of Walsh *et al.*'s (2012) four-item Civility Norms Questionnaire Brief. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements about norms regarding interpersonal treatment among their co-workers. A sample item is "Your coworkers make sure everyone is treated with respect."

Ethnic harassment. Ethnic harassment was assessed using Schneider *et al.*'s (2000) seven-item Ethnic Harassment Experiences Scale, a measure found to work well with different racial and ethnic groups (including Whites). Participants indicated how often within the past year they had experienced harassing behaviors from their co-workers or supervisors on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). A sample item is "Made derogatory comments about your ethnicity." See Table IV for a breakdown of ethnic harassment incidence rates by gender and race of the target.

Item responses were averaged to create their respective scales. Scale means, reliabilities and correlations appear in Table V. All scales were scored such that higher values represent higher levels of the underlying construct. For the climate measures, higher values indicate a more positive climate.

Results

Using SPSS version 25, we tested a multiple regression model predicting ethnic harassment to test our hypotheses. We controlled for race (dummy coded: 0=White; 1=people of color), rank, job–race context and diversity training, as previous research has found that they are related to ethnic harassment (Bergman *et al.*, 2012). Regression results appear in Table VI.

		Ethnic harassment	
		Gender	
Race	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total harassed (%)
White	24.9	13.2	19.2
People of color	50.0	40.7	45.9
Total harassed	34.6	22.6	29

Notes: $n=566$. Percent values reflect the number of members harassed within a specified group. For example, 24.9 percent of White men experienced one or more instances of ethnic harassment within the past year

Table IV.
Study 2 descriptive statistics of incidence rates for the past 12 months by race and gender of target

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Race	0.37	0.48	–						
2. Job–race context	3.80	1.19	−0.29**	–					
3. Rank	2.46	1.15	−0.14**	−0.03	–				
4. Diversity training	1.14	2.07	0.15**	−0.08*	0.00	*0.86*			
5. Climate for ethnic harassment	4.16	0.81	−0.08	−0.09*	0.06	0.08	*0.93*		
6. Climate for respect	5.79	1.09	0.02	−0.05	0.05	0.08	0.40**	*0.89*	
7. Ethnic harassment	1.15	0.37	0.23**	−0.04	−0.01	0.08	−0.28**	−0.29**	*0.87*

Notes: $n=549$. Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's α) are shown in italic along the diagonal. Race is dummy coded such that 0=White and 1=people of color. *$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$

Table V.
Descriptive statistics of Study 2 variables

		Ethnic harassment		
Variable	β	B (SE)	LLCI	ULCI
Intercept	–	1.82 (0.11)	1.60	2.05
Race	0.21**	0.16 (0.03)	0.10	0.23
Rank	0.04	0.01 (0.01)	−0.01	0.04
Job–race context	0.00	0.00 (0.01)	−0.02	0.03
Diversity training	0.08	0.01 (0.01)	0.00	0.03
Climate for ethnic harassment	−0.17**	−0.08 (0.02)	−0.12	−0.04
Climate for respect	−0.24**	−0.08 (0.01)	−0.11	−0.05
R^2		0.17**		

Notes: $n=549$. **$p<0.01$

Table VI.
Summary of regression results predicting ethnic harassment

Ethnic harassment
H1b, which predicted that ethnic harassment climate would be negatively related to ethnic harassment frequency, was supported: greater perception that the organization was intolerant of ethnic harassment was associated with lower ethnic harassment ($\beta = -0.17$, $p<0.01$). *H2b* proposed that respect climate would also be negatively associated with ethnic harassment frequency. In support of this hypothesis, the more individuals thought respectful treatment was the norm among their co-workers, the less ethnic harassment occurred ($\beta = -0.24$, $p<0.01$); this effect, moreover, was significant over and above the effects of ethnic harassment climate, target race and rank, racial diversity of the context and participation in diversity training.

Discussion
The ubiquity of workplace harassment, even in organizations with robust anti-harassment programs, suggests that current policy and prevention efforts have come up short. Scholars and practitioners have recommended that organizations to take a more holistic view of prevention by not only prohibiting harassment but also promoting respect (Cortina, 2008; Cortina, Fitzgerald and Drasgow, 2002; Cortina, Lonsway, Magley, Freeman, Collinsworth, Hunter and Fitzgerald, 2002; Feldblum and Lipnic, 2016; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). The current study is among the first to put this recommendation to an empirical test.

