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# GENDER AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Research on sexual harassment is still in its infancy. Over the past 20 years, research has moved from prevalence studies to more sophisticated empirical and theoretical analyses of the causes and consequences of sexual harassment. This review provides an overview of the prevalence and measurement of harassment along with some suggestions for developing standard measures of sexual harassment. Researchers are encouraged to include organizational forms of harassment in their measures, along with commonly understood individual forms. The most prominent and promising explanations of harassment are discussed including societal, organizational, and individual level approaches. Of particular promise are approaches incorporating the gendered nature of organizational structures and processes. Research on the responses to and consequences of sexual harassment are also presented. The review ends with a discussion of overlooked areas and directions for future research, including the need for more advanced survey data collection techniques and qualitative research.

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Even social scientists didn't study it, and they study everything that moves.  
Catherine MacKinnon (1987:106; commenting on the  
lack of information about sexual harassment)

Twenty years ago, the study of sexual harassment focussed on whether or not sexual harassment was a social problem worthy of study and on descriptive analyses of its prevalence. In recent years, research has shifted to more sophisticated empirical and theoretical analyses of the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. Research now exists that attempts to answer many of the fundamental questions surrounding sexual harassment: What is sexual harass-

ment? How prevalent is sexual harassment? What are the predictors of sexual harassment? And what are the responses to and consequences of sexual harassment? This review outlines the major accomplishments in this field, some of its pitfalls, and research directions for the future.

## WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

From a legal standpoint, sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination composed of two forms of behavior: quid pro quo harassment and hostile environment harassment. Quid pro quo harassment involves sexual threats or bribery that are made a condition of employment or used as the basis for employment decisions. Hostile environment harassment captures those behaviors, such as sexual jokes, comments, and touching, that interfere with an individual's ability to do her/his job or that create an "intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment" (US EEOC 1980). This includes forms of gender harassment such as gender-based hazing and put-downs. After examining US legal decisions in sexual harassment cases, Schultz (1998b) comes to the following conclusion:

Of course making a woman the object of sexual attention can also work to undermine her image and self-confidence as a capable worker. Yet, much of the time, harassment assumes a form that has little or nothing to do with sexuality but everything to do with gender. (p. 1687)

At its core, sexual harassment is often about letting women know they are not welcome in certain workplaces and that they are not respected members of the work group (Reskin & Padavic 1994). Sexual harassment continues to hamper employment opportunities for many women and men.

## THE PREVALENCE AND MEASUREMENT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

### *How Prevalent Is Sexual Harassment?*

Considerable variation exists in the estimated proportions of women reporting experiences with sexual harassment.<sup>1</sup> Depending on the sample used, 16% to 90% of working women experience sexual harassment in their lifetime (e.g. Brooks & Perot 1991, Gutek 1985, Terpstra & Baker 1989, US MSPB 1981). The recent US National Women's Study conducted by the Crime Victims and Treatment Center found 12% of women experienced harassment in their life-

<sup>1</sup>Most studies focus on the sexual harassment of women. Men's experiences are an understudied aspect of sexual harassment and are discussed later in this review. This discussion focuses on workplace sexual harassment. Researchers interested in the phenomenon of public harassment are referred to research by Gardner (1995).

time (Dansky & Kilpatrick 1997:164). Researchers agree that this study underestimates nonverbal forms of hostile environment harassment (e.g. posting of pornography in the workplace and graffiti) and harassment perpetrated by coworkers. In Canada, studies using random samples of the general population, estimate that lifetime sexual harassment rates for women vary from 23% (Welsh & Nierobisz 1997) to 51% (Gruber 1997). Gruber's (1990) content analysis of 18 sexual harassment surveys found the median prevalence rate to be 44%. When coworker behavior is included, the prevalence rate ranges from 40% to 50% (Fitzgerald et al 1995c). The brief overview of prevalence rates highlights one of the major problems confronting the empirical study of sexual harassment, as these differences are attributed, in part, to survey measurement issues.

### *Measuring Sexual Harassment*

Some measurement issues identified as problematic in research on sexual harassment include differences in sampled populations, response rates, number of sexual harassment items, and context and time frame of questions (see Gruber 1990, 1992, Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993, Arvey & Cavanaugh 1995, Welsh & Nierobisz 1997). For example, studies with higher survey response rates that use random samples tend to report lower prevalence rates than do other studies. As well, in early sexual harassment surveys there was little consensus as to how sexual harassment was defined. Most surveys provided a list of sexual behaviors derived in part from the EEOC definition. Often these lists of behaviors were neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive (Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993, Gruber 1992). Survey items also tended to be nonspecific such as asking about "pressure for relationships" or experiencing "sexual remarks and teasing" (e.g. CHRC 1983). Extremely brief items are problematic for they may be interpreted differently by survey respondents. To overcome this, Fitzgerald & Shullman (1993) advocate the use of detailed and behaviorally based items to ensure that respondents interpret survey items in a similar manner. These types of items also improve respondents' recall of their experiences (Sudman & Bradburn 1982). As well, items should ask respondents about "unwanted" sexual experiences and should not use the term "sexual harassment" (Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993). In response to these early measurement problems, two comprehensive and fairly consistent schemes for measuring sexual harassment have emerged in the literature: the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (Fitzgerald et al 1988) and the Inventory of Sexual Harassment (Gruber 1992).

