

Honoring Accounts for Sexual Harassment: A Factorial Survey Analysis¹

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This study analyzes a factorial survey, incorporating vignettes about student-to-student sexual harassment, completed by undergraduates at a small liberal arts college. As in previous studies, perceived seriousness levels for such incidents are shown to depend primarily on the perpetrator's behavior. However, perceived seriousness also depends strongly on the accounts offered by the perpetrator for his behavior and to a lesser extent on verbal reactions of the female victim. Furthermore, some types of accounts reduce the perceived seriousness of the behavior, while others increase it. Male and female respondents differ in their overall means, but do not differ significantly in the factors that influence perceived seriousness. Some implications of these results for the study of sexual harassment and of accounts are noted.

The issue of sexual harassment has prompted a good deal of concern on college campuses in recent years. Using an innovative methodological technique, the factorial survey, Rossi and his colleagues (Rossi & Anderson, 1982; Reilly, Carpenter, Dull, & Bartlett, 1982; Weber-Burdin & Rossi, 1982) have been able to delineate the ways in which common situational features, including the behaviors of the individuals involved, are evaluated by observers in deciding whether any given incident constitutes sexual harassment. Rossi and his colleagues found that the verbal and physical behavior of male instructors,

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particularly their threats about female students' academic success and their physical contact with students, appear the most important factors defining faculty-student sexual harassment on the large university campuses they studied.

Recent research (McClelland & Hunter, 1989) on rates of sexual harassment at Grinnell College, the small liberal arts college studied here, has raised some questions about the generality of these findings. Faculty-student harassment, the type investigated by Rossi and his colleagues in their studies of universities [Weber-Burdin and Rossi (1982) chose to focus on faculty-student harassment in order to provide an empirical basis for institutional regulations concerning faculty conduct.], proved to be rather rare in the smaller, less hierarchical college setting: of all incidents of sexual harassment reported by a random sample of students, only about 3% involved a member of the faculty or administration of the college. Nevertheless, some kinds of sexual harassment were fairly frequent on campus: over 50% of female students reported having been harassed while at college, and in nearly all cases, the reported perpetrator of the incident was another student. Other recent studies have documented that "date rape" is a common occurrence on university campuses (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987). While faculty-student harassment may arouse greater moral concern in many observers, student-student harassment is probably more prevalent on campuses.

Investigation of student-student harassment, however, requires attention to dimensions of the situation not explicitly considered by Rossi and his colleagues. In particular, one must focus on the verbal accounts, if any, which the perpetrator of the action offers to deflect any imputation of responsibility or blame for the incident. Faculty-student incidents occur in the context of an institutionalized power difference between the parties, which tends to free the more powerful party from having to give any account for his behavior. Thus, a student faced with a sexually harassing instructor may be limited to finding indirect ways of "managing the trouble" (Benson & Thomson, 1982, p. 243), rather than challenging the instructor directly, especially in a situation in which the behavior is not observed by others. (Our focus here is on face-to-face encounters at the time of the incident. A faculty member whose harassment of a student becomes publicly known may, of course, be called to account by others in the institution itself or in the profession.) In cases of student-student harassment, however, the smaller power difference between the parties and the reduced dependency of the victim on the harasser should make demands for accounts a more common feature of such situations. Indeed, when misperceptions of sexual interest occur among students (as they frequently do), those whose interest is misperceived (usually females) typically demand accounts for the other's sexual misconduct, and

those who misperceive (usually males) often either apologize or angrily justify their behavior (Abbey, 1987).

Previous Research on Accounts

A number of studies (e.g., Blumstein *et al.*, 1974; Felson & Ribner, 1981; Ungar, 1981; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; Riordan, Marlin, & Kellogg, 1983; Scully & Marolla, 1984; Marolla & Scully, 1986; Hupka, Jung, & Silverthorn, 1987; Weiner, Amirkan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987; Riordan, Marlin, & Gidwani, 1988) have documented the importance of the labeling process that occurs when the perpetrator of some sort of misconduct offers an account of his behavior, which may perhaps be honored by the ostensible victim in the situation or by some other relevant audience. Indeed, the very possibility of accounting for (e.g., excusing or justifying) one's behavior by this labeling process may contribute to the prevalence of sexual harassment, even among such relatively well-educated populations as college students. After all, commonly used accounts for sexual misconduct have considerable cultural support, as the wide acceptance of the rape myths they often incorporate suggests (Pryor, 1985; Burt, 1980, 1983; Lottes, 1988; but see also Orcutt & Faison, 1988). Feminist scholars who study rape and other forms of sexual aggression have argued strongly that sexual misconduct is widespread in our society in part because of the cultural legitimacy lent to sexual aggression by such rape myths (Berger & Searies, 1985; Margolin, Miller, & Moran, 1989).

