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Am I Next? Men and Women's Divergent Justice Perceptions Following Vicarious Mistreatment

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Though we would like to believe that people universally consider workplace mistreatment to be an indicator of injustice, we describe why bystanders can react to justice events (in this study, vicariously observing or becoming aware of others being mistreated) with diverging perceptions of organizational injustice. We show that a bystander's gender and their gender similarity to the target of mistreatment can produce identity threat, which affects whether bystanders perceive the overall organization to be rife with gendered mistreatment and unfairness. Identity threat develops via two pathways—an emotion-focused reaction and a cognitive-focused processing of the event—and each pathway distally relates to different levels of bystanders' justice perceptions. We test these notions in three complementary studies: two laboratory experiments ($N = 563$; $N = 920$) and a large field study ($N = 8,196$ employees in 546 work units). Results generally show that bystanders who are women or similar in gender to the target of mistreatment reported different levels of emotional and cognitive identity threat that related to psychological gender mistreatment climate and workplace injustice following the incident as compared to men and those not similar in gender to the target. Overall, by integrating and extending bystander theory and dual-process models of injustice perceptions, through this work, we provide a potentially overlooked reason why negative behaviors like incivility, ostracism, and discrimination continue to occur in organizations.

Keywords: vicarious gender mistreatment, bystanders, identity threat, psychological gender mistreatment climate, organizational justice

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Workplace mistreatment is defined as a “specific, antisocial variety of organizational deviance, involving a situation wherein at least one [individual] takes counternormative negative actions, or terminates normative positive actions, against another member” (Cortina & Magley, 2003, p. 247). This category of behavior reflects a latent construct that is indicated by a number of more specific facets including gender discrimination (treating someone unfavorably because of their gender), incivility (interrupting a person or treating them rudely), ostracism (ignoring someone or attributing their ideas to others), and harassment (creating a hostile or intimidating work environment), among others (Cortina, 2008; McCord et al., 2018). Despite legislation in many countries aimed at reducing

workplace mistreatment, all forms of these behaviors continue to be startlingly prevalent in today's workplaces.

Recently, scholars have documented that it is not only the targets of mistreatment that suffer, but that bystanders who observe or hear about the mistreatment of others (labeled *vicarious mistreatment* by Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019) may also sustain ill effects. To date, scholarly work on vicarious mistreatment (also referred to as ambient, bystander, or observed mistreatment/incivility, Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013; Dhanani et al., 2018) has proven to be an informative addition to the mistreatment literature. Specifically, research on this topic shows that experiencing other-targeted mistreatment is related to higher burnout (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007) and turnover

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The sampling plan, data exclusions, manipulations, measures, and statistical software packages used to analyze the data are detailed in each study's respective sections. The authors adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology's* methodological checklist. Data, analysis code, and research materials are available from the authors upon request. Studies 1 and 2 were not preregistered. Study 3's preregistration link can be found here at https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=PQG_L6B.

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intentions (Houshmand et al., 2012) as well as lower perceived organizational support (Harris et al., 2013). Moreover, recent meta-analytic evidence suggests that the negative effects can be just as strong—or even stronger—when employees experience vicarious, as compared to personally experienced, wrongdoing (Dhanani et al., 2018).

We posit that one of the major barriers to eliminating interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace is that some forms of workplace mistreatment are inherently subjective and ambiguous (Cortina, 2008). This may lead bystanders of these events to come to different conclusions about how the subjective event relates to them and their workplace. These divergent perceptions are important to consider, as they could inadvertently perpetuate workplace mistreatment if the witnessed actions are not seen as personally relevant, perhaps influencing bystanders to label the action and broader environment as harmless or even fair. Although we would like to believe that people universally perceive injustice when observing or learning about the mistreatment of others, we argue that feeling personally threatened may serve as one reason why people draw negative conclusions about the organizational environment writ large when witnessing such actions.

The idea that some employees who witness negative behaviors enacted against other people (i.e., vicarious mistreatment) may not register injustice is supported with decades of research stating that employee perceptions can be idiosyncratic even when exposed to the same stimuli (e.g., James & Tetrick, 1986) and that these perceptual differences can be attributed to belonging to different social identity groups (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). By expanding theory to explain *who* may be most likely to experience identity threat following vicarious mistreatment, we suggest that a potential reason that negative behaviors (e.g., discrimination, incivility, ostracism) continue in organizations is that they are not perceived as unfair by some bystanders (Rowe, 2018). That is, we construe vicarious mistreatment in the same vein as organizational occurrences like layoffs, pay cuts, and unfair promotion decisions as a type of justice event, which is defined by Jones and Skarlicki (2013, p. 139) as “a specific episode that can give rise to a fairness judgment, often relating to one or more types of justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice).” In this work, we develop theory that explains why men and women’s perceptions of justice events like vicarious mistreatment may differ, especially depending on the gender of the target. That is, we integrate and extend theory on the dual-process models of injustice perceptions (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011) and research on bystander effects (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005; Latané & Darley, 1970) to outline the process of *how* vicarious mistreatment perceptions constitute a series of justice events that influence more system-wide justice perceptions as bystanders undergo emotional and cognitive processing of the incident to distill its implications for their own identity.

Through this theorizing, we advance the literature in several ways. First, we respond to recent scholars (e.g., Dhanani et al., 2018) who lamented the dearth of boundary conditions that illuminate *when* negative outcomes (e.g., low overall justice perceptions) may result from vicarious workplace mistreatment. Although some prior research shows that individual characteristics can affect whether or not a person views themselves as a target (e.g., Aquino & Bradfield, 2000), it is not yet well understood whether perceptions of vicarious mistreatment are similarly filtered through

the lens of one’s own gender. As such, we focus our theorizing on how potential threats to one’s identity may contribute to the formulation of bystander justice perceptions after witnessing mistreatment levied against another. Specifically, we build on previous literature showing that gender is directly related to experiences of mistreatment (McCord et al., 2018) to hypothesize that *bystander gender*¹ influences how a bystander processes the justice event (i.e., vicarious mistreatment). Specifically, we posit that bystander gender will relate to whether they register the mistreatment as an identity threatening situation and whether they implicate the organization in the mistreatment-justice process.

In addition, we expect that *bystander-target gender similarity* will also influence the impact of vicarious mistreatment on identity threat because sharing a social group with the target of the mistreatment should trigger self-protection biases (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Feeling personally threatened by the vicarious mistreatment event may lead bystanders to conclude that the organization as a whole is unjust. By examining this possibility, we heed calls to move vicarious mistreatment research beyond stressor-strain conceptualizations to better understand how justice perceptions are impacted following these events (Dhanani et al., 2018; Miner & Cortina, 2016). Moreover, our study is unique in that it examines both women’s and men’s identity threat and organizational perceptions after witnessing the mistreatment of others. Specifically, we test all four combinations of bystander-target gender configurations in a series of three studies. This serves as an important extension of previous work that has held the gender of the target constant (e.g., Reich & Hershcovis, 2015) or ensured that the perpetrator’s gender in a scenario always matched that of the participant (e.g., Hershcovis et al., 2017).

We also shed meaningful light on the psychological mechanisms underlying bystanders’ divergent organizational perceptions of vicarious mistreatment. We theorize that a bystander’s gender and gender similarity to the target of mistreatment can produce identity threat for bystanders and that this is related to the extent that bystanders perceive the organizational climate to be unjust upon witnessing mistreatment. This identity threat reaction—which, in turn, is linked to bystanders’ organizational climate and justice perceptions—can occur via two pathways. One is an emotion-focused reaction and the other is a cognitive-focused processing of the event. This serves as an important contribution, given that prior scholars have failed to identify significant effects between demographic similarity and *behavioral* reactions to witnessed mistreatment such as intervening on behalf of the target (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). We suggest that bystander gender and bystander-target gender similarity play a role in both the internal *emotional* and *cognitive* processing of vicarious mistreatment events as identity threats.

We also illuminate the intervening role of perceptions of the organizational context when forming overall justice perceptions from justice events. To elaborate, we expand on current models by theorizing how individuals may extrapolate, through a process of emotional and cognitive processing of identity threat, from justice events (e.g., vicarious mistreatment) to the formulation of overall justice perceptions. In this way, we contribute to a better understanding of how divergent perceptions of vicarious mistreatment

¹ In the present study, we only focus on two genders: men and women.

“extend into the fabric and fiber of the organization” (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013, p. 472) by defining workplace mistreatment climate perceptions (Pearson et al., 2001). This approach expands scholars’ understanding beyond the triad (i.e., bystander, perpetrator, target²) that is typically considered in research on vicarious mistreatment. Moreover, assessing gender mistreatment climate is important as it allows us to understand the extent to which identity threat arising after exposure to vicarious mistreatment is localized to a specific perpetrator or is expanded to include perceptions that such behaviors are likely to continue occurring in their organization.

We structure the remainder of this article as follows. First, we integrate dual-process models of injustice perceptions (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011) and research on bystander effects (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005; Latané & Darley, 1970) to establish vicarious mistreatment as a justice event while answering a call for research “explicating the variables that impact whether or not third parties recognize an interaction as mistreatment” (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019, p. 22). Specifically, we describe how the boundary conditions of bystander gender and bystander-target gender similarity illuminate *when* a justice event (e.g., vicarious mistreatment) informs organizational-wide justice perceptions. We also highlight parallel (i.e., emotional/cognitive identity threat) and serial (i.e., psychological gender mistreatment climate) mediators that clarify the psychological processes that account for *why* observing justice events involving others contributes to the formation of injustice perceptions.

Theoretical Background

In this work, we focus on understanding the process of how justice events can develop into broader justice perceptions in workplaces. Extant studies from social identity threat scholars (e.g., Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Roberson & Kulik, 2007) contend that individuals belonging to different social categories can experience the same physical setting and behaviors in different ways due to the historical treatment of their group. In instances where a member of one’s social group is being mistreated, bystanders may experience a threat to their own identity given that identity is often rooted in group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Identity threat, in turn, is related to how people perceive their environment (Murphy et al., 2007). Based on this, it stands to reason that people who have been historically disadvantaged (i.e., women) or those belonging to the same gender as the target, will register witnessing mistreatment against others as a contextual cue that triggers identity threat (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). In the next section, we integrate theory on dual-process models to explicate how identity threat may occur as a result of both emotion-focused and cognitive-focused processes following a justice event.