The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) presents sexual harassment as a three-dimensional construct consisting of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (e.g., Fitzgerald et al 1988, 1995b, Gelfand et al 1995). Each dimension of harassment utilizes multiple indicators. Gender harassment represents sexist and derogatory comments and jokes

about women in general. Unwanted sexual attention consists of unsolicited sexual remarks, questions and/or sexual touching. Finally, sexual coercion captures all forms of sexual solicitations. The three harassment dimensions of the SEQ parallel legal constructs, with gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention linked to hostile environment harassment and sexual coercion linked to quid pro quo harassment (Fitzgerald et al 1997b:11). Overall, the founders of the SEQ define sexual harassment as a “psychological construct” consisting of “unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding her resources, or threatening her well-being” (Fitzgerald et al 1997b:15).

To increase the reliability of responses, survey items of the SEQ are “behaviorally-based,” including references to specific sexual behaviors (Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993, Welsh & Nierobisz 1997). Responses are classified on either a three-point or five-point Likert scale, measuring how often the harassment occurred (Gefland et al 1995, Fitzgerald et al 1995a). In one study of a public utility company, Fitzgerald et al (1995a) report alpha reliability coefficients of .82 for gender harassment, .85 for unwanted sexual attention, and .42 for sexual coercion (p. 435). The low value for sexual coercion reflects the lower base rate of this type of harassment compared to others. Since the SEQ builds on the empirically based categories of Till (1980), Fitzgerald et al (1997b) believe content validity is built into their measure. As well, most items are highly correlated with the criterion item “I have been sexually harassed” (Fitzgerald et al 1997b:13). Based on these types of analyses, the SEQ creators believe their instrument is designed to meet existing reliability and validity standards (Fitzgerald et al 1997b, 1995a) with initial reviews concurring (Arvey & Cavanaugh 1995).

The second measure, the Inventory of Sexual Harassment (ISH), was developed through the content analysis of previously published sexual harassment studies and court cases (Gruber 1992). The ISH consists of three categories of harassment: verbal comments, verbal requests, and nonverbal displays. This scheme captures severity of the harassment because sexual behaviors within each category fall on a continuum of less-to-more severe (see Gruber 1992, 1997, Gruber et al 1996 for details). Using the ISH, Gruber and colleagues (Gruber et al 1996, Gruber 1997) present evidence of the “universality” of women’s sexual harassment experiences in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Although the ISH is critiqued for conflating legal distinctions between quid pro quo and hostile environment harassment, it can be used to add a level of specificity to the general SEQ categories (Fitzgerald et al 1997b:12; see Welsh et al 1998, for example).

More work on measurement is needed. First, separate indicators or subscales of frequency, duration, directness, and offensiveness for specific types of harassment should be developed further. Because both the causes and im-

fact of harassment are not consistent across all types of harassment, these more refined measures are necessary (Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993, Gruber et al 1996, Gruber 1998). Second, cumulative or multidimensional measures of sexual harassment should be developed, as most harassment behaviors do not occur in isolation (Gruber et al 1996, Fitzgerald et al 1995b; for examples, see Schneider et al 1997, Macmillan et al 1996). Third, researchers other than the creators of the SEQ and the ISH need to perform reliability and validity tests on these measures (e.g. Stockdale & Hope 1997). These two measurement schemes represent the first step in developing standard harassment measures. Yet other researchers are slow to incorporate either the SEQ or the ISH and to test their relative reliability and validity. For example, the US National Women's Study conducted in the early 1990s used its own method of classification. Although the costs of incorporating multiple measures of sexual harassment into surveys is high, analyses are needed as to the relative strengths and weaknesses of available measures of sexual harassment. And finally, as is discussed in the next section, more attention is needed to the range of harassing behaviors included in sexual harassment measures. For the past 20 years, sociological research on sexual harassment has been limited by the ways surveys have been constructed.<sup>2</sup> This has resulted in sexual harassment being viewed primarily as an unambiguous individual phenomenon of men harassing women (Williams 1997). Yet, what constitutes sexual harassment may be subjective, based on an individual's perceptions or the organizational context in which she works. In the following section, I discuss some of the implications of the subjective nature of sexual harassment for using survey data.

### *Is It Sexual Harassment? Labeling Sexual Behaviors*

Although survey respondents often report being the targets of unwanted sexual behaviors, many respondents do not define these behaviors as sexual harassment (e.g. Fitzgerald et al 1997b). Yet, when using survey responses, it is common for researchers to define all unwanted sexual behaviors as sexual harassment, whether the respondent defines them as such (see Gruber 1998 for notable exception). This phenomenon has led some to focus on the gap between objective and subjective perceptions of harassment or the likelihood respondents will label their experiences as sexual harassment (e.g. Vaux 1993, Folgero & Fjeldstad 1995, Williams 1997).