While the process of offering accounts for sexual misconduct has clear relevance for our understanding of the problem of student-student sexual harassment, most previous studies of this process have suffered from one or more of several methodological difficulties. Empirical analyses of accounts have typically involved one of three approaches: role playing, field experiments, and interviews of samples of offenders. The most common form of study involves *role playing*, in which subjects read a vignette about some embarrassing situation and then answer questions about what they would do or say in a similar situation (e.g., Riordan *et al.*, 1983). In a variant of this approach, subjects are asked to recall an occasion in which something personally embarrassing happened and then to answer a similar set of questions about that situation (e.g., Weiner *et al.*, 1987). A less common design is a *field experiment*, perhaps one in which something untoward happens to confederates of the experimenter within the view of subjects who are later asked about their reactions to the incident and the accounts offered for it (e.g., Ungar, 1981). A third strategy for studying accounts is to ask a *sam-*

ple of "offenders," usually people convicted of a crime (e.g., rapists), why they committed their offense, or to extract from court records their "official" excuses or justifications (e.g., Scully & Marolla, 1984; Marolla & Scully, 1986; Felson & Ribner, 1981).

None of these techniques is fully satisfactory. Role playing permits greater experimental control over the situations examined, and avoids many ethical and practical limitations on the kinds of incidents studied, but may not provoke realistic responses from subjects (Neff, 1979), who are usually college students obtained in convenience samples (Sears, 1986). Field experiments increase realism, but limits the kinds of incidents that can be staged and often preclude any opportunity to question subjects about their behavior. Offender studies permit examination of very serious misbehaviors and associated accounts, but are based on potentially unusual samples of incarcerated subjects who probably tailor their accounts with organizational acceptability in mind (yet see Burt, 1983). All these techniques share two characteristics that limit the degree to which their results are generalizable: first, each uses a small and nonrepresentative sample of subjects; and second, each severely restricts the number and range of features that can be built into the incident (and thus the types of accounts that might be offered following the incident) that they can examine. Clearly, some innovation of method is necessary to make further progress in this area.

The Factorial Survey Technique

An improved methodology for studying accounts is already available in the form of the factorial survey technique used by Rossi and his colleagues in the studies of sexual harassment referred to above (Rossi & Anderson, 1982; Reilly *et al.*, 1982; Weber-Burdin & Rossi, 1982). Factorial surveys combine many of the strengths of social surveys and of laboratory experiments. To prepare a factorial survey, the investigator uses a computer program to create a unique series of vignettes for each questionnaire by selecting random story elements from several dimensions, e.g., the setting of the story, the action of one party, and the reaction of the other. Each respondent then rates a different series of vignettes according to a given rating scale. The technique permits considerable variation in the range and features of the incidents considered, which should increase the realism of the vignettes and facilitate the role-playing task (Neff, 1979), even if the plausibility of randomly assembled stories is sometimes problematic. Furthermore, because the selection of story elements is completely random, the investigator can employ commonly available statistical techniques to disentangle the effects of the various dimensions on the ratings. This technique also permits the

use of a random sample of respondents, which then will clearly represent some population of interest, for instance, the students at a college or university (see Rossi & Anderson, 1982). (We recognize that our own sample of students from a single small college is not necessarily representative of college students in general, of course, but we see it as more nearly representative of students at one type of institution than is often the case in studies of harassment.)

Purpose of This Study

The current study extends the factorial survey technique to the study of the process of honoring accounts for sexual misconduct. In doing so, we focus on student–student sexual harassment, which is much more common than faculty–student harassment on the small college campus that is the setting for our research. We raise three basic questions. First, what characteristics of an incident convince people that it constitutes sexual harassment? Second, which sorts of accounts, if any, can transform such an incident of apparent sexual harassment into something less problematic? Third, are these accounts perceived similarly by male and female students? Our major interest in the accounts offered by a student to a student for behaviors commonly recognized as sexually harassing is in the degree to which these accounts permit the perpetrator to escape the imputation of guilt in incidents of possible harassment.