Dual-Process Theories of Justice Events

Pioneering studies by Dhanani and LaPalme (2019) and O’Reilly and Aquino (2011) describe dual-process models of observing mistreatment wherein automatic and cognitive processes (labeled System I and System II, respectively) work together to impact different perceptual and behavioral outcomes. System I processes are described as emotion-laden and reactive,

whereas System II involves more analytical cognitive evaluations (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). Dual-process models contend that the alarming nature of witnessing mistreatment activates an unconscious and negative emotional reaction. In addition, bystanders engage in cognitive processing of the event wherein they attempt to make sense of what happened (O’Reilly & Aquino, 2011). During System II processing, people exposed to vicarious mistreatment draw “inferences about the organization’s values, the likelihood the third party will be treated fairly in the future, and the risk of affiliating with the organization” (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019, p. 17) and use this to formulate their perceptions of organizational justice.

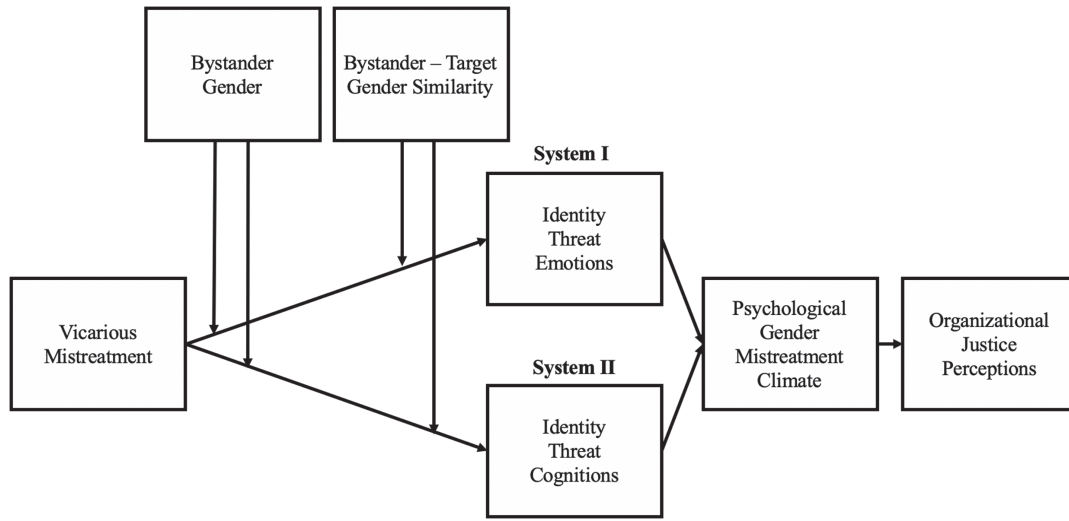
Longstanding research on the bystander effect has concluded that bystanders carefully consider their social surroundings when choosing how to respond to observed mistreatment of others (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). Bowes-Sperry and O’Leary-Kelly (2005) built on the work of Latané and Darley (1970) by contending that although altruism could be one motive that drives bystander reactions to mistreatment, there also may be other, more self-interested motives. Namely, people may be driven to feel better about themselves or gain a better reputation. As such, bystanders may sometimes conclude that their identity is being threatened and that an injustice has occurred after processing the vicarious mistreatment event (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005). Moreover, the groundbreaking work by Skarlicki and Kulik (2004) identifies factors that impact the willingness of third parties to act when witnessing a justice event and established that there are distinctions between the target’s and bystander’s perspectives.

The justice literature also supports the idea that organization-wide justice perceptions can emerge through a combination of automatic and controlled processing of justice events (M. Ambrose et al., 2007; Jones & Skarlicki, 2013). For example, Barsky and Kaplan (2007) showed that both state and trait affect are related to various justice perceptions, suggesting that both emotional and cognitive processing are at play in developing overall justice perceptions. Further, research by Barsky et al. (2011) demonstrated that emotional reactions are used to influence justice perceptions based on the cognitive appraisal of justice events in the workplace.

Aligned with these studies, we contend that System I and System II processes are crucial for considering the different reactions of workers and that a factor not yet considered by existing theoretical dual-process models—gender identity threat among bystanders of workplace mistreatment—plays a role as well (see Figure 1, for our theoretical model). Much of the expanded theorizing that we provide details how the bystander’s and target’s gender relate to their identity threat through both System I and System II pathways, which relate to whether they believe that mistreatment is a cornerstone of their organizational climate. Overall, our logic illuminates how prior scholarship overlooks the notion that bystanders’ self-protection motives may result in some bystanders viewing the mistreatment of peers as more unjust than others.

² We use the term *bystander* to refer to the person witnessing/learning of mistreatment against another person, *target* to refer to the person experiencing mistreatment, and *perpetrator* to refer to the person inflicting the mistreatment.

Figure 1
Full Hypothesized Study Model



Hypothesis Development

Justice Events (Vicarious Mistreatment) and Overall Justice Perceptions

Justice perceptions,³ defined as perceived fairness at work, are among the most widely examined variables in organizational research (Colquitt et al., 2001). Prior research has linked low levels of justice to a myriad of interpersonal mistreatment behaviors, including incivility (Miner & Cortina, 2016) and social undermining (Duffy et al., 2002). Similarly, we suggest that vicarious mistreatment represents a justice event that can combine with other signals in the environment to form overall justice perceptions. We operationalize vicarious workplace mistreatment by using a range of behaviors including interrupting, ignoring, and discriminating (e.g., promotion denial). Previous scholars have suggested that employees look to how their coworkers are being treated to infer organizational norms of fairness (Lamertz, 2002; Rupp, 2011). Thus, we suggest that bystanders of individual justice events like discrimination and incivility will conclude that low levels of overall justice pervade their workplace.

Hypothesis 1: Vicarious mistreatment is negatively related to bystander organizational justice perceptions.

Boundary Conditions of the Justice Event-Overall Justice Perception Relationship

Thus far, our theorizing is consistent with prior models of bystander reactions to mistreatment. In the following sections, we describe the boundary conditions that can alter how employees' justice perceptions may differ after witnessing or hearing about a justice event against coworkers. In light of prior work noting that individual perceptions tend to be idiosyncratic (Ng et al., 2019) and self-serving (von Hippel et al., 2005), we suggest that the bystander's and target's gender may play a key role in determining how people perceive vicarious mistreatment as a justice event. In

particular, we posit that the bystander's and target's gender will impact the level of identity threat experienced as the bystander grapples to understand the event they witnessed or translate what it means for them (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; Ng et al., 2019). As such, we consider two boundary conditions relevant to these processes—the gender of the bystander and bystander-target gender similarity.

Gender

We propose that bystanders may be more or less affected by a vicarious mistreatment-justice event depending on their demographic membership. We anticipate that a bystander's gender will moderate the relationship between a justice event and overall justice perceptions. Gender is relevant to social perceptions because it is readily observed in the workplace (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989) and is one piece of information we use to categorize ourselves and others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In addition, prior studies have confirmed that there are several psychological differences between the genders on average, with women being more observant of environmental threats than men (Friesdorf et al., 2015). Thus, we contend that one's gender can alter whether or not justice events like vicarious mistreatment translate into overall justice perceptions.

³ Researchers have identified four categories of organizational justice: *procedural* (perceived fairness of the procedures used in organizational processes), *interpersonal* (perceptions of the quality of interpersonal treatment received from those in authority), *informational* (explanations about why procedures were used in a certain way), and *distributive* (perceived fairness of outcomes; Colquitt, 2001). Recently, scholars have suggested that justice might best be considered holistically given that fairness facets often influence and meld into one another (M. L. Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). This is supported by research showing that employees tend to average all justice information into an overarching perception of fairness (or weigh them equally; Lind, 2001). This may be particularly true for exposure to gender-based mistreatment, wherein rewards are allocated unequally, decisions are influenced by bias, and one gender is treated with disrespect, thereby pervading all aspects of justice (Dhanani et al., 2018).

Women have more traditionally been the targets of workplace mistreatment and may fear that their gender group as a whole is being threatened when witnessing mistreatment levied against another. Research has shown that women, on average, are still more likely than men to experience many forms of mistreatment including bullying (Salin, 2003), sexual harassment (Magley et al., 1999), incivility (Cortina, 2008), and gender discrimination (McCord et al., 2018) at work. Based on these experiences, women's expectations about being a target in the future might inform how they label, justify, and understand the negative emotions they feel when observing this type of justice event. Indeed, prior work has noted that women may be more sensitive to observing the mistreatment of others given that they belong to a stigmatized group that often serves as the basis of mistreatment (Montgomery et al., 2004) and that stigmatized minorities often have heightened vigilance for mistreatment and are more likely to scan and detect threats to their social identity than majority group members (Kaiser et al., 2006; Thoroughgood et al., 2019). For example, research shows that women are more likely to label mistreatment as "bullying" as compared to men (Salin, 2003) and rate negative acts directed toward them as more severe (Escartín et al., 2011). In sum, we expect that this increased familiarity with mistreatment-based justice events will lead women to perceive the broader organization that allows this threatening behavior to be more unjust than men.

Men, in contrast, have less collective experience with being devalued and mistreated (Cortina, 2008), and may therefore experience less identity threat on behalf of their gender when witnessing others being discriminated against. Particularly in the case of more severe forms of mistreatment, men may find it difficult to picture themselves in a similar justice event situation in the future. As an example, some may find it hard to imagine a case where they do not get promoted simply because they are a man. Accordingly, men may be more likely to conclude that the vicarious mistreatment is a one-off incident rather than a systemic problem that relates to how they see themselves and their future in the organization. Thus, we expect that bystander gender will alter the relationship between vicarious mistreatment and perceived overall justice. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Bystander gender moderates the effect of vicarious mistreatment on bystander organizational justice perceptions such that this relationship is stronger for female, as compared to male, bystanders.

Gender Similarity

We also anticipate that a bystander's gender similarity with the target of the mistreatment will moderate the relationship between a justice event (specifically, vicarious mistreatment) and justice perceptions. Although we expect that men and women may have different levels of identity threat in the face of vicarious mistreatment, we also contend that they will perceive more injustice when witnessing the mistreatment of a member of their own gender. As a result of the shared social identity, self-protection tendencies dictate that vicarious mistreatment will be labeled as more threatening to one's identity if the target shares the same gender as the bystander (Chan & McAllister, 2014). Bystanders also engage in sensemaking to arrive at an explanation for what has transpired (Martinko et al., 2002). When bystanders share the same gender as the target, the

behavior will be deemed negative if they fear similar treatment in the future (Davidson & Friedman, 1998).