Some explanations are offered as to why respondents may be unwilling to label, or be more sensitive to, certain types of unwanted sexual behavior. First, social psychologists find women and men both with more traditional sex-role attitudes label fewer behaviors as sexual harassment (e.g. Johnson et al 1991, Tangri & Hayes 1997). In terms of experiencing harassment though, this find-

<sup>2</sup>In psychology, research also relied on analogue studies of college students.

ing is not consistent across all work contexts. Rosenberg and colleagues (1993) found female attorneys with feminist orientations were less likely than their more traditional counterparts to report experiences with sexual harassment. Second, individual differences such as sexual orientation, race, and the organizational position of the harasser influence the self-labeling of harassment experiences (Giuffre & Williams 1994). Giuffre & Williams (1994) offer a compelling explanation for the process behind self-labeling. Heterosexual norms in workplaces make sexual interaction between coworkers of the same race and sexual orientation seem less problematic. It is when sexual interaction crosses racial, sexual orientation, or organizational power lines that targets of the behavior are more likely to label their experiences as sexual harassment. Third, the characteristics of the harassment matter as targets of harassment are more likely to label severe, pervasive, or frequent sexual behaviors as sexual harassment (Stockdale et al 1995).<sup>3</sup>

Recent qualitative studies highlight how organizational culture contributes to employees' willingness and ability to label sexual behaviors as sexual harassment (e.g. Folgero & Fjeldstad 1995). In some masculine work cultures, women, in order to be seen as competent and as teamplayers, may not define their experiences as sexual harassment (Collinson & Collinson 1996). As well, in other workplaces, sexual behaviors commonly understood as sexual harassment may in fact be requirements of the job (Williams 1997:4). That is, organizations may sanction or mandate the sexualized treatment of workers. For example, management may require waitresses to wear tight skirts (Loe 1996), customers in bars may be encouraged to "talk dirty" to waitresses by ordering drinks with sexually-loaded names like "Screaming Orgasm" (Williams 1997:22; Giuffre & Williams 1994:387), or for new female coal miners sexualized hazing rituals may be considered part of their initiation into workgroups (e.g. Yount 1991).<sup>4</sup>

In these sexually charged or permissive work cultures, degrading and sexual behaviors become an "institutionalized" component of work and, thus,

<sup>3</sup>Much debate exists over whether or not men and women hold different perceptions of sexual harassment. Gender differences in perceptions of harassment tend to disappear when the context of the harassment (frequency, severity, and pervasiveness) are considered (Gutek & O'Connor 1995). Gutek (1995) provides a good overview of this issue and concludes that what women and men perceive as harassment, or as more or less severe harassment, is similar.

<sup>4</sup>Beyond the scope of this review is the enjoyment and power some women gain through sexual interactions at work (e.g. Pringle 1988). See Williams (1997) for a recent discussion of this issue and how it links to sexual harassment. Also related to the issue of power is that of consent, especially as typified by professor-student consensual relations (e.g. Refinetti 1997). Discussions of sexual consent are intertwined with issues of "political correctness," with what are appropriate policies for harassment and freedom of speech (Holloway & Jefferson 1996). This review does not have space to do justice to these arguments. Interested readers are referred to the volume on "Sexual harassment and sexual consent" in the journal *Sexuality and Culture* (1997).

may not be considered sexual harassment (Williams 1997). This process of institutionalization involves the normalization of sexual harassment, whereby "individual workers may not define their experiences as sexual harassment, even if they feel sexually degraded by them" (Williams 1997:26, Loe 1996).

To what extent do we need to worry about the gap between experiencing unwanted sexual behaviors and labeling these behaviors sexual harassment? Some believe we have little to worry about in terms of the validity of harassment measures because the perception of the target is incorporated into measures by default (Tangri & Hayes 1997:122). For Fitzgerald et al (1997b), the main implication of self-labeling is that experiences respondents do not label as harassment are less likely to enter the legal system. This does not mean these experiences have no effect. Respondents who were the objects of unwanted sexual behaviors, regardless of whether they labeled their experiences as sexual harassment, experienced more negative psychological and work-related outcomes than respondents who did not experience any unwanted sexual behaviors (Fitzgerald et al 1997b:23). In terms of survey measurement, the inclusion of an item which asks "did you consider this sexual harassment?" can be used to determine how differences in outcomes may be affected by self-labeling. This is not the answer for all research issues though. In some instances, unambiguous measures that parallel legal definitions of harassment are useful, such as when examining the effect of sexual harassment policies on the occurrence of sexual harassment (e.g. Gruber 1998).

Yet, some aspects of the problems regarding self-labeling of harassment are not resolved by asking the respondent whether or not their experience constituted sexual harassment. Williams (1997) believes this problem will continue to complicate the validity of harassment measures due to the limited range of behaviors incorporated into social science conceptualizations. For example, the experience of institutionalized forms of harassment, where workers consent to sexual behaviors as part of their job, are not likely to be captured by survey items that specify respondents should report "unwanted" sexual behaviors (Williams 1997:23). To overcome this, some researchers suggest turning to ethnographic methods to uncover ambiguous forms of sexual harassment and to bridge the gap between objective and subjective measures (Williams 1997, Avery & Cavanaugh 1995).

This highlights an underlying tension between survey research and qualitative methods when studying sexual harassment. Williams (1997) criticizes survey research for emphasizing the harassment of women by men and for overlooking how heterosexual norms in organizations exploit workers' sexuality and may lead to same-sex harassment. Yet, it is not survey methods per se that are the problem. Just as the courts are slow to take up forms of harassment that do not fit "our top-down, male-female sexual come-on image of harassment" (Schultz 1998a, 1998b), so are social science researchers. We know that

workers tolerated hostile work environments long before these environments were recognized as such legally (Fitzgerald et al 1997b:7). And, as qualitative research illustrates, workers continue to tolerate same-sex harassment and organizationally sanctioned harassment not captured in current measurement schemes. As we gain a better understanding of the range and context of unwanted sexual behaviors, sexual harassment's effective empirical measurement becomes not only more critical but more complicated.