Types of Accounts: Apologies, Excuses, and Justifications

We focus here on three basic types of accounts for sexual harassment: apologies, excuses, and justifications. These accounts constitute the basic forms discussed in the early works on accounts (Mills, 1940; Austin, 1961), and in more recent and more extensive typologies of accounts (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Stokes & Hewitt, 1976; Schonbach, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Semin & Manstead, 1983; Hunter, 1984).

These three types of accounts are all verbalized motives (Mills, 1940) offered retrospectively for untoward acts, although they differ in the kinds of claims made about the act and about the degree of responsibility imputed to an actor for the act. *Excuses* involve “partial or total rejection of personal responsibility for an admitted and admittedly negative act” (Hunter, 1984, p. 157). *Justifications* involve “acceptance of responsibility for an act whose negative evaluation is rejected partially or wholly” (Hunter, 1984, p. 157). And *apologies* involve “acceptance of both responsibility for an act and the negative evaluation of the act, coupled with regret” (Hunter, 1984,

p. 57). Thus, an excuse denies responsibility for a bad performance; a justification denies one's performance was bad; and an apology concedes responsibility for the bad performance, but promises future virtue.

Many theorists have constructed detailed typologies of apologies, excuses, and justifications (see, especially, Schonbach, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Snyder, Higgins, & Stucky, 1983; Semin & Manstead, 1983; Weiner *et al.*, 1987). Some of these typologies, particularly of apologies and of justifications, are really *ad hoc* lists; other typologies, particularly excuses, are more conceptually based. We have used several such typologies to formulate sets of all three kinds of accounts that appear consistent with distinctions in the literature and that might plausibly be offered for the serious misbehavior of sexual harassment. We have selected, after pretesting with students from this campus, several examples for each set of apologies, excuses, and justifications in order to minimize the risk that our findings will be determined by the specific wording of the accounts. (Specific wording of these statements appear in Table I; general categories are briefly discussed below.)

Table I. Accounts for Sexual Harassment and Their Substantive Foci

Wording of account	Substantive focus of account
Apologies	
"I'm sorry."	"Simple" apology
"I'm sorry; I shouldn't have done that."	Rule
"I'm sorry; I feel awful about this."	Guilt and remorse
"I'm sorry; it won't happen again."	Future behavior
Excuses	
Internal attribution	
"I didn't do anything."	Denial
"I'm not usually like this."	Unusualness of act
"I guess I misunderstood you."	Poor judgment
"I was so horny I couldn't help myself."	Psychological cause
"I don't know what came over me."	Accident
External attribution	
"Your roommate said you wanted to."	Mistaken information
"You should have said something sooner."	Accident
"The guys dared me to do it."	Coercion
"I'm so drunk I don't know what I'm doing."	Temporary lack of volition
Justifications	
"What did you expect, when you act that way?"	Retribution through derogation of victim
"Women always say no but mean yes."	Condemn the condemners
"You know you want it, so relax and enjoy it."	Benefits greater than harm
"What are you so upset about? It's no big deal."	No harm done
"How was I to know you didn't want that?"	Standards vague
"I was just kidding."	No harm done
"Everyone else does it."	Widespread support for act
"I'm a man and that's the way men are."	Self-fulfillment

Apologies can be simple and nonspecific (“I’m sorry”), the sort of comment one might make “mindlessly” (Langer, 1978; see Kitayama & Burnstein, 1988) in the case of a minor transgression. However, as predicaments become more severe, apologies may need to become more extensive (less “perfunctory”) or they will fail (Schlenker & Darby, 1981, p. 275; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989). The more extensive apologies used here focus on various substantive concerns (Schlenker & Darby, 1981): on the rules that have been broken, on the guilt or remorse of the guilty party, or on the promised correctness of future behavior.