We expect this similarity-attraction bias to alter the relationship between vicarious justice events and overall justice for a number of reasons. First, sharing a social identity with a target likely serves as a threat to one's sense of self given that it undermines one's status in the organization (Thoroughgood et al., 2019). For example, women may experience more subconscious fear and demoralization when a woman is discriminated against as such incidents reinforce women's lower-status as a group (Miner & Cortina, 2016). Given that incidents with a stronger negative valence lead to increased psychological arousal and more thorough cognitive processing (Bless et al., 1990), people who observe mistreatment against someone of the same gender may also be more likely to process the action more deeply to understand what implications this incident has for their own gender group and the organizational characteristics on a whole (Martinko et al., 2002). Thus, bystanders similar to the target of mistreatment may conclude that others in the organization are likely to treat them differently due to their gender.

In contrast, observing a justice event that involves mistreatment directed at a member of the opposite gender is likely to be labeled as comparatively more irrelevant to a dissimilar bystander, leading to more superficial cognitive processing and the generation of explanations that better align with this more benign emotional reaction. As an example, women who witness mistreatment against a man may engage in euphemistic labeling of the act (Bandura et al., 1996), concluding that "it could be worse," "was harmless," or even that the behavior was based on legitimate business-related reasons. By classifying the act as innocuous, members of the opposite gender can keep their gender identity unscathed when experiencing vicarious mistreatment. This is easier to do when the identity threat is less severe (i.e., when one does not share a social identity group with the target). Moreover, people may even tend to subconsciously defend the perpetrator to maintain a positive self-image based on group membership if gender similarity is stronger with the perpetrator than with the target (Jost, 2019; Kaiser et al., 2006). Their desire to preserve a positive self-image and avoid guilt may even lead to rationalization of the observed behavior (Gino & Galinsky, 2012). In the case of a man observing mistreatment against a woman, for example, the bystander may formulate excuses that the perpetrator is generally "good" or is adhering to outdated norms, protecting their own identity in the process.

Although a handful of empirical studies have examined the moderating effects of shared group membership on the effects of vicarious mistreatment (on outcomes other than justice), results have been mixed (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). Some have reported that heightened similarity resulted in stronger responses to vicarious mistreatment (Blader et al., 2013); women judge sexual harassment targeted at women as more severe as compared to men (Wayne et al., 2001) and bystanders of mistreatment are more lenient toward the person with which they share a gender when they witness an altercation (Salin, 2011). Other studies, however, failed to replicate this effect (e.g., Ghumman et al., 2016), leading Dhanani and LaPalme (2019, p. 14) to conclude that "bystanders are most affected by vicarious mistreatment ... when they are more similar to the target, though demographic similarity does not appear to produce this effect."

There are important distinguishing features to note between prior work and our study. First, no study has tested all four bystander-target

gender configurations. Thus, examining the moderating effects of gender and gender similarity simultaneously provides new insights over previous scholarship that has simply controlled for gender. Second, most prior studies examined behavioral reactions like intervening on behalf of the target, whereas we examine justice perceptions. Considering the simultaneous moderating effects of gender and gender similarity on perceived organizational justice may reveal that demographic similarity appears more or less relevant than stated in the extant literature. That is, similarity may not have an impact on *behavioral* intervention on the part of bystanders, but it may have an impact on the *cognitive* processing of mistreatment, as discussed in the justice literature (Skarlicki & Rupp, 2010). Taken together, Dhanani and LaPalme (2019) conclusion that bystander-target demographic similarity does not moderate the effects of vicarious mistreatment may be premature. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: Bystander-target gender similarity moderates the effect of vicarious mistreatment on bystander organizational justice perceptions such that this relationship is stronger for bystanders of the same gender, as compared to a different gender, as the target of the mistreatment.

The Mediating Roles of Identity Threat and Psychological Gender Mistreatment Climate

Finally, we propose that identity threatening emotions (System I) and cognitions (System II) will serve as parallel mediators of the aforementioned relationships whereas *psychological gender mistreatment climate* will be a serial mediating factor that predicts organizational justice perceptions. We define psychological gender mistreatment climate as employee perceptions that gender-based mistreatment is likely to be occurring in their organization. This follows work by Schneider and Reichers (1983) that argues that more precise slices of organizational climate can be delineated, leading to more narrow climate perceptions. Similar to prior researchers who have studied specific types of mistreatment climates at work like age discrimination climate (Kunze et al., 2011) and racial bias climate (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005), we expect that individuals who witness poignant justice events may conclude that such acts of gendered mistreatment (incivility, ostracism, discrimination, etc.) are highly likely to be occurring elsewhere in the organization and do not simply constitute an isolated incident.

Upon experiencing a justice event such as vicarious mistreatment, we expect that certain employees will experience more or less identity threat depending on their own gender and gender similarity with the target. Supporting this idea, Dhanani and LaPalme (2019) proposed that certain emotional outcomes (e.g., anxiety, anger, empathy) of justice events like vicarious mistreatment happen unconsciously and almost automatically through System I processes and sensemaking occurs via more conscious and cognitive System II processes. Justice events like vicarious mistreatment are, therefore, likely to activate both emotions of discomfort (System I) and deeper cognitive processing related to personal threats to the self (System II; O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011). Indeed, Jones and Skarlicki (2013) describe a process through which justice events can be used to inform overall justice perceptions of the organization. Similar to dual-process models of mistreatment, they argue that employees make

sense of justice events automatically. Following unexpected events (like the mistreatment of a peer), individuals may be triggered to also engage in more cognitive processing to understand what this means in terms of future threats (Jones & Skarlicki, 2013). As outlined above, we expect that these effects may be particularly exacerbated among women and when there is bystander-target similarity, thereby triggering self-protective tendencies. Accordingly, we believe that identity threatened bystanders will use System I or System II processes to understand what happened and that they will use these conclusions to inform their perceptions of the broader organization and the likelihood of mistreatment against a given gender.

Supporting this prediction, witnessing mistreatment among employees led customers to make negative generalizations about employee norms and the company in general (Porath et al., 2010). Furthermore, prior research has empirically linked vicarious mistreatment to climates that feature a tolerance of mistreatment (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). Moreover, scholars have noted that gender, in particular, can shape whether events like vicarious mistreatment impact conclusions about organizational context. For example, Salin (2011) reported that women were more likely to make organizational attributions of blame, whereas men tended to focus on personal causes (e.g., the target was antisocial/provocative) when interpreting vicarious bullying.

Finally, we suggest that gender mistreatment climate leads to organizational justice perceptions. Justice scholars have argued that attitudes and perceptions related to justice events can fully mediate the impact of different forms of justice events on system-related or entity-related justice perceptions (M. Ambrose et al., 2007). Following this logic, the impact of justice events (e.g., vicarious mistreatment) is not limited to specific attitudes about that event and its perceived pervasiveness in the organization (i.e., gender mistreatment climate). In addition, individual justice events do not drastically and directly alter organization-wide justice perceptions in all instances (Jones & Skarlicki, 2013). Instead, we argue that gender mistreatment climate, as a broader perception related to the likelihood of mistreatment events occurring, precedes the formation of organization-wide justice perceptions following a process of sensemaking through System I and System II processing (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Taken together, we propose the following predictions:

Hypothesis 4: Psychological gender mistreatment climate mediates the interactive effects of vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, and bystander-target gender similarity on bystander organizational justice perceptions. Specifically, the negative indirect effects of vicarious mistreatment on organizational justice perceptions through psychological gender mistreatment climate will be stronger for women and those with gender similarity to the target.

Hypothesis 5: Psychological gender mistreatment climate acts as a serial mediator following the parallel mediators of identity threat emotions and identity threat cognitions. Specifically, the negative indirect effects of vicarious mistreatment on bystander organizational justice perceptions that occur via identity threat (emotions and cognitions) and subsequently gender mistreatment climate, will be stronger for women and those with gender similarity to the target.

Overview of Studies

We tested our model using three complementary studies in the United States (U.S.): A laboratory experiment ($N = 563$), a large field study ($N = 8,196$ employees in 546 work units), and another laboratory experiment ($N = 920$). Study 1 is a preliminary investigation to explore the impact of vicarious mistreatment on organizational justice perceptions and the moderating roles of bystander gender and bystander-target gender similarity. We then replicate these findings in Study 2 with data from a large field study to overcome the natural limitations that can be present in an experimental study (e.g., limited generalizability) while also examining the intervening role of psychological gender mistreatment climate in our model. Finally, in Study 3, we test our comprehensive model by testing the dual pathways of bystanders' processing of vicarious mistreatment through identity threat reactions—emotions (System I) and cognitions (System II).

Transparency and Openness

Our sampling plan, data exclusions, manipulations, measures, and statistical software packages used to analyze the data are detailed in each study's respective sections. We adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology's* methodological checklist. Data, analysis code, and research materials are available from the authors upon request. Studies 1 and 2 were not preregistered. Study 3's preregistration link can be found here at https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=PQG_L6B.

Study 1 Method

Data and Sample

Undergraduate students ($N = 563$; 80.3% female; 26.5% White, 22.0% Hispanic, 19.0% Black, 22.9% Asian, and 9.6% mixed race or other categories) enrolled at a large Southeastern university in the United States participated in the study in exchange for extra credit. The mean age of the sample was 23.14 ($SD = 6.88$; range = 18–59 years). Further, 61.2% of participants worked full (35+ hr/week) or part time (<35 hr/week) in a variety of industries (service [20.6%] and clerical [14.1%] were reported most frequently). Moreover, nearly half of the participants (49%) worked part time while another 12% worked full time. The data collection was approved by the institutional review board (University of Houston, project number: 08268-02, project title: Group Performance).

Procedure and Experimental Design

Upon arrival, participants were assigned randomly to one of the four experimental groups wherein they read their assigned narrative before responding to a questionnaire. Our experimental design was a 2 (vicarious mistreatment: present or absent) \times 2 (target gender: male or female) \times 2 (bystander gender: male or female) factorial design. The study participants were bystanders of a scenario wherein a supervisor was depicted as the perpetrator and an employee being considered for a promotion was the target. The dependent variables were collected first to minimize response order effects, and participants were not permitted to refer to the narrative during the questionnaire.