## THEORIES AND EXPLANATIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

If there is a weakness in studies of sexual harassment, it is the lack of systematic theoretical explanations for why sexual harassment occurs. As Tangri & Hayes (1997:113) point out, most sexual harassment studies offer descriptive models that primarily describe covariates and do not offer explanations as to why sexual harassment occurs. Grounded in feminist, social psychological, and psychological frameworks, several models exist that break explanations of harassment into the primary correlates of sexual harassment (e.g. target characteristics, occupational/organizational characteristics, and offender characteristics) and theoretical explanations of sexual harassment (e.g. sex-role spillover and power-dominance models, e.g. Stockdale 1996, Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993, Hulin et al 1996). In the following section, I first outline the most prominent explanations and theories of sexual harassment found in sociological analyses of sexual harassment. This builds on Tangri et al's (1982) influential discussion of the "Sociocultural" model and the "Organizational" model. Tangri and colleagues (1982) also discuss the "natural/biological model" which proposes sexual harassment is the natural outcome of men's stronger sex drive and men's role as the sexual aggressor (e.g. Studd & Gattiker 1991). For an update and critique of this model, researchers may consult Tangri & Hayes (1997).

### *Societal Level Explanations and the Sociocultural Model*

The sociocultural model posits that sexual harassment is a product of culturally legitimated power and status differences between men and women (Farley 1978, MacKinnon 1979). Sociocultural explanations fit with the "feminist" or "dominance" model that emphasizes sexual harassment's origins in patriarchal society (e.g. MacKinnon 1979, Cockburn 1991, Stanko 1985, Rospenda et al 1998, Padavic & Orcutt 1997). Sexual harassment is perceived to be an outgrowth of the gender socialization process and is a mechanism by which men assert power and dominance over women both at work and in society (Tangri et al 1982). Proponents of this approach emphasize gender as a key predictor of who is at risk of harassment, in light of empirical evidence that women experience more harassment than men (Tangri et al 1982, Gutek 1985, USMPSB 1981).

The sociocultural model also emphasizes how individual-level correlates, such as age and marital status, mediate women's low status and lack of sociocultural power (e.g. Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber 1993, Padavic & Orcutt 1997). For example, single women and young women may be viewed as more available for sexual interaction than do other women, and hence, they may experience higher levels of sexual harassment than other women (e.g., Gruber & Bjorn 1982, Lafontaine & Tredeau 1986, US MSPB 1981). Some argue that age not only captures the "impact of youth per se" but is also a proxy for low seniority or poor job status (Gruber 1998:312). Individual-level correlates of age and marital status are mediated by occupational context (Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber 1993). For example, among older women in the United States, those who are professionals experience less harassment than do non-professional women (Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber 1993).

### *Organizational-Level Explanations*

A diverse set of explanations for sexual harassment focus on the role of organizations, ranging from theoretical explanations of power to descriptions of organizational characteristics that are correlated with the likelihood of sexual harassment. Underlying many of these explanations are the ways power differences in organizations promote sexual harassment and perpetuate inequality (Rospenda et al 1998:42).

**FORMAL AND INFORMAL ORGANIZATIONAL POWER** Some organizational models emphasize how inequities in structural or formal power in organizations lead to harassment. Individuals with formal organizational power, such as managers, may use their position to harass subordinates (e.g., Benson & Thomson 1982, MacKinnon 1979). An underlying assumption is that it is men holding managerial positions who are harassing women subordinates. However, research showing that harassers are more likely to be co-workers (e.g. Gutek 1985) and that harassers may sometimes be subordinates (Grauerholz 1989, McKinney 1994, Rospenda et al 1998) highlights the limitations of such explanations.

Most researchers agree that conceptualizations of organizational power must be broadened to include interpersonal modes of power (see Cleveland & Kerst 1993 for extensive review; Grauerholz 1996). For example, co-workers with individual or informal sources of power, such as personality, expertise, and access to critical information, may be more likely to engage in harassment than others (Cleveland & Kerst 1993). In terms of contrapower harassment, whereby a subordinate harasses someone with formal organizational power, sociocultural power may compensate for the lack of organizational power (e.g. McKinney 1990, 1992). Rospenda and associates illustrate how sociocultural and interpersonal forms of power are used by perpetrators to subordinate the victim's organizational power, as seen in the case of a white fe-

male senior faculty member harassed by a black administrator (1998:55). While formal organizational power still has contextualized effects in terms of who is harassed and how targets react to their harassment, it is clear that harassment studies need to incorporate the multiple hierarchies of power which “can make people simultaneously powerful and powerless in relation to others” (Miller 1997:50). By doing so, we move away from always conceptualizing the harasser as male and powerful and the target as female and powerless.