We replicated previous research (e.g. Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1997) showing that a climate perceived as intolerant of harassment is negatively associated with sexual harassment experiences, and we extended the evidence to ethnic harassment experiences. We further found that respect climate negatively predicts identity-based harassment, above the influence of harassment climate. The demographics of the target (gender, race and rank), the demographic composition of the setting, and diversity-related training exposure do not explain these results. Promotion of generalized respect, not tied to any facet of identity or form of discrimination, is not central to the typical anti-harassment program. And yet we found this somewhat unconventional solution to show great promise. Our results have several theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical and practical implications
We contribute to research and theory on harassment prevention by bridging the literatures on sexual harassment, racial/ethnic harassment and workplace incivility, which have all progressed separately from one another. By integrating findings from these streams of research, we extend Fitzgerald *et al.*'s (1997) model of organizational antecedents of sexual harassment to include the climate for respect; we also demonstrate generalization of this expanded model to ethnic harassment. Our results support the possibility that an organizational climate promoting respect – in concert with one prohibiting harassment – may help reduce mistreatment of all kinds. Future research should consider other climate factors, such as the climate for trust or dignity, to examine whether and how they influence the prevalence of identity-based harassment (Rogers and Ashforth, 2017).

This study has several implications for the prevention of workplace harassment. Our results support Cortina and colleagues' (Cortina, 2008; Cortina, Fitzgerald and Drasgow, 2002; Cortina, Lonsway, Magley, Freeman, Collinsworth, Hunter and Fitzgerald, 2002) recommendation that organizations couple traditional anti-harassment programs (e.g. anti-harassment policies and reporting procedures) with broader efforts to cultivate a climate of respect. This also follows the recommendations of the EEOC Task Force on sexual harassment (Feldblum and Lipnic, 2016) and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2018). These reports suggest that fostering respectful working norms may reduce harassment by ensuring that organizations go beyond addressing illegal

discriminatory activity, which privileges the most egregious and rare behaviors, to combatting mistreatment more generally – whether it be gender based, race based or ambiguous with respect to identity. As Cortina (2008, p. 71) notes:

> This sort of combined strategy would provide a more efficient and effective means of combating antisocial work behavior, which has many behavioral faces (general, gendered, raced, etc.). Related training programs might then attract broader audiences, being relevant to all employees (regardless of gender or ethnicity) and avoiding resistance met by interventions that exclusively target gender discrimination, racial discrimination, and so forth [. . .].

This holistic approach may also benefit organizations by discouraging subtler forms of mistreatment before they evolve into overtly unlawful behavior, as well as encouraging acts of respect and kindness that may boost employee well-being and performance (Kabat-Farr and Cortina, 2017; Laschinger *et al.*, 2012; Leiter *et al.*, 2011; Osatuke *et al.*, 2009).

Organizations can create a respectful climate through training. One such training that attempts to reengineer workplace culture and group norms is the Civility, Respect and Engagement at Work (CREW) program (Osatuke *et al.*, 2009). CREW trainings start with a collective brainstorming session about what counts as respectful and disrespectful behavior. From there, the work group identifies areas of strength and weakness and participates in exercises to practice respectful behavior. At last, the group generates and implements a plan of action to foster respect, and this plan is continually evaluated and modified (Laschinger *et al.*, 2012; Leiter *et al.*, 2011; Osatuke *et al.*, 2009). CREW has been effective at reducing disrespectful behavior and increasing respectful interactions between employees. Although CREW has yet to be evaluated with regards to identity-based harassment, our study provides initial support for the idea that respect promotion could advance harassment prevention goals.

While we have demonstrated the potential for a respect climate to help create harassment-resistant organizations, some scholars have noted that calls for civility and respect sometimes have a dark side that upholds the racist and sexist status quo. With its focus on a norm of respectful treatment by and toward all employees, a climate for respect may be mistakenly interpreted as a colorblind diversity philosophy. Colorblind philosophy posits that the best way to end discrimination and promote racial harmony is to overlook someone's gender or race and just treat everyone equally; this ideology can be best demonstrated by phrases such as "I don't see color, I just see people" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Although a colorblind ideology may have the intention of eradicating discrimination, it allows the powerful to turn a blind eye to racial oppression and racial privilege (Neville *et al.*, 2000) and can actually amplify racial bias (Richeson and Nussbaum, 2004). Moreover, a colorblind philosophy squashes conversation about discrimination, inequity and unfairness. Due to unequal power distributions in organizations, those at the top can define civility to their benefit and use it as a tactic to silence and "tone-police" the marginalized who report mistreatment and demand fair treatment (Calabrese, 2015). Using "calls for civility to evade calls for change" can lead to organizations perpetuating unequal and hostile work environments where harassment thrives (Nyong'o and Wazana Tompkins, 2018). These critiques are important, but the civility appeals they reference differ in important ways from what we are advocating here.