We designed an experiment that employed manipulated versions of a two-page narrative as the experimental task. Prior scholars have

noted that scenario-based studies are among the most popular and appropriate ways to capture justice-related intuitions (O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011). Our narrative plot focused on four employees being considered for a promotion. We selected a promotion scenario given that promotion decisions are one area where gender discrimination (a form of workplace mistreatment) may arise. The employees were gathered in a conference room to meet with the hiring supervisor in charge of selecting one of the candidates for the promotion. As indicated in the narrative, past performance with the company and their submitted resumes were the two determining factors for their selection as one of the final four candidates. The supervisor⁴ stated explicitly that based on these selection criteria, the four candidates were equally qualified for the promotion. Next, the supervisor asked the candidates to participate in a group brainstorming exercise to determine who would receive the promotion.

From this point, the narrative differed according to the experimental condition designed based on a compilation of narratives of men and women describing mistreatment they experienced based on their gender. Participants not exposed to vicarious mistreatment read a narrative of the four candidates performing the brainstorming task in which each candidate contributed an equal number of ideas or suggestions during the session. Further, when candidates did contribute, the supervisor let them finish speaking and provided neutral or supportive feedback. Participants in the vicarious mistreatment condition read a similar sequence of events, but the supervisor often interrupted the target, ignored their comments while attributing their ideas to others, and provided negative and unsupportive comments to his or her suggestions. These additional workplace mistreatment behaviors—which reflect incivility and ostracism—were chosen as additional forms of workplace mistreatment given that these subtler forms may be among the most prevalent gender-based mistreatment behaviors in the modern workplace. For example, Cortina (2008, p. 65) noted that “in many cases disproportionate incivility toward women ... would likely comprise the most ambiguous forms of disrespectful conduct (e.g., interrupting an employee, failing to include an employee in professional camaraderie, ignoring an employee).” At the end of the brainstorming session in both scripts, the supervisor announced which of the four candidates had received the promotion. Of the 563 participants, 118 read about a male employee who did not experience mistreatment, 116 read about a female employee who did not experience mistreatment, 209 read about a man who experienced mistreatment, and 120 read about a woman who experienced mistreatment.

Measures

Organizational Justice Perceptions

We assessed the four forms of organizational justice with Colquitt (2001) 20-item organizational justice measure to measure the

⁴ We aimed to ensure that participants perceived that gender rather than other demographic factors like race was the reason for the mistreatment in the experimental conditions. We also hoped to ensure that the characters reflected the demographics of the University, which is quite diverse. To do so, we ensured that the supervisor was always portrayed as the same White male in every scenario. The four candidates were a mix of two White people and two Black people as well as two men and two women. The candidate who received the promotion was always the opposite gender of the target, but the same race.

bystander's (i.e., participant's) organizational justice perceptions. A sample item is "Has the supervisor treated all individuals in the group with respect." Responses were on a 5-point scale, anchored at 1 = *strongly agree* and 5 = *strongly disagree*. Because our hypotheses did not differentiate across the four types of justice, we followed the precedent of prior work (e.g., Zhang, et al., 2014) and aggregated all 20 items to form a single scale ($\alpha = .92$).

Vicarious Mistreatment

Whether or not the bystander (i.e., the participant) witnessed gender-based mistreatment was dummy-coded (0 = no, 1 = yes) according to the participant's assigned experimental condition. As noted above and in the script available in the online Supplemental Appendix A, our experimental manipulation featured multiple facets of mistreatment including incivility, ostracism, and discrimination. As expected, those in the vicarious mistreatment condition reported significantly higher agreement with the following manipulation check than those who were not, 3.95 versus 3.11, respectively; $t(234) = -4.97, p < .01$: "To what extent do you agree that gender played a part in the decision of who received the promotion in the scenario that you read."

Gender (Bystander and Target)

Target gender was manipulated using names, pictures, and pronouns in the vignette and dummy-coded (0 = man; 1 = woman). The item, "Are you male or female?" measured bystander (i.e., participant) gender; this was also dummy-coded (0 = man; 1 = woman).

Study 1 Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1. To examine the study hypotheses, we performed analysis of variance (ANOVA) using SPSS V.28 modeling the independent variables and moderator as fixed factors to predict organizational justice perceptions (see Table 2). Hypothesis 1, which proposed a negative main effect of vicarious mistreatment on organizational justice perceptions, was fully supported: $F(1, 555) = 33.12, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$. Namely, bystanders in the vicarious mistreatment condition reported significantly lower levels of justice perceptions than those who were not (2.74 vs. 3.25).

The second and third hypotheses predicted that bystander gender (Hypothesis 2) and bystander-target gender similarity (Hypothesis 3) moderate the effect of vicarious mistreatment on organizational justice perceptions such that it is stronger for women and those of the same gender as the target. The moderating effects of bystander

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations in Study 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Bystander gender (female)	0.80	0.40	—		
2. Target gender (female)	0.42	0.49	0.01	—	
3. Vicarious mistreatment	0.58	0.49	0.03	-.13**	—
4. Organizational justice	2.88	0.87	-0.06	.10*	-.37**

Note. $N = 563$. Bystander gender and target gender (female) were dummy-coded (0 = male, 1 = female).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Analysis of Variance Predicting Organizational Justice Perceptions in Study 1

Source	SS	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2
Vicarious mistreatment	20.97	1	33.12**	.05
Bystander gender (female)	1.85	1	2.93	.00
Target gender (female)	3.47	1	5.47*	.01
Vicarious Mistreatment \times Bystander Gender (Female)	4.20	1	6.63**	.01
Vicarious Mistreatment \times Target Gender (Female)	.15	1	.23	.00
Bystander Gender (Female) \times Target Gender (Female)	1.78	1	2.82	.00
Vicarious Mistreatment \times Bystander Gender (Female) \times Target Gender (Female)	4.71	1	7.44**	.01
Error	351.50	555		

Note. $N = 563$. $R^2 = .16$. SS = sum of squares. Vicarious mistreatment (0 = did not experience, 1 = experienced) and bystander/target gender (0 = male, 1 = female) are dummy-coded.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

gender, $F(1, 555) = 6.63, p = .01, \eta^2 = .01$, was statistically significant. Though both men ($d = .56$) and women ($d = .88$) exhibited significant effects of vicarious mistreatment, the effect size for the latter was more than 1.5 times as large as that of the former (see Figure 2). The two-way interaction involving bystander gender was qualified by the anticipated three-way interaction involving bystander and target gender to examine bystander-target gender similarity, $F(1, 555) = 7.44, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$. This is known as the interaction approach to testing demographic similarity (Riordan, 2000). The pattern of simple slopes for the vicarious mistreatment manipulation showed that the effects were most pronounced for male bystanders who saw male targets ($d = .74$) and female bystanders who saw female targets ($d = 1.21$) compared to men ($d = -.00$) and women ($d = .62$) who saw targets of the opposite gender (see Figure 3). Gender similarity to the target resulted in an effect size more than twice the size as gender dissimilarity. These patterns provide support for Hypotheses 2 and 3.

The purpose of the first study was to test the impact of vicarious mistreatment on organizational justice perceptions. As expected, bystanders exposed to vicarious mistreatment reported lower

Figure 2
The Interactive Effects of Vicarious Mistreatment and Gender on Organizational Justice Perceptions in Study 1

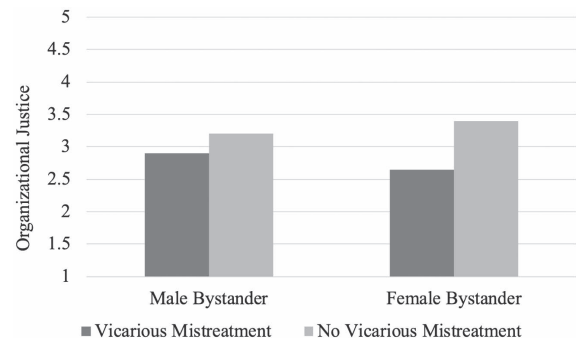
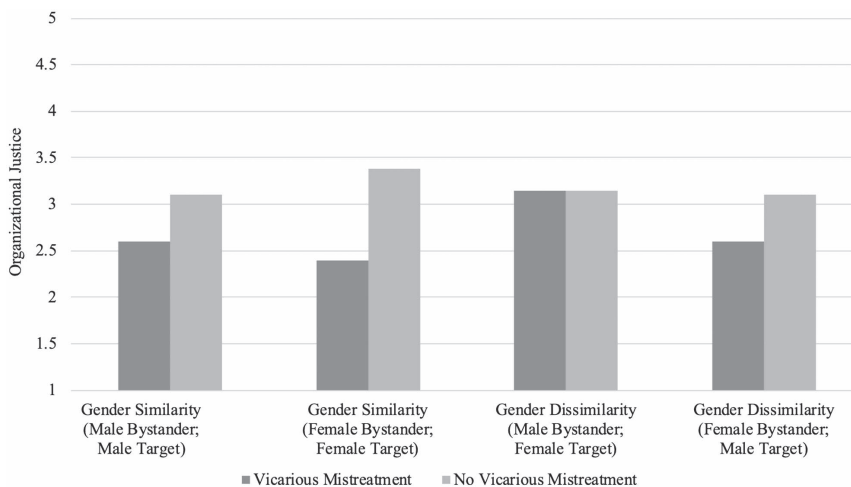


Figure 3
The Interactive Effects of Vicarious Mistreatment and Gender Similarity on Organizational Justice Perceptions in Study 1



perceptions of organizational justice compared to those who were not. Moreover, this effect was more pronounced for women (relative to men) and bystanders of the same gender as the target. Though this preliminary evidence is consistent with our proposed theory, there is an important limitation that should be acknowledged. Namely, the bystanders read about a scenario that involved or did not involve various forms of vicarious mistreatment, which could differ from the experience of being exposed to the mistreatment of others in real life. Consequently, it is important to determine whether the effects observed in the lab in Study 1 generalize to field settings. Moreover, we are able to extend the tests of our model by examining the mediating role of climate in Study 2. A military sample was chosen as a context that would provide an illustrative demonstration of our theory because the gender divides established in Study 1 may be worsened in traditionally masculine workplaces. Men may simply not experience identity threat upon witnessing mistreatment against women (and vice versa), leading them to avoid labeling the overall organization as unfair due to self-protection tendencies. Indeed, prior theorizing suggests that men and women are likely to maintain their self-perceptions of being a fair person by rationalizing their divergent perspectives to conclude that the event is not indicative of a negative environment as a whole (e.g., contending that women do not have what it takes to move up the ranks in the military, Riley, 2002). Thus, Study 2 was designed to replicate our three-way interaction while examining the intervening role of psychological gender mistreatment climate.