**NUMERICAL AND NORMATIVE DOMINANCE** Numerically skewed sex ratios in work situations, such as female-dominated and male-dominated work groups, play a prominent role in explanations of sexual harassment. Some approaches focus on the gender roles associated with female and male-dominated work situations (e.g. sex role spillover), while others discuss the issue in terms of numerical dominance of males over females in certain workplaces (contact hypothesis). Those interested in whether these approaches are considered theories, hypotheses, or descriptions of correlates are referred to previous reviews of sexual harassment research (e.g. Tangri & Hayes 1997, Stockdale 1996). In this review, I focus on the process by which numerically skewed work situations are linked to sexual harassment. In the following two sections, I discuss the primary ways normative dominance (gender roles) and numerical dominance (workgroup gender ratios) in work situations are used to explain the occurrence of sexual harassment (e.g. Gruber 1998).

*Sex role spillover* Sex role spillover theory is considered one of the primary theories of sexual harassment (Tangri & Hayes 1997, Stockdale 1996). According to Gutek, when women’s gender roles take precedence over their work roles, sex role “spillover” occurs (Gutek & Morach 1982, Gutek 1985). This happens most often when the gender ratio is heavily skewed toward either men or women because skewed situations render “femaleness” more salient and visible (Kanter 1977, Stockdale 1996a:10). Under these circumstances, sexual harassment is more likely. For example, in female-dominated work situations, feminine roles become equated with the job, such as expectations that nurses are “nurturing” or waitresses are “sexy” (Gutek 1985, Nieva & Gutek 1981). In male-dominated workplaces, where women are competing with men for jobs, men attempt to emphasize women coworkers’ status as women over their status as workers (DiTomaso 1989:88). Doing this allows men to put women in their “proper” subordinate position. Overall, sex-role spillover theory highlights how gender-based normative expectations prevail in numerically skewed work situations.

Support for this approach has been mixed. Women in male-typed jobs are more likely to experience sexual harassment than women in female-typed and integrated occupations (Gutek & Morasch 1982, Gutek & Cohen 1987), but

they are not necessarily more likely to label their experiences as sexual harassment (Konrad & Gutek 1986, Ragins & Scandura 1995). Studies of sex-role spillover are limited by their use of occupational sex ratios as proxies for sex roles. Social constructionists provide a more fundamental critique of sex-role spillover theory. Based on critiques of sex-role theory in general, sex-role spillover theory conceptualizes gender and sexuality as elements that are “smuggled” into gender-neutral, asexual organizations by gendered workers (Rogers & Henson 1997:216). Measures of occupational sex ratios do not capture the gendered organizational processes that foster sex role spillover.

*The contact hypothesis and numerical dominance* The contact hypothesis (Gutek et al 1990, Gruber 1998) views harassment as a function of the contact between men and women in the workplace, rather than emphasizing the gender role expectations associated with certain jobs. Here, numerical dominance is seen as distinct from, though interrelated to, normative dominance (Gruber 1998). For example, a female secretary who works in an environment numerically dominated by males and who has more contact with men, will experience more severe harassment than her counterparts in integrated workplaces or those numerically dominated by females (e.g. Gutek et al 1990, Gruber 1997). Direct support for the contact hypothesis is found when measures of contact are based on respondents’ reports of daily contact with men as opposed to occupational sex ratios (e.g. Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber 1993, Gutek et al 1990, Gruber 1998).

Complicating numerical dominance are male-dominated or “doubly-male” workgroups where both numerical and normative dominance are present. In these “male preserves” (see Gruber 1997 for overview; Gruber 1998, Martin 1980, DiTomaso 1989) or “masculine job gender contexts” (Hulin et al 1996), “the traditionality of an *occupation* creates a work culture that is an extension of male culture, and numerical dominance of the *workplace* by men heightens the visibility of, and hostility toward, women workers who are perceived as violating men’s territory” (Gruber 1998:303). Ultimately this leads to extensive and aggressive forms of sexual harassment not usually found in other workgroups (e.g. Stanko 1985, Martin & Jurik 1996).

Gruber’s (1998) analysis represents one of the few empirical attempts to tease out the relative effects of numerical (gender ratio of workgroup) and normative dominance (occupational sex ratio) on sexual harassment experiences. He finds that the amount of contact with men, or the gender ratio of workgroups, is helpful for understanding both the likelihood of experiencing harassment and the occurrence of specific types of harassment. The effect of normative dominance, or occupational sex ratios, provides less explanatory power than does numerical dominance. It also is not significantly related to physical threats and sexual materials, forms of sexual harassment common to

male-dominated workplaces. Gender predominance, an interaction term of the gender ratio of workgroups and occupational sex ratios used to capture the combination of normative and numerical dominance found in male preserves, was an important predictor of exposure to sexual materials and physical threats. Gruber concludes that studies that rely solely on occupational sex ratios as their measure of gender dominance probably overestimate the effect of gendered occupational roles and underestimate the effect of the numerical gendered context. Overall, most survey-based studies attempting to capture normative and numerical dominance are hindered by the use of occupational and workgroup gender ratios as proxies for underlying gendered processes and organizational structures. These processes are not easily captured by survey measures. Qualitative studies can complement quantitative studies by demonstrating how numerical and normative dominance are interrelated and where they diverge (e.g. Rogers & Henson 1997, Collinson & Collinson 1996).

**ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE** Because organizational culture represents the norms of appropriate behavior and values held by organizational members (Hall 1994), it is not surprising researchers are turning to culture to explain why sexual harassment occurs in some organizations and not in others (e.g. Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber 1993, Hulin et al 1996, Pryor et al 1993). Early on, Gutek (1985) proposed that “unprofessional” or disorganized ambiances, such as antagonistic relationships between coworkers or drinking on the job, would increase the likelihood of sexual harassment of women. More recently, Ragins & Scandura (1995) discuss how the physical nature of blue-collar work promotes a “physical culture” resulting in more aggressive forms of sexual harassment (p. 449).

Organizational cultures that tolerate sexual harassment are linked to increased incidents of sexual harassment (e.g. Hulin et al 1996, Pryor et al 1993). Pryor and associates’ (1993) person/situation framework illustrates how men who are highly likely to sexually harass are encouraged to do so by “local” norms of sexual and aggressive behaviors supported by supervisors and peers. In contrast, proactive sexual harassment policies, or attempts to modify the workplace culture through training sessions and official complaint procedures, are particularly effective for reducing hostile environment harassment (Gruber 1998).

**THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK** Relatively few studies incorporate how the technical organization of work, such as task characteristics, interacts with the social organization of work (e.g. DiTomaso 1989, Kauppinen-Toropainen & Gruber 1993, Lach & Gwartney-Gibbs 1993). In part, this gap is due to the influence of psychologists on the area and their predominant interest in individuals and their interactions (e.g. Stockdale 1996, Hulin et al 1996). Looking

at the organization of work, alienating work conditions, such as physically demanding or repetitive jobs, may be partly responsible for women's experiences of sexual harassment in male-typed jobs. Some researchers see men's harassment of women and sexual horseplay in the workplace as an attempt to forge human contact and to overcome boring work (e.g. Hearn & Parkin 1987:85; Hearn 1985). On the other hand, engaging in sexually aggressive behavior and harassment may be an act of resistance that demonstrates opposition to women's presence in traditionally male jobs (e.g. Miller 1997, Hearn & Parkin 1987). As Cockburn reminds us, "men's morale and solidarity in their struggle against the boss is sometimes achieved directly at the expense of women" (1991:148).

**GENDERED ORGANIZATIONS AND DOING GENDER** Recent attention by sexual harassment researchers to the gendered processes of organizations (e.g. Acker 1990) and to "doing gender" (e.g. West & Zimmerman 1987, West & Fenstermaker 1995) has begun to clarify how the organization of work is connected to sexual harassment. As stated by Rogers & Henson (1997:234), "sexual harassment is about particular constructions of gender, especially organizational imperatives to 'do gender' in a particular manner" (Lorber 1994, West & Zimmerman 1987). For example, the deferential behavior of temporary workers, stemming from the feminized and powerless status of their job, increases workers' vulnerability and potential for experiencing sexual harassment (Rogers & Henson 1997:224; see also Folgero & Fjeldstad 1995). Not surprising, studies that focus on the socially constructed nature of sexual harassment are qualitative. This research represents an important advance in the field by moving beyond variables of sex-ratios and organizational culture to explain sexual harassment, drawing our attention to how organizational norms of heterosexuality and power construct gender and facilitate sexual harassment (e.g. Schneider 1982, Collinson & Collinson 1989, Williams 1997, Rospenda et al 1998).

### *Individual-Level Explanations*

A variety of approaches focus on individual-level characteristics of harassment targets to explain whether sexual harassment is likely to occur. Some of these were discussed above, such as sociocultural characteristics and sources of individual power (e.g. Gruber & Bjorn 1986). The link between offender characteristics and sexual harassment has been examined by psychologists. Using insights from research on the proclivities of rapists, Pryor (1987, Pryor et al 1993) finds men who score high on his Likelihood-to-Sexually-Harass scale are more likely than other men to harass women in circumstances that tolerate sexual contact between men and women. For an overview of individual-level psychological approaches to sexual harassment, such as the role of sexual arousal, readers may find Stockdale (1996) informative.

## REACTIONS TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Research suggests that women's responses to sexual harassment fall along a continuum of avoidance, diffusion, negotiation, and confrontation (Gruber 1989). Most women do not report their experiences of sexual harassment. Instead they are more likely to ignore the harassment (Benson & Thomson 1982, Cochran et al 1997, Gruber & Bjorn 1982, Loy & Stewart 1984), to deflect the harassment by joking or going along with it (Gutek 1985, USMSPB 1981 1987), or to avoid the harasser (Cochran et al 1997, Culbertson et al 1992, Gutek 1985, Schneider 1991; see Yoder & Aniakudo 1995 for exception). In Culbertson et al's (1992) study of the US Navy, only 12% of the enlisted women and 5% of the women officers who experienced harassment filed formal complaints. Women do not report harassment for a variety of reasons ranging from a fear of retaliation or disbelief to a fear of losing one's job or making the situation worse (Loy & Stewart 1984, Cochran et al 1997, Schneider 1991, Fitzgerald et al 1995c). Assertive or direct responses tend to occur in a variety of contexts, such as when the harassment is severe (Brooks & Perot 1991, Cochran et al 1997, Gutek & Koss 1993, Livingston 1982, USMSPB 1981); when the harasser is not a supervisor (Gruber & Smith 1995); when policies and procedures are in place to combat sexual harassment (Gruber & Smith 1995); when the percentage of women in an occupation is either at parity with men or a threatening minority (Gruber & Bjorn 1986, Gruber & Smith 1995); and, finally, when the harassment target holds feminist attitudes (Gruber & Smith 1995, Brooks & Perot 1991). Respondents who are more tolerant of sexual harassment are less likely to see their experiences as severe and hence respond less assertively (Cochran et al 1997). Moving beyond assertive versus nonassertive responses to harassment, Fitzgerald et al (1995c) offer a framework of externally and internally focused strategies. This framework includes behavioral strategies such as avoidance and seeking social support as well as cognitive or emotion-management strategies such as denial and detachment. Fitzgerald and colleagues argue for the incorporation of cognitive strategies in order to shift the question from why victims do not respond assertively to the multiple ways women respond to sexual harassment.