Excuses take a variety of forms (e.g., Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981, p. 282, and especially Semin & Manstead, 1983, p. 91–92), which several theorists (e.g., Snyder *et al.*, 1983; Snyder & Harris, 1987; Snyder & Higgins, 1988) have attempted to organize into categories derived from attribution theory. While detailed attributional interpretations of the excuses used in this study are possible, here we rely on a single attributional distinction between internal and external attributions. What we call “internal” excuses involve attempts to reduce one’s apparent culpability for a behavior by suggesting that some forgivable error or weakness on the part of the actor is to blame. Such excuses (as listed in Table I) can involve denial of involvement (as in the case of mistaken identity), claims of the presumed atypicality of the behavior, putative limits to one’s volition due to uncontrollable psychological causes or to overwhelming emotion, or unforeseen accident due to one’s own imperfection. “External” excuses attempt to deny full personal responsibility by suggesting that some force outside of the actor is to blame. Such excuses might invoke mitigating circumstances (like mistaken information or coercion), accident due to another’s act, or physical causes like alcohol.

Justifications also come in numerous guises (see Schonbach, 1980, pp. 196–197; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981, p. 288; Semin & Manstead, 1983, pp. 91–92), including the ones used here: derogation of the victim, appeal to social comparisons (involving either condemnation of the condemner and of the condemner’s right to condemn the action, or claims of widespread support for the behavior), misrepresentation of the harm done (involving either claims that the benefits outweigh the harm done or claims that no harm was done), declaration of a need for self-fulfillment by the perpetrator, or complaints about the vagueness of applicable standards. While other justifications might be offered for the behaviors analyzed here, these have face validity as clearly applicable to the sorts of behaviors we are investigating and as resembling common explanations for sexual misconduct (see Reilly, Lott, & Gallogly, 1986).

Since in this analysis we extend and partly replicate the analysis of sexual harassment reported by Rossi and his colleagues, we follow their methods and analyses as much as possible. We have not, however, attempt-

ed a full replication of their work; rather, we have focused our attention on the basic question of the extent to which apologies, excuses, and justifications influence the perceived seriousness of sexually harassing behavior.

Hypotheses

Our expectations for this study are simple:

First, although the population surveyed here is different in important ways from those studied by Rossi and colleagues, and although our focus is on student–student harassment rather than on faculty–student harassment, we expect many of the same general conclusions to hold, especially with regard to the primary importance observers place on the action of the perpetrator in evaluating the seriousness of an incident.

Second, we expect that accounts offered by the perpetrator will also have an important impact on the perceived seriousness of these situations.

Third, we expect that apologies will be more successful than excuses or justifications in reducing the perceived seriousness of these situations, at least for incidents such as these that do not involve the most extreme forms of harassment, since apologies involve an admission of guilt and an implicit promise to behave more appropriately in the future.

Fourth, we expect that excuses in general will be somewhat more successful than justifications in reducing the perceived seriousness of these situations. Excuses, after all, involve only the reevaluation of the actor's responsibility for the act, while justifications require reevaluation of the behavior itself. On a campus where sexual harassment is widely seen as wrong, such reappraisal of the behavior is unlikely. In fact, we expect that use of justifications will backfire under these conditions, and will increase the perceived seriousness of the situation.

Fifth, since internal excuses attempt to shift responsibility to secondary or temporary features of the actor, they implicitly involve a promise of better behavior in the future. We expect internal excuses thus to act somewhat like apologies in reducing the apparent seriousness of these situations, although not as effectively. However, since external excuses attempt to shift blame to others, they imply no promise of better behavior in the future and should increase the apparent seriousness of these situations.

Sixth, given the differential likelihood of sexual victimization for males and females, and the focus in these vignettes on male sexual aggression, we expect that male and female respondents will react somewhat differently to these vignettes. Specifically, we expect that female respondents will rate these vignettes as more serious on average than male respondents, and that female

and male respondents will react differently to the various types of accounts offered.

METHODS

Sample

The data come from a survey of students at Grinnel College, a small, highly selective liberal arts college in the Midwest. From a list of undergraduate students in residence in the fall semester of 1989, we chose a stratified random sample of 300 students (about 25% of the total) to receive a mailed questionnaire. By sending a second copy of the questionnaire to sampled students who had not replied within a week, and then an additional reminder letter a week later, we received a total of 231 usable replies within four weeks, for a response rate of 77%. Not only is this response rate rather higher than the 35–45% range often found in surveys on sexual harassment (Mazer & Percival, 1989a, 1989b), but response rates in subgroups also appear reasonably uniform. Women were slightly more likely to respond than men, but response by year in school shows no clear trend.