Study 2 Method

Data and Sample

To examine the effects of justice events (specifically, vicarious mistreatment) in a field setting, we collected data through the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI). Each year, DEOMI conducts rolling data collections involving surveys of active U.S. military personnel, including on issues of discrimination (the data used for this study were collected in 2009). The data from this survey, called the Defense Organizational

Climate Survey, have been used by different members of the author team in three previously published studies (David et al., 2019; Luksyte et al., 2022; Rubino et al., 2018). With the exception of gender, the variables used in Study 2 are different from the other three articles.

The variables described below were collected from 8,196 individuals in 546 work units as part of a larger data collection in a single year. This translates to roughly 15 people per unit (range = 4–166), with a gender composition that averaged 18.87% female (range = 0%–100%). The sample was predominantly male (82.7%) and racially/ethnically diverse (15.7% Hispanic, 3.4% Native American, 4.4% Asian American, 15.9% Black, 1.9% Pacific Islander, and 67.4% White). The average age was 2.3 ($SD = .94$) on a 5-point scale where 2 = 22–30 and 3 = 31–40. The majority of participants were from the Army (61.8%), followed by the Navy (19.6%), Marines (15.2%), Air Force (2.1%), and Coast Guard (1.2%), respectively.

Measures

All variables were measured at the individual level except for vicarious mistreatment, which was operationalized at Level 2. Individual responses were aggregated to determine the frequency that gender discrimination took place in the unit during the prior year.

Organizational Justice Perceptions

We used a four-item, Likert-type scale to measure bystanders' organizational justice perceptions ($\alpha = .86$). The items are: "At my workplace, all employees are kept well informed about issues and decisions that affect them," "My supervisor helps everyone in my workgroup feel included," "I trust my supervisor to deal fairly with issues of equal treatment at my workplace," and "At my workplace, a person's job opportunities and promotions are based only on work-related characteristics." This scale has been validated by Rubino et al. (2018) as an organizational justice scale and showed small mean differences ($d = .23$) and a high correlation ($r = .84$) with scores on the scale used in Study 1.

Vicarious Mistreatment

As part of their annual climate survey, DEOMI asks questions to both male and female employees that indicate if they experienced various forms of discrimination within the past year (responses coded as 0 = no; 1 = yes). Based on this single item, we computed the percentage of respondents in each bystander's unit who indicated they experienced mistreatment on the basis of gender, excluding the bystander's response. We used this as an indicator of vicarious mistreatment, as it captures the prevalence of gender-based discrimination experienced by other people in the bystander's (focal participant's) unit (i.e., the higher the reported mistreatment in one's group, the more likely the bystander is to have experienced mistreatment vicariously).⁵

Gender (Bystander and Targets)

As in the prior study, we dummy-coded participant responses about their gender such that 0 = male and 1 = female. To mimic the design of the first study, we first computed the percentage of targets in each unit that were female (i.e., individuals in the bystander's unit indicating that they experienced discrimination in the last year). To measure gender similarity, we then created a two-way interaction term of the bystander's gender and the percentage of female targets in each unit.

Psychological Gender Mistreatment Climate

Given that we expected individual perceptions of climate to differ depending on the sex of the bystander and targets, we were interested in individual (psychological) perceptions of climate rather than aggregated (group) ratings. As indicated by prior authors (e.g., Walsh et al., 2010), DEOMI annually includes a series of items designed to capture various aspects (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, disability, religion) of the equal employment opportunity climate. There are two items tapping the climate for mistreatment on the basis of gender (i.e., "Sexist jokes were frequently heard" and "A supervisor referred to subordinates of one gender by their first names in public while using titles for subordinates of the other gender").⁶ The instructions noted that responses should reference the previous 30-days and participants responded on a Likert-type rating scale indicated their perceptions of the likelihood of these behaviors are happening in their environment (1 = *very high chance that the action occurred* to 5 = *almost no chance that the action occurred*). We averaged these items; higher scores indicated a stronger climate for mistreatment ($\alpha = .86$). Given the response scale (i.e., judging perceived *likelihood* the behavior is happening in the environment rather than rating the *frequency* of observed behaviors), we note that this scale does not capture personally experienced mistreatment, but rather the extent to which these behaviors are perceived to be pervasive in the work unit.

Study 2 Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 3. To determine whether the nesting of employees within work units violated the assumption of independence, we conducted a one-way ANOVA with justice as the dependent variable. This intraclass correlation (ICC) analysis produced a significant result, $ICC = .07$, $F(545, 7651) = 2.24$, $p < .01$, indicating that ordinary

least squares is inappropriate and that multilevel modeling is necessary. Thus, we conducted a series of hierarchical multilevel models using R V.4.1.1 to test our hypotheses and all continuous variables were grand mean centered (see Table 4).

Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative main effect of vicarious mistreatment on organizational justice perceptions. In the first step of our analyses, we detected a significant cross-level effect of vicarious mistreatment on organization justice ($\gamma = -1.42$, $SE = .17$, $p < .01$). As expected, bystander employees working in units with peers who experienced more gender discrimination (our indicator for workplace mistreatment in this study) indicated significantly lower organizational justice perceptions. Thus, Hypothesis 1 again received support.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the effect of vicarious mistreatment would differ by bystander gender. To test Hypothesis 2, we first modeled a random slope for bystander gender to determine whether there was sufficient variance in the slope at the unit level for a cross-level interaction to occur. This random slope was significant ($.07$, $SE = .03$, $p = .02$), indicating that it is appropriate to test for cross-level interactions involving gender. Unexpectedly, the Vicarious Mistreatment \times Bystander Gender interaction was not statistically significant ($\gamma = -.46$, $SE = .33$, $p = .17$), failing to support this hypothesis. The relationships were, however, in the predicted direction; women ($\gamma = -1.79$, $SE = .30$, $p < .01$) had a more negative reaction to mistreatment than men ($\gamma = -1.31$, $SE = .19$, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that group bystander-targets gender similarity would influence the association between vicarious mistreatment and perceived justice. To test this hypothesis, we modeled a three-way interaction involving vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, and bystander-targets gender similarity (i.e., the percentage of females in the unit that reported experiencing gender-based mistreatment over the past 30 days). This interactive approach mimics the approach we employed in Study 1 to show the nature of the interaction. In the present study, the three-way interaction was statistically significant ($\gamma = -3.55$, $SE = 1.12$, $p < .01$). Simple slope analyses indicate that the effects of vicarious mistreatment were strongest for male bystanders when a higher percentage of targets were men ($\gamma = -2.39$, $p < .01$) and for female bystanders when a higher percentage of targets were women ($\gamma = -1.67$, $p < .01$), as compared to men ($\gamma = -.98$, $p < .01$) and women ($\gamma = -.73$, $p = .24$) when a greater percentage of targets were of the opposite gender (see

⁵ Although participants directly report whether they were discriminated against or not, we note that vicarious mistreatment as calculated here is not the same as experienced mistreatment. It is mistreatment experienced by others in the bystander's work unit. To further underscore the distinction between experienced and vicarious mistreatment, we conducted additional analyses replacing vicarious mistreatment with experienced mistreatment (i.e., the mistreatment reported by the focal participant). The three-way interaction of experienced gender mistreatment, gender, and percentage of female mistreatment targets in one's workgroup failed to significantly predict either gender mistreatment climate ($\gamma = .24$, $SE = .32$, $p = .45$) or organizational justice perceptions ($\gamma = -.23$, $SE = .32$, $p = .47$).

⁶ To better justify our climate variable, we ran a small post hoc validation study on the Prolific survey platform ($N = 143$). The participants worked full time, were 37.7 years of age on average ($SD = 10.55$), 49.7% were women, and 69.9% were White (14% Black, 8.4% Latino/Hispanic, 14% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.5% Native American, and 2.1% other/multiracial). Participants completed both the two-item DEOMI gender discrimination climate scale as well an established scale by Kunze et al. (2011), replacing the word age with gender. We found that they correlated strongly ($r = .63$, $p < .01$), further corroborating that our measure reflects discrimination climate.

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations in Study 2

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Bystander gender (female)	.17	.38	—			
2. Vicarious mistreatment	.07	.08	.16**	—		
3. Gender of targets (% of female targets in group)	.29	.37	.20**	.44**	—	
4. Psychological gender mistreatment climate	1.93	.98	.05**	.14**	.00	—
5. Organizational justice perceptions	3.82	.95	-.06**	-.13**	-.04**	-.39**

Note. *N* = 8,196. Bystander gender (female) was dummy-coded (0 = male, 1 = female).

** *p* < .01.

Figure 4, for an illustration). As in Study 1, the effects were more than twice as large when targets were gender-similar than when they were not, supporting Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that psychological gender mistreatment climate would mediate the interactive effects of vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, and bystander-target gender similarity. A key difference between Studies 1 and 2 is that the former examines the proposed interactive effects directly whereas the latter examines them indirectly. To test Hypothesis 4, we began by testing the effects of the three-way interaction observed in Hypothesis 3 in predicting psychological gender mistreatment climate. The three-way interaction was statistically significant ($\gamma = 4.38$, $SE = 1.07$, $p < .01$). Next, we tested the second stage of the mediation by examining whether psychological gender mistreatment climate predicted organizational justice perceptions in the context of vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, bystander-target gender similarity, and their composite interactions. The effect of psychological gender mistreatment climate on organizational justice was significant ($\gamma = -.35$, $SE = .01$, $p < .01$) and the previously reported 3-way interaction was attenuated from -3.55 to -2.00 (though it was still significant; $p = .046$). Using the Monte Carlo method, we computed the index of moderated mediation and found it to be statistically significant (-1.53 , 99% CI $[-2.51, -.57]$). This indicates the interactive effects of vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, and bystander-target gender similarity on organizational justice operated, at least in part, through psychological gender mistreatment climate (supporting Hypothesis 4).

In a large field survey, we found that exposure to the justice event of vicarious mistreatment was negatively related to bystander perceptions among bystanders who had greater gender similarity to the targets. Reconfirming the boundary condition of gender similarity helped us detail why perceptions of overall organizational justice perception differ for some bystanders following justice events (i.e., gender discrimination levied against coworkers). Our results in Study 2 largely replicated the results from Study 1, showing that even mistreatment self-reported by peers can help to shape bystanders' overall justice perceptions (particularly for those higher in gender similarity to the targets). Moreover, we further detailed why divergent bystander perceptions of vicarious mistreatment may occur. Specifically, by identifying psychological gender mistreatment climate as a mediator in our model, we demonstrated the role that organizational climate can play in the formulation of bystanders' organizational justice perceptions, as it represents how an accumulation of individual justice events feed into the overall justice perceptions that include other nongender related justice events. Our findings showed that when more people in a unit report experiencing gender-based mistreatment in the past year, this predicts greater perceptions from the focal person that gender-based mistreatment had a high chance of occurring in the past 30 days elsewhere in the organization (an indicator of high gender mistreatment climate). These gender mistreatment climate perceptions, in turn, further corresponded with lower perceptions of overall organizational justice. This indirect link was especially pronounced when bystanders were the same gender as the mistreated targets.