Qualitative studies suggest that responses to sexual harassment are grounded in the organization of power relations at work. Women and men temporary workers, with little control over employment assignments, have little recourse but to tolerate or ignore the harassment if they wish to continue receiving work assignments (Rogers & Henson 1997:230). On the other hand, African-American women firefighters, already considered outsiders and marginalized due to their race and gender, believe they have nothing to lose from fighting back against sexual harassment and confronting their harassers (Yoder & Aniakudo 1996). These studies support Williams' (1997) argument for contextualizing

our understanding of sexual harassment. Although both temporary workers and African-American women firefighters are marginalized or vulnerable workers, they respond to sexual harassment in dramatically different ways.

## CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Numerous studies outline the job-related, psychological, and somatic health consequences of sexual harassment. In terms of job consequences, sexual harassment is found to result in lowered morale, absenteeism (USMSPB 1981, 1987), decreased job satisfaction (Gruber 1992), decreased perception of equal opportunity (Newell et al 1995), and damaged interpersonal work-relationships (Culbertson et al 1992, DiTomaso 1989, Gutek 1985). Some victims are forced to quit or they lose their jobs (Coles 1986, Crull 1982, Gutek 1985, USMSPB 1981 1987). Organizations also pay a price for harassment in terms of lost productivity, job turnover, and medical claims (USMBPB 1987). The psychological and physical health consequences of sexual harassment are also well-documented. Sexual harassment is linked to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, nausea, stress, and headaches (Crull 1982, Fitzgerald 1993, Gutek & Koss 1993).

Research on the consequences of harassment is limited. Most studies tend to list possible outcomes, with little regard to the prevalence of outcomes or the complex processes underlying them (Gutek & Koss 1993:42). Recent research by psychologists attempts to respond to this critique. Early results from the National Women's Study (Dansky & Kilpatrick 1997) provide evidence of a long-term link among depression, lifetime post-traumatic stress disorder, and sexual harassment. However, this study is limited by a reliance on retrospective accounts. Schneider et al's (1997) job-stress model provides evidence that sexual harassment has a distinct negative effect on psychological and job-related outcomes, even after controlling for respondents' general level of job stress or negative disposition (see also Fitzgerald et al 1997a). Fitzgerald et al (1995c) also recommend including measures of victim vulnerability, such as victimization history, personal resources, attitudes, and control, to explain the impact of sexual harassment on targets. Results from a two-wave longitudinal study on the effects of workplace harassment on coping, self-medication, and health over time will be available in the near future (Richman et al 1997).

Psychologists are responsible for much of the research on the psychological consequences of sexual harassment. For their part, sociologists should be asking questions about the life course effects of sexual harassment on women's lives. That is, sexual harassment represents a turning point in the lives of some targets, altering their progression through life-course sequences and hindering their chances for positive work and family outcomes. To utilize the life-course perspective, sexual harassment researchers need to gather longitudinal data.

The need for different types of data as well as substantive areas in need of more research are discussed next.

## STUDYING SEXUAL HARASSMENT: AN AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

### *Longitudinal Research and Multiplicity Sampling*

Sexual harassment research in the past 10 years has moved away from a focus on prevalence rates to more sophisticated multivariate analyses of the antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment (e.g. Padavic & Orcutt 1997). Restricting many of the empirical analyses of harassment is a reliance on cross-sectional survey data. One positive trend away from this is the movement toward longitudinal data collection (e.g. Richman et al 1997) because an understanding of the organizational context of harassment requires longitudinal data. For example, current analyses of the effect of organizational culture generally rely on respondents' perceptions of culture *after* they were sexually harassed. Without longitudinal data, the meaning behind the correlation between organizational tolerance and incidences of sexual harassment is unclear (Pryor et al 1993).

Organizational researchers are also turning to multiplicity or "bottom-up" sampling techniques to create samples linked across macro and micro levels (e.g. Parcel et al 1991:74, Kalleberg et al 1996). Future surveys of sexual harassment should incorporate this kind of sampling. By linking interviews with individuals, supervisors, and human resource managers, multiplicity sampling could provide data on the relationship between sexual harassment, organizational policies and context, and job-related outcomes. It is time for the use of more sophisticated data collection techniques if we are to continue to build our theoretical and empirical understandings.