This study was designed as a factorial survey (Rossi & Anderson, 1982), which involves the computer generation of vignettes based on collections of randomly selected story elements (“levels”) from each of several different dimensions that have been defined by the investigator. Vignettes generated by this procedure can be considered to have been randomly sampled from the universe of all possible combinations of the levels of the given dimensions. In our study, each respondent rated a unique sample of 10 vignettes describing incidents of possible sexual harassment. For the purpose of this analysis, we have followed Rossi and his colleagues in taking the 2310 different vignettes that were rated as the units of our analysis, rather than the 231 respondents who performed the ratings. [As Rossi and Anderson note (1982, pp. 32–33), that the judgments made by one individual are not independent of each other leads to potential problems with response set and serial correlation in samples that combine subsamples of judgments made by different individuals. Such errors are likely to reduce the variance that is possible to explain with reference to the dimensions of the stories, but because the errors are essentially random with respect to these dimensions, such errors should not bias the regression coefficients.] Our independent variables are, for the most part, based on the dimensions of the vignettes, although we have used a few respondent characteristics, such as gender, in some analyses.

In spite of some problems with plausibility, inevitable when a computer is writing stories by a random combination of elements, only two vignettes were not rated by the respondents, making our effective sample for this analysis comprise 2308 vignettes.

Instrument

The factorial survey technique (see Rossi & Anderson, 1982) requires the construction of a unique questionnaire for each respondent. Rossi and his colleagues used a special-purpose computer program to construct their surveys (see Rossi & Anderson, 1982); we constructed our survey using general purpose programs on a microcomputer. [Construction of the questionnaires involved several steps. We used a microcomputer spreadsheet program to generate matrices of random numbers, and then used these numbers to select the levels of the dimensions that would constitute each story. Output from the spreadsheet, in the form of sentences fragments, was next entered into a word-processing program with a mail-merge facility, which combined these fragments into paragraphs, placed a rating question at the end of each paragraph, and positioned the paragraphs on the page, 3 on a page, one of each type on every page, in randomly varying orders. Our procedure generated some duplications of vignettes, because of unanticipated regularities in the way the spreadsheet program chose random numbers. As a result, we had a greater than expected number of statistically significant correlations between the dimensions of the randomized data. Still, all of the correlations between dimensions were substantively very small (no longer than 0.1).] Appendix I shows a typical page from a questionnaire. Our questionnaires included 30 vignettes apiece: 10 on sexual harassment, 10 on racial harassment, and 10 describing "control" incidents relating to impolite cigarette smoking. The results described below pertain only to the data on sexual harassment. (We will report comparisons across these incidents in a later article.) The questionnaire also included several final pages of questions on demographic and background information about the respondent.

Independent Variables

The dimensions used in the construction of the vignettes included the class year of each of the hypothetical pair of students involved, their prior relationship, the setting of the incident, the male student's verbal action, the male student's physical action, the response of the female student, and the account offered by the male student. (For a detailed listing of the levels of

each of these dimensions, refer to Table III. To add variety to the stories, we randomly assigned names from a list of ten female names and ten male names to the characters in the vignettes. The names had no statistically significant relationship with the ratings and have not been included in the regression analyses reported here.) Following Rossi and colleagues, we focus on male–female harassment, because earlier studies (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; McClelland & Hunter, 1989; Mazer & Percival, 1989a) indicated that this is by far the predominant type of harassment on campuses. (This decision provoked a good deal of comment from our respondents, many of whom demanded equal time for male victims of female harassment.)

Comparison of this study to the studies designed by Rossi and his colleagues is limited in several ways, besides our focus on student–student harassment. For one thing, we have restricted the range of behaviors examined by omitting all verbal threats and any action tantamount to rape, in order to keep a believable focus on the accounts offered by the perpetrator. Moreover, we included many fewer levels of those dimensions that were found to have little effect on judgments in the Rossi studies. Finally, we have added a dimension relating to the response to the victim, which should have an important impact on the definition of the somewhat ambiguous situations arising from student–student encounters. The purpose of imposing restrictions on our survey design was in part to simplify the problems inherent in constructing credible vignettes from random combinations of levels, and in part to expedite our data gathering and analysis by reducing the size of the sample of vignettes needed for statistically reliable results. (Comments from some of our subjects suggested that restricting the levels of some of the dimensions made the vignettes more repetitive and thus less plausible.)