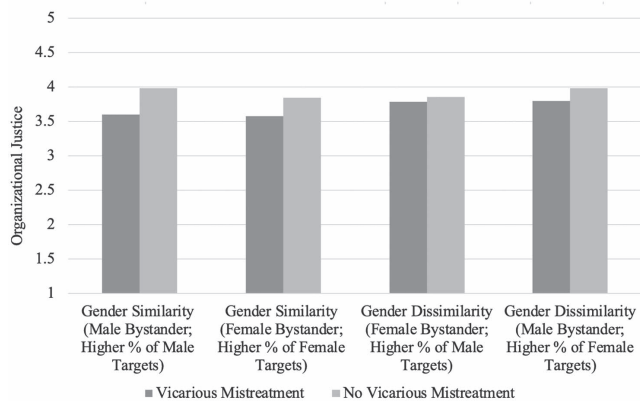
Table 4
Summary of Hierarchical Multilevel Modeling Predicting Organizational Justice Perceptions in Study 2

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	3.87** (.02)	3.87** (.02)	3.85** (.02)	3.84** (.02)
Vicarious mistreatment	-1.43** (.17)	-1.30** (.19)	-1.76** (.22)	-1.07** (.20)
Bystander gender (female)	-.15** (.03)	-.14* (.03)	-.07 (.04)	-.06* (.03)
Gender of targets (% of female targets in group)			.15 (.05)	.06 (.05)
Vicarious Mistreatment × Bystander Gender (Female)		-.46 (.33)	.62 (.43)	.64 (.38)
Vicarious Mistreatment × Gender of Targets (% of Female Targets in Group)			2.13** (.62)	1.16* (.56)
Bystander Gender (Female) × Gender of Targets (% of Female Targets in Group)			-.30** (.09)	-.18* (.07)
Vicarious Mistreatment × Bystander Gender (Female) × Gender of Targets (% of Female Targets in Group)			-3.55** (1.12)	-2.00* (1.00)
Psychological gender mistreatment climate				-.35** (.01)

Note. *N* = 8,196. Bystander gender (female) is dummy-coded (0 = male, 1 = female).

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

Figure 4
The Interactive Effects of Vicarious Mistreatment and Group Gender Similarity on Organizational Justice Perceptions in Study 2



The purpose of the second study was to determine whether the effects observed in the lab in Study 1 generalize to field settings. We were also able to extend our model by examining the mediating role of psychological gender mistreatment climate. However, to better explain why bystanders can react to vicarious mistreatment with diverging levels of injustice perceptions, Study 3 was designed to replicate our three-way interaction while examining the dual psychological pathways that bystanders may use when processing vicarious mistreatment. Specifically, in Study 3, we examine how a bystander's gender and gender similarity to the mistreatment target can alter the identity threat emotions (System I) and cognitions (System II) experienced by bystanders after processing the vicarious mistreatment. We expected that both pathways shape bystanders' psychological gender mistreatment climate and justice perceptions.

Study 3 Method

Data and Sample

To constructively replicate the results of the first two studies and assess the underlying psychological mechanism that operates using System I and System II processing to explain the effects of vicarious mistreatment, we recruited participants who were who were at least 18 years old, living in the United States, and employed full time from a panel service, Prolific, to take part in a final experiment. We set the inclusion criteria to ensure roughly equal numbers of men and women. In an initial survey, we collected demographic information and confirmed that participants met the above criteria. In total, 1,503 people completed the initial survey, of which 1,366 (91%) were qualified and invited to participate in the full experiment (964 [71%] accepted this invitation). We included three attention check items (e.g., "please select strongly agree for this item"), which 44 (4.6%) people failed, resulting in their exclusion from the sample. Participants were compensated for participating in each questionnaire according to the rules of Prolific.

Our final study sample included 920 people, a sample that was roughly half male (48.7%) and 77.3% White (7.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.7% Hispanic, 3.8% Black, 0.1% Native American, and 6.9% mixed race or other categories). Their average age was 37.76 years old ($SD = 11.04$) and their average work tenure was 17.32

years ($SD = 10.97$). All were employed full time by a company, 62.9% had managerial experience, and they hailed from a wide variety of industries including Health care (15.4%), Education (13.9%), and Manufacturing (8.2%). This data collection was approved by the institutional review board (University of Colorado, Boulder, project number: 22-0109, project title: Group Performance) who determined that our study was exempt.

Procedure and Experimental Design

The procedures and experimental design were identical to those described in Study 1, with a 2 (vicarious mistreatment: present or absent) \times 2 (target gender: male or female) \times 2 (bystander gender: male or female) experimental design.⁷ Of the 920 participants, 226 read about a male employee who did not experience mistreatment, 234 read about a female employee who did not experience mistreatment, 226 read about a man who experienced mistreatment, and 234 read about a woman who experienced mistreatment. Similar to Study 1, the supervisor (perpetrator) was always a White male and the other main character among the candidates (i.e., the person who was given better treatment and the promotion in the experimental conditions) was always of the opposite gender of the target, but the same race.

Measures

All measures were responded to on a 5-point scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) unless otherwise indicated.

Organizational Justice Perceptions

We used the same measure from Study 1 ($\alpha = .92$).

Vicarious Mistreatment

As in Study 1, we manipulated vicarious mistreatment such that the focal individual in the stimulus materials either experienced

⁷ Although vicarious mistreatment has been defined broadly to include witnessing, hearing about, or being indirectly exposed to the knowledge that another person has been mistreated (Glomb et al., 1997; Miner & Cortina, 2016), it is unclear whether these discovery mediums are equally impactful on the bystander. Thus, in the original design, we added an additional 2 \times 2 layer to test if there were differences between participants that witnessed vicarious mistreatment and those that heard about the mistreatment incident secondhand. Appendix B (in the online Supplemental Material) shows the script for the hearsay experimental and control conditions. However, in testing the effect of our model, Wilks $\lambda = .41(4, 901) p = .80$, on identity threat cognitions ($F = .13$), identity threat emotions ($F = .16$), gender mistreatment climate ($F = .28$), and organizational justice ($F = .62$), the p values were always .43 or higher, indicating that there was no statistical difference between the witness and hearsay conditions. It is possible that no significant differences resulted because the participants in the two conditions failed to notice the subtle difference of hypothetically witnessing the incident versus being told about the incident from a secondhand source. However, we note that we asked participants in both conditions "To what extent do you agree that sex/gender played a part in the decision of who received the promotion" and that the mean of this item was slightly higher in the hearsay conditions ($M = 3.08$) as compared to the witnessed conditions ($M = 2.88$), indicating that the participants did register a difference in that they were slightly more swayed by the opinion of the person who was recounting the story of the meeting in the hearsay condition. Ultimately, given the lack of differences and in an effort to preserve statistical power, we collapsed the witnessing and hearsay conditions together.

mistreatment—including incivility, ostracization, and discrimination—(coded “1”) or did not (coded “0”). Using the same manipulation check as in Study 1, those who experienced vicarious mistreatment reported significantly higher agreement than those who did not, 3.76 versus 2.21; $t(918) = 19.89$, $d = 1.31$.

Gender (Bystander and Target)

Like Study 1, we manipulated the gender of the target individual (0 = man; 1 = woman) and dummy-coded bystander (i.e., participant) responses about their gender (0 = male; 1 = female).

Identity Threat

To assess the automatic System I process that is an aspect of identity threat, we adapted the identity threat *emotions* scale created by Outten et al. (2012). After reading the scenario, we asked participants to respond how reading about the situation made them feel. Participants indicated how much they experienced three emotion adjectives at the time including “angry,” “annoyed” and “resentful” ($\alpha = .92$). Then, to assess the more thought-laden System II, aspects of identity threat, we used a social identity threat scale that was created by Hall et al. (2018) to capture the *cognitive* aspect of identity threat they would expect if they were an employee at a given company. After reading the scenario, we asked bystanders (i.e., participants) to respond to four items including “If you worked at the organization in the scenario, how often do you think that people would think about your gender when judging you?” ($\alpha = .90$).

Psychological Gender Mistreatment Climate

To measure bystanders’ psychological gender mistreatment climate, we modified the items used by Kunze et al. (2011) to capture age discrimination climate to focus on mistreatment on the basis of gender. A sample item is “Gender-discriminatory behavior regarding job assignments exists in this company.” Responses were averaged such that higher scores indicated a greater perceived likelihood that gender-based mistreatment is pervasive in the company ($\alpha = .98$).

Study 3 Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 5. Although experimental tests of main and moderated effects typically involve ANOVA, our model also incorporates serial and parallel mediation. Accordingly, we employed regression in SPSS V.28 and used the Monte Carlo method with R V.4.1.1 to compute the index of moderated mediation and corresponding confidence intervals (see Table 6, for a summary of the regressions).

Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative main effect of individual justice events (i.e., vicarious mistreatment) on organizational justice perceptions. Consistent with this prediction, we detected a significant effect of vicarious mistreatment on organization justice ($b = -1.12$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$). As expected, bystanders exposed to vicarious mistreatment indicated significantly lower organizational justice perceptions than those in the control condition. Thus, Hypothesis 1 received further support. Though Hypothesis 2 predicted that this effect of vicarious mistreatment would differ by bystander gender, the Vicarious Mistreatment \times Bystander Gender interaction was not

statistically significant ($b = .02$, $SE = .16$, $p = .89$), thereby failing to support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that bystander-target gender similarity would influence the association between vicarious mistreatment and organizational justice perceptions. To test this hypothesis, we modeled a three-way interaction involving vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, and bystander-target gender similarity. This three-way interaction was not statistically significant ($b = -.14$, $SE = .23$, $p = .55$). Nevertheless, our final hypotheses predicted that Systems I and II identity threat (parallel mediation; Hypothesis 4) and psychological gender mistreatment climate (serial mediation; Hypothesis 5) would mediate the interactive effects of vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, and bystander-target gender similarity. As summarized in Table 6, the hypothesized three-way interaction was statistically significant in predicting both identity threat emotions (System I processing) and identity threat cognitions (System II processing). In turn, these System I and System II processes both significantly predicted bystanders’ psychological gender mistreatment climate perceptions (Hypothesis 4), which related significantly to bystanders’ organizational justice perceptions (Hypothesis 5). Using the Monte Carlo method, we computed the indices of moderated mediation. In sum, our results suggest that identity threat following vicarious mistreatment develops along both pathways—the more emotional System I pathway (i.e., identity threat emotions; Indirect = $-.043$, 95% CI [$-.088$, $-.002$]) and the more cognitive System II pathway (i.e., gender identity threat cognitions; Indirect = $-.039$, 95% CI [$-.076$, $-.009$]) to formulate bystander’s impressions of the organization’s psychological gender mistreatment climate.⁸ Thus, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were supported.