Many scholars of workplace civility and respect think carefully about issues of power, privilege, social identity and social change (e.g. Cortina, 2008; Lim and Cortina, 2005; Walsh *et al.*, 2012). Their work does not posit that one must ignore another employee's social characteristics in order to treat them respectfully; quite the contrary, they explicitly acknowledge that incivility can be an "an instrument of oppression, used to ostracize women, people of color, and other undervalued minorities from organizational life" (Cortina *et al.*, 2017, p. 308). Promotion of a respect climate can work actively against those hidden forms of bias. In addition, we emphasize that responsibility for climate rests with all employees, and

efforts to promote respect need not solely originate from the top of the organization. Consistent with Cortina *et al.* (2017), we call for a climate in which respect is co-created by employees at all levels of the organization, ensuring that all are treated with a sense of dignity and worth, especially those who are most marginalized.

In addition to creating a respectful climate, organizations should also seek to cultivate a climate that does not tolerate any form of identity-based abuse. Organizations traditionally aim for this by developing a comprehensive anti-harassment policy, training employees on that policy, implementing a reporting procedure for harassment and taking complaints of harassment seriously (Cortina and Berdahl, 2008). Behavioral norms and policies discussed in anti-harassment training should be modeled and enforced by organizational leaders, as research has shown that leader implementation is one of the most important organizational practices in harassment prevention (Williams *et al.*, 1999). Moreover, assessment should play a major role in any harassment prevention effort, determining whether policies, practices or trainings are having their intended effects (or, conversely, unintended negative consequences; e.g. Bingham and Scherer, 2001).

Limitations and future directions
Although this study provides organizations with a novel approach to preventing sex- and race-based harassment, like any research it has limitations. Given that our data were cross-sectional, we can only speak definitively to associations among variables rather than causal relationships. Future research should utilize experimental or longitudinal methods to bolster claims of causality. For example, researchers could randomly assign participants to participate in training that centers around either respect promotion or harassment prevention, and then give them the opportunity to send a sexist (or racist) joke using Siebler *et al.*'s (2008) computer harassment paradigm. This design could also answer important questions about perpetrators such as who is harassing whom, and for whom is this intervention most effective? Because we were unable to provide information about the identity of perpetrators in our studies, research that attends to questions such as these would be an important addition to this line of work.

In addition, because Study 1 was based on secondary data analysis, the measurement of some constructs was less than optimal. Assessing climate for respect with a composite of only two items, focusing on perceptions of leaders, we may have missed important facets of the construct. We improved upon this measurement limitation in the second study by using a validated measure of climate for respect, assessing perceptions of employee behavioral norms, and found the same pattern of results. A second limitation was that we were not able to conduct multi-level analyses to account for within-unit variance, not having access to group- or unit-level data. Future studies should attempt to replicate our findings using data nested within workgroups, teams or units allowing for operationalization of climate at a collective level.

Finally, we examined sex-based harassment and race-based harassment separately. Women and men of color, however, often experience these abuses simultaneously as racialized sexual harassment, a form of sexualized mistreatment that invokes racial stereotypes (Buchanan and Ormerod, 2002; Cortina *et al.*, 2002). More research is needed to examine whether anti-harassment and pro-respect interventions reduce these intersectional forms of workplace mistreatment. The mistreatment of women of color and other non-prototypical group members has a history of being trivialized (Shelton and Chavous, 1999; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008), making this work all the more critical.

In closing, the current study advances knowledge about factors that prevent harassment based on sex and race. In addition to harassment climate, we found that norms for respectful interaction may be an effective tool to deter identity-based harassment. Based on this initial evidence, we encourage organizations interested in harassment prevention to cultivate a

climate of respect. That is, they should strive to promote dignified conditions of work, for all employees at all levels of the organization.

Notes

1. The DMDC did not release any racial breakdown for Coast Guard respondents.

2. Due to a clerical error, participants saw two racially harassing vignettes instead of three.

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