### *Uncovering Gendered Processes: The Need for Qualitative Research*

To counter the reliance on survey methods, a growing number of researchers are calling for the use of qualitative methods to study sexual harassment (Avery & Cavanaugh 1995, Williams 1997). This is partly due to a belief that important concepts and processes are not adequately captured by survey items. For example, much is written about the connection between sexual harassment and the gendered nature of organizations in terms of how "organizational forms structure and are themselves structured by gender" (Savage & Witz 1992:8, Acker 1990, Adkins 1992). Yet, as discussed earlier, these gendered processes are difficult to capture using discrete survey items. As a result, researchers often use measures of gender roles and management's tolerance for sexual harassment as proxies for gendered processes existing in organizations. These

measures do not tap the depth or identify the subtle ways in which organizational processes may “institutionalize” sexual harassment as part of the job. Good examples of this research include recent studies of the restaurant industry (Giuffre & Williams 1994) and temporary work (Rogers & Henson 1997). As well, qualitative research is capable of uncovering the ambiguity that surrounds sexuality and sexual harassment in organizations (Williams 1997).

### *Race and Sexual Harassment*

Several overviews comment on the paucity of research concerning sexual harassment, race and ethnicity (e.g. Murrell 1996, Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993, Barak 1997). Much of this discussion is conceptual with an emphasis on the distinction between sexism and “sexual racism” (e.g. Murrell 1996:56, Collins 1990) and on how racialized norms of sexual attractiveness limit job opportunities for women of color (e.g. Williams 1997:29). A few early empirical studies found no overall difference in harassment rates for women of color and white women (e.g. Gutek 1985, USMSPB 1981). On the other hand, some evidence exists that women of color experience more severe forms of sexual harassment (e.g. Gruber & Bjorn 1982). Rospenda et al’s (1998) analysis moves beyond the issue of prevalence to show how race intersects with class and gender in instances of contrapower harassment. For example, they theorize how norms of black masculinity may be a factor in the reluctance of a black male faculty member to report the harassment by a white male secretary (Rospenda et al 1998:50). In many ways, MacKinnon’s quote cited at the beginning of the article still characterizes the state of research on race and sexual harassment.

### *Sexual Harassment of Men and Same-Sex Harassment*

The sexual harassment of men, as well as same-sex harassment, are understudied phenomena (Vaux 1993, Williams 1997, Fitzgerald et al 1997). In terms of the sexual harassment of men, Gutek’s (1985) study found that men were more likely to interpret “social-sexual” behavior as nonthreatening, whereas women interpreted the same behavior as threatening. Men also identify some behaviors as harassing that are not identified by women (Berdahl et al 1996). These behaviors include those perpetrated by women, such as verbal comments that negatively stereotype men (e.g. “Men are pigs”). Men also report being labelled as unmasculine (e.g. being called “fag” or “pussy”) when they do not participate with their male colleagues in jokes about women (Fitzgerald et al 1997b:24). In order to understand the harassment of men, research on masculinity provides a useful starting point (e.g. Connell 1995).

Related to the sexual harassment of men are issues of same-sex harassment. Not only does the harassment of gays and lesbians need to be considered (e.g. Woods & Lucas 1993, Hall 1989), but the harassment of heterosexual men by heterosexual men should be examined. As discussed elsewhere in this review,

studies illustrate how sexuality and “hyper-masculinity” are part of many organizational cultures (e.g. Williams 1997). Heterosexual norms exclude or sexualize women, but they also constrain the behavior of men. As others have mentioned, researchers need to incorporate the complexity of sexual exploitation and harassment found in organizations (e.g. Vaux 1993). As Williams point out, focusing on the harassment of women by men ignores “other sexualized power dynamics in the workplace” (1997:33).

## CONCLUSION

This review only touches the surface of many issues with which researchers are currently struggling. Beyond the specific scope of this review, but in need of further study, is the relationship of complaints of sexual harassment to legal and institutional environments. Studies of the outcomes of sexual harassment cases focus on victim, perpetrator, and sexual harassment characteristics without utilizing theoretical insights from the sociology of law (e.g. Terpstra & Baker 1992, 1988). Black’s (1993) work provides an avenue for conceptualizing how organizational status may predict the outcome of third party intervention into sexual harassment. And, similar to research on the “legalization of the workplace” (e.g. Sutton et al 1994, Edelman 1992), the organizational adoption of sexual harassment policies and the potential increased regulation of workers’ sexual interaction could be examined using insights from institutional approaches. Issues in the study of sexual harassment at work can draw from and inform a variety of sociological perspectives not previously considered.

What we know about sexual harassment is that its definition and occurrence is contextualized by organizational and individual factors. Gender will continue to remain central to the study of harassment, whether conceptualized as quantitative measures of gender ratios or more qualitative understandings of gender roles and gendered organizational processes. At this point, though, no unified theoretical framework has developed for explaining the occurrence of sexual harassment. Recent insights from social constructionists and other analyses of gendered organizations are among the most promising. As researchers move beyond cross-sectional surveys to more advanced survey techniques and more encompassing ethnographic studies, the task of sorting out the effects of gender, individual perceptions and organizational context on sexual harassment will be assisted. As well, criminological theories are underutilized in the study of sexual harassment. One possible avenue is to incorporate routine activity theory that can provide insight into the interaction between organizational context and the presence of guardians and motivated offenders. The study of sexual harassment is in beginning stages, which means researchers are still struggling with issues related to measurement, data collection, and theoretical development. Yet it is these challenges that make this area one worth pursuing.

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