Follow-up analyses of the simple slopes for the mistreatment manipulation showed that the effects on identity threat (both emotion-focused and cognitive-focused) were most pronounced for female bystanders who saw female targets being mistreated (see Figure 5). To elaborate, our results show that when there is no vicarious mistreatment, participants are likely to engage in equal levels of System I and System II processing of identity threat, regardless of bystander gender or bystander-target gender similarity. However, when vicarious mistreatment is experienced, bystander-target gender similarity differentially impacts the processing of the mistreatment event. Specifically, Figure 5 shows that although both pathways significantly predict organizational climate perceptions, identity threatening emotions (System I) are more strongly triggered than are identity threatening cognitions (System II) following vicarious mistreatment. Moreover, this pattern of results is strongest when there is a female bystander and a female target. Table 7 summarizes the results of our hypothesis tests across the three studies.

⁸ Those exposed to vicarious mistreatment could attribute the mistreatment to the individual perpetrator as opposed to generalizing it to the organization overall. Consequently, we employed a six-item measure to capture perceptions of the harm created by the supervisor’s behavior and controlled for it when assessing the impact of our manipulation on perceived psychological gender mistreatment climate. After accounting for the perceived harm of the supervisor’s actions, the impact of vicarious mistreatment on perceived psychological gender mistreatment climate remained significant ($b = -.84$, $p < .001$) with those exposed to vicarious mistreatment significantly more likely to believe that there is a strong gender mistreatment climate than those in the control condition (3.807 vs. 2.964, respectively).

Table 5
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations in Study 3

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Bystander gender (female)	0.51	0.50	—					
2. Target gender (female)	0.51	0.50	−0.01	—				
3. Vicarious mistreatment	0.50	0.50	0	0	—			
4. Identity threat emotion	2.69	1.37	0.14**	.17**	.49**	—		
5. Gender identity threat	2.38	1.00	.27**	.13**	.38**	.51**	—	
6. Gender mistreatment climate	3.39	1.30	.08*	.07*	.55**	.56**	.50**	—
7. Organizational justice	2.54	1.05	−.11**	−.12**	−.56**	−.71**	−.49**	−.65**

Note. *N* = 920. Bystander gender and target gender (female) were dummy-coded (0 = male, 1 = female).

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

General Discussion

Our theorizing illuminates one reason why some bystanders in the workplace (i.e., women and those with gender similarity with the target) may be more likely than others (i.e., men and those with no gender similarity with the target) to react to justice events (specifically, vicarious mistreatment) differently: They may be more likely to experience identity threat, which informs how they perceive the organization as a whole. To develop theory in this area, we examined the effects of justice events (i.e., vicarious mistreatment) on overall justice perceptions while identifying noteworthy mediating mechanisms and novel boundary conditions of this relationship across three complementary studies. These studies employed two methodologies to operationalize vicarious mistreatment using a variety of behavioral indicators (e.g., incivility, ostracism, and discrimination), which allowed us to achieve a constructive replication of our results (Schmidt, 2016) and also helps to alleviate common method bias concerns.

To elaborate, through integrating dual-process theories of vicarious mistreatment (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; O'Reilly & Aquino, 2011) and research on bystander reactions (Latané & Darley, 1970), our work helps scholars and practitioners to understand *why* gender and gender similarity with the target are linked to bystanders'

conclusions about what is transpiring across the overall organization. This examination contributes to this literature by expanding our understanding of bystander reactions, demonstrating that differences in these can be driven by self-interested processes. Specifically, we showed that gender and gender similarity with the target alter how employees perceive the mistreatment of others, ultimately resulting in divergent levels of emotional (System I) and cognitive (System II) identity threat for bystanders processing the vicarious mistreatment (especially for women experiencing vicarious mistreatment against women). In contrast, when there is no vicarious mistreatment, identity threat reactions exist at similar levels, regardless of bystander gender or bystander-target gender similarity.

Theoretical Implications

Our integration and extension of prior research helps develop a deeper theoretical understanding of the bystander perceptions of vicarious mistreatment. We first integrate the distinct dual-process models of Dhanani and LaPalme (2019) and O'Reilly and Aquino (2011). We then extend this work by showing how bystander gender and bystander-target gender similarity alter identity threat reactions to justice events. In doing so, we propose that both emotion-based

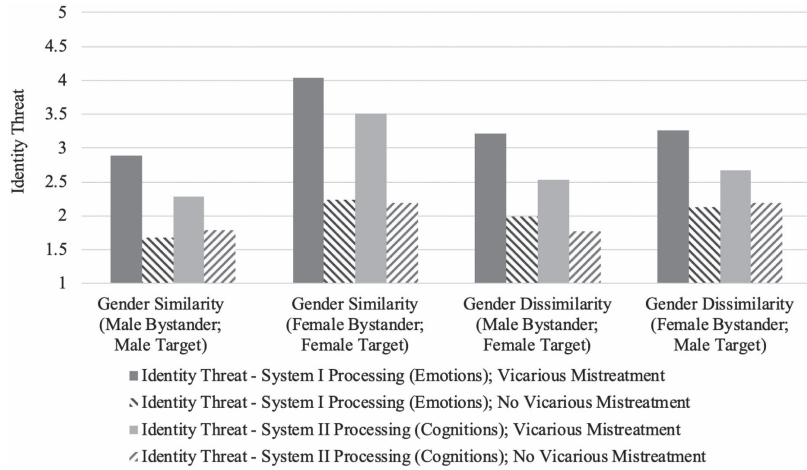
Table 6
Summary of Regression Models Predicting Organizational Justice Perceptions in Study 3

Variable	Model 1 DV: Identity threat emotions (System I)	Model 2 DV: Identity threat cognitions (System II)	Model 3 DV: Psychological gender mistreatment climate	Model 4 DV: Organizational justice perceptions
Vicarious mistreatment	1.20** (.15)	.50** (.12)	.65** (.13)	−.40** (.09)
Bystander gender (female)	.30 (.15)	.40** (.11)	.12 (.13)	.02 (.09)
Target gender (female)	.44** (.15)	−.01 (.11)	−.31* (.13)	−.09 (.09)
Vicarious Mistreatment × Bystander Gender (Female)	−.06 (.22)	.26 (.16)	.55** (.18)	.09 (.12)
Vicarious Mistreatment × Target Gender (Female)	.04 (.22)	−.02 (.16)	−.38* (.18)	−.06 (.12)
Bystander Gender (Female) × Target Gender (Female)	−.19 (.21)	.01 (.16)	−.17 (.18)	−.12 (.12)
Vicarious Mistreatment × Bystander Gender (Female) × Target Gender (Female)	.62* (.30)	.58* (.23)	.41 (.25)	.30 (.17)
Identity threat—Emotions			.28** (.03)	−.33** (.02)
Identity threat—Cognitions			.27** (.04)	−.08** (.03)
Psychological gender mistreatment climate				−.25** (.03)
<i>R</i> ²	.30	.27	.48	.62

Note. *N* = 920. Bystander gender (female) is dummy-coded (0 = male, 1 = female). DV = dependent variable.

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

Figure 5
The Interactive Effects of Vicarious Mistreatment and Gender Similarity on Identity Threat (Emotions and Cognitions) in Study 3



reactions (System I) and cognitive-based reasoning (System II) play a role in how bystanders determine whether or not they may experience a similar fate as the mistreatment target in the future, and, thus, whether organization-wide mistreatment and injustice is ongoing. In this way, the present study heeds the call of Chrobot-Mason et al. (2013) to theoretically unpack the relationship between vicarious mistreatment and justice perceptions.

First, our results indicate the existence of boundary conditions that add further nuance to the vicarious mistreatment–justice

relationship. Our findings confirm O’Reilly and Aquino (2011) contention that a person’s identity can shape their “circle of moral regard” or “scope of justice,” and this leads them to determine who is more and less deserving of concern. We contend that a key missing component in prior dual-process models is examining how gender may impact the conscious and subconscious processing of identity threat following vicarious mistreatment. O’Reilly and Aquino (2011, p. 539) called for more complicated models that incorporate self-serving motives, suggesting that “it may be that the

Table 7
Summary of the Results Across the Three Studies

Hypothesis number	Hypothesis wording	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Hypothesis 1	Vicarious mistreatment is related negatively to bystander organizational justice perceptions.	Supported	Supported	Supported
Hypothesis 2	Bystander gender moderates the effect of vicarious mistreatment on bystander organizational justice perceptions such that this relationship is stronger for female, as compared to male, bystanders.	Supported	NOT Supported	NOT Supported
Hypothesis 3	Bystander-target gender similarity moderates the effect of vicarious mistreatment on bystander organizational justice perceptions such that this relationship is stronger for bystanders of the same gender, as compared to a different gender, as the target of the discrimination.	Supported	Supported	NOT Supported
Hypothesis 4	Psychological gender mistreatment climate mediates the interactive effects of vicarious mistreatment, bystander gender, and bystander-target gender similarity on bystander organizational justice perceptions. Specifically, the negative indirect effects of vicarious mistreatment on organizational justice perceptions through psychological gender mistreatment climate will be stronger for women and those with gender similarity to the target.	N/A	Supported	Supported
Hypothesis 5	Psychological gender mistreatment climate acts as a serial mediator following the parallel mediators of identity threat emotions and identity threat cognitions. Specifically, the negative indirect effects of vicarious mistreatment on bystander organizational justice perceptions that occur via identity threat (emotions and cognitions) and subsequently gender mistreatment climate, will be stronger for women and those with gender similarity to the target.	N/A	N/A	Supported

Note. N/A = not applicable.

instrumental motive becomes even stronger when the third party belongs to the same ingroup as the target and can therefore more readily imagine being chosen as a target of injustice in the future.” By examining gender and gender similarity as moderators, we build theory that explains how gender-based bias may impact identity threat as well as organizational perceptions following vicarious mistreatment.

On average, our results related to bystander-target gender similarity add further nuance to this process as they suggest that similarity to the target impacts whether bystanders perceive the event to be an identity threatening situation. These findings move past the typical stereotype of men identifying with the perpetrator and women with the target and expands upon the original theorizing of Bowes-Sperry and O’Leary-Kelly (2005) in interesting ways. It is not solely that men do not notice or are less sensitive to discriminatory behaviors (Rowe, 2018) or that they are more likely to justify them away with euphemistic labels (Barclay et al., 2017; Jost, 2019). Instead, in Studies 1 and 2, we show that men sometimes perceive more injustice following vicarious mistreatment when the target is a man rather than a woman. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this is in Study 2 (see Figure 4), where men rated justice levels as identical whether or not vicarious mistreatment is present—provided that the target is a woman.

In Study 3, however, we found that gender similarity predicted identity threat for women, but not for men. This discrepancy might have occurred because, as higher status individuals, men may not be particularly threatened when observing the mistreatment of others at work. Instead, the injustice they register when men are discriminated against may develop through alternative pathways such as lowered belongingness or the belief that the organization favors women regardless of merit (Schnurr & Fuchs, 2022; Tost et al., 2021). Although we were unable to replicate the moderating role of gender in Study 3, we did find that women bystanders who shared a gender with the target of mistreatment were more likely to experience both automatic and conscious identity threat. As such, self-protective social identity tendencies (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the prospect of future victimization (Major & O’Brien, 2005; Petriglieri, 2011) seem to be at least one of the drivers of the perceptions following vicarious mistreatment. We encourage future research that explores other reasons why gender similarity is associated with increased justice perceptions when other people are being interrupted, ignored, or otherwise mistreated.

Overall, by highlighting that some bystanders (i.e., those with the same gender as the target) may be more likely than others to conclude that injustice is transpiring when faced with vicarious mistreatment, we build on prior work that has highlighted the more self-interested mechanisms that drive reactions to the mistreatment of others (e.g., Li, et al., 2019). In light of the detrimental outcomes that justice perceptions may have (Colquitt et al., 2001), expanding dual-process models to capture how bystanders formulate these divergent identity threat and organizational perceptions serves as a fruitful contribution. As shown by Studies 2 and 3, self-interested concerns can shape how bystanders extrapolate from witnessing a wide array of mistreatment to drawing conclusions about the general treatment of a particular gender in an organization (i.e., vicarious mistreatment leads to psychological gender mistreatment climate perceptions for threatened bystanders). This explanatory factor informs theory about how people extrapolate from justice events to form more diffuse environmental perceptions.

An interesting implication of our study is that there are some situations where men—traditionally thought to have higher power and status in the workplace—can be negatively affected by the mistreatment of others and may view it as an indicator of injustice. Although gender-based mistreatment has traditionally been levied more toward women, there are several recent surveys reporting that anywhere from 22% (Parker & Funk, 2017) to 67% (Cassino, 2016) of men reported facing at least a little mistreatment on the basis of gender. This has led Manzi (2019, p. 2) to conclude that “the fact that discrimination continues to affect women more than men, however, does not necessarily mean that men cannot be the targets of gender bias in evaluation.” Others have shown that gender-based mistreatment against men grown considerably between 2006 and 2013 (Sipe et al., 2016).

This body of work also points to the intriguing possibility that gender mistreatment may serve different functions and have different effects for men and women. Although testing different antecedents of gender mistreatment among men and women was outside the scope of the present study, there is some evidence that shows this may be the case. For example, Kobrynowicz and Branscombe (1997) found that whereas low self-esteem and high levels of assertiveness were related to mistreatment in men, high need for approval was negatively related and depression was positively related to mistreatment in women. In addition, a recent study by Tost et al. (2021) argued that men and women have different lay theories about why gender-based mistreatment occurs against men and women. Whereas women attribute mistreatment to patriarchal structures at work, men attribute mistreatment or perceived unfairness to organizations going overboard in their attempts to rectify past discrimination against women. That is, men sometimes attribute mistreatment against men to increased social awareness and a push for women’s rights and gender equality in recent years. For example, Kehn and Ruthig (2013) found that whereas women of any age viewed mistreatment against men and women as unrelated to one another, older men perceived any status gained by women as coming at the expense of men. Others have argued that high-status individuals (men, in this case) may be even more threatened by bias against members of their own ingroup as this represents a direct threat to the existing status hierarchy that they are motivated to uphold (Wilkins et al., 2017). Overall, these studies demonstrate why people with more status in the workplace (e.g., men) would see a similar other’s mistreatment as an indicator of organizational injustice. Although we only test the mediating roles of identity threat thought and emotion in the present study, we encourage future research that examines alternate mediators for male bystanders of vicarious mistreatment.

Managerial Implications

First, we suggest that managers and supervisors should be cognizant of the impact that workplace mistreatment can have, even for employees other than the target. In particular, merely witnessing or hearing about mistreatment incidents is enough to form negative appraisals about not only the perpetrators, but also about the workplace context in general. Open-door policies, transparent decision making, and anonymous HR hotlines could help create an environment that centers around maintaining justice and provide bystanders more information to process vicarious mistreatment. In addition, given that men may attribute vicarious mistreatment to organizations

wanting to appear pro-women (Tost et al., 2021), we also urge top managers to communicate clearly the reasoning behind any policies designed to help create gender parity and emphasize that workplace mistreatment in all forms will not be tolerated, regardless of the target's gender.

Second, as our findings show the cascading effects of mistreatment, organizations can use this same notion to consider the role of others in the prevention of mistreatment. That is, our results imply that men are less likely to view mistreatment against women as unjust, which could lead to a form of bystander effect (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005) wherein men do not act when women are targeted by mistreatment in organizations. Organizational leaders, still primarily men, are unlikely to intervene to stop mistreatment if they do not perceive these acts as personally relevant and unfair in the first place. Accordingly, the gender composition of grievance committees, HR staff, and line managers should be taken into consideration to ensure that people are appropriately considerate and open to the concerns of all employees (Salin, 2011). Further, implicit bias training should be conducted to make managers aware of these findings so that they question their own assumptions when subordinates—particularly those of the opposing gender—have a complaint (see King et al., 2010, for best practices). Holland et al. (2016) also found that training bystanders helped to increase both their felt responsibility and action, suggesting that this may be a useful way to overcome the differential responses we uncovered.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with any study, there are limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the methodological designs of each study come with natural limitations. One critical limitation is that our experimental studies featured manipulations that involved a number of different mistreatment behaviors at once (e.g., ignoring, interrupting, attributing ideas to someone of the opposite gender, denying a promotion). In Study 2, vicarious mistreatment was calculated based on self-reported gender discrimination of peers in the work unit to a single item, as this was a natural way to collect the data in such a large field study. Thus, although we agree with McCord et al. (2018) that each of these forms of mistreatment are indicators tapping into larger latent construct, there is no clear way to discern whether each of the mistreatment behaviors individually would result in the same justice perceptions. Moreover, although the operationalization of vicarious mistreatment in Study 2 follows precedent set by prior studies (e.g., Glomb et al., 1997), we cannot be sure that bystanders actually witnessed or heard about the mistreatment. Still, we contend that military troops, in particular, are likely to be rather tightknit and spend lots of time together in their groups (e.g., exercising and sleeping in close proximity), making complete ignorance of discriminatory actions unlikely. Moreover, the replicability of our results across three studies featuring diverse methodologies and mistreatment behaviors suggests that there was a reasonable level of awareness about the mistreatment happening to others in the bystander's unit in Study 2. Nevertheless, the results of Study 2 are not directly comparable to the experiments given that our method of calculating vicarious mistreatment allowed for multiple targets of mistreatment (rather than a single justice event). We encourage more field studies that employ conventional methods of measuring vicarious mistreatment with bystander ratings (e.g., "How often did you

witness each discriminatory behavior in the past 12 months," Woodford et al., 2012) as well as experimental studies that manipulate individual mistreatment behaviors in isolation.

In addition, we note that gender mistreatment climate was calculated using responses to two survey items in Study 2 rather than using validated climate scales. Although in Study 3, we used an established mistreatment climate scale, further replication is required here as well. There are also potential conceptual shortcomings with the use of psychological climate as a mediator that leaves our model somewhat underspecified. Although we attempted to uncover the black box of why vicarious mistreatment would lead to climate perceptions in Study 3 (i.e., because of identity threat in bystanders), in this work, we have not clearly pinned down the exact psychological mechanism of *why* identity threats and psychological mistreatment climate are associated with lower organizational justice perceptions. Prior research points to several possibilities. For example, individuals who witness poignant justice events may conclude that such acts are contagious (Salanova et al., 2005) or can be learned through socialization (Schneider, & Reichers, 1983), leading them to conclude that their organization is an unfair place overall. Alternatively (or in addition), it may be that people experiencing identity threat will become more vigilant of their environments (Murphy et al., 2007), making them more attune to injustice cues. Testing these and other mechanisms in future research to better understand the psychological processes linking identity threat, gender mistreatment climate, and organizational justice constitute key next steps for expanding on our theoretical notions. As our results provide initial evidence implicating the organization in the mistreatment-justice process, it is critical that more research is conducted to understand the psychological steps individuals take in forming these perceptions.

Finally, we note that the justice outcome variable in Study 1 and Study 3 was assessed by asking questions about the supervisor's behavior in the hypothetical meeting given that the participants had little information about the broader organization beyond the one depicted interaction (e.g., they did not know the company's official policies or performance review procedures). As we did not manipulate our mediators, the nature of our experimental designs prevents us from drawing conclusions of causality (Spencer et al., 2005; Stone-Romero & Rosopa, 2011). Moreover, as we were able to temporally separate these constructs in Study 2, we caution the reader about the possibility of an inverse causal order (i.e., that perceptions of injustice may influence broader climate perceptions). Still, we note that recent reviews on organizational climate (e.g., Schneider et al., 2017) have concluded that process climates such as discrimination and diversity climates can lead to both individual behaviors and organizational attitudes, lending confidence to our hypothesized sequence of events. To further expand on our research model, we suggest a more complex design in future studies that considers the gender of the perpetrator. This would align with prior qualitative work deeming this factor important for how people label potential instances of bullying (Salin, 2011). We are also unable to ascertain how having a higher percentage of women in the workplace would impact justice perceptions following exposure to vicarious mistreatment given the balanced gender composition of the experimental vignettes and the low percentage of women in the military sample. Thus, we encourage future research in women-dominated occupations and industries.

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