Dependent Variable

The 15-point seriousness rating scale we use as a dependent variable is a modification of the 16-point scale used by Weber-Burdin and Rossi (1982), which in turn represented a modification of the 9-point scale used in the first factorial survey of sexual harassment (Rossi & Anderson, 1982; Reilly *et al.*, 1982). The original 9-point scale, anchored at the end points by the labels *definitely not harassment* and *definitely harassment*, proved less than fully satisfactory for ordinary least-squares (OLS) analysis, because of a J-shaped distribution of responses. Weber-Burdin and Rossi extended the scale and changed the labels, also adding labels to several intermediate points, in order to produce a more nearly normal distribution of responses. Their scale, however, remained strongly skewed, with a substantial bunching of responses at the high end of the scale (labeled *serious harassment*).

Table II. Distribution of Seriousness Ratings for Sexual Harassment Vignettes

Rating	Code	Percent
Extremely trivial	0	1.2
	1	1.8
	2	1.3
Trivial	3	4.8
	4	3.5
Ambiguous	5	7.3
	6	5.9
Slightly serious	7	9.5
	8	6.0
Moderately serious	9	10.3
	10	9.3
Highly serious	11	11.9
	12	9.3
Extremely serious	13	8.1
	14	9.8
No rating given		0.1
		(100% = 2310)
Average rating ^a	=	8.901
Standard deviation ^a	=	3.553
Median rating ^a	=	9.000

^aComputed for the 2308 cases rated.

In an effort to improve further the distributional qualities of the scale, we attempted to stretch out the upper portion of the scale by moving the label for an "ambiguous" rating to a lower point on the scale and designating four labeled levels of seriousness, from *slightly serious* to *extremely serious*. We made further changes by removing the word "harassment" from the labels entirely and by adding a preliminary question, "From your own perspective, how serious is the offense, if any, described in this story?" These additional changes allowed us to use the same scale for the vignettes describing all three kinds of incidents included in the questionnaire: sexual, racial, and smoking. However, the changes render meaningless any direct comparisons of unstandardized regression coefficients between this survey and the earlier surveys.

Table II presents the distribution of seriousness ratings for the sexual harassment vignettes. The distribution more closely resembles a normal curve than a J curve, but it still shows some tendency toward skewness, evidently caused by the truncation of the distribution at the high end of the scale. Close inspection of the percentages reveals that the labeled points on the scale were selected somewhat more often than points without labels. The median rating for the sample of sexual harassment vignettes was 9.0, or "moderately serious," with the mean rating almost the same, at 8.9.

Table III. Regression of Seriousness Ratings on Dimensions and Levels of Sexual Harassment Vignettes

Dimension and level	<i>b</i>	SE	β
Status of female student (Baseline = a senior)			
A freshman	.047	.118	.007
Status of male student (Baseline = a senior)			
A freshman	-.141	.117	-.020
Prior relationship (Baseline = had occasionally spoken with)			
Had never spoken with	.363 ^a	.182	.041
Had been friends for some time with	.147	.181	.017
Had been romantically involved with	-1.111 ^c	.183	-.124
For some time had been avoiding	.582 ^b	.188	.063
Social setting (Baseline = at a party)			
At The Bar	.043	.143	.006
In the dorm lounge while watching TV	.214	.143	.028
Male's verbal behavior (Baseline = After talking about their classes)			
After noting how good she looked	.061	.145	.008
After suggesting they go someplace more quiet	-.037	.142	-.005
Male's physical behavior (Baseline = touched her hand with his)			
Stared at her breasts	1.611 ^c	.185	.182
Put his arm around her waist	1.545 ^c	.186	.173
Put his hand on her breast and kissed her	4.106 ^c	.187	.457
Grabbed at her clothes, forcing bodily contact	4.218 ^c	.184	.484
Female's response (Baseline = she tensed up but said nothing)			
She told him, "Please stop."	.314 ^a	.142	.042
She yelled at him, "Stop! What the hell do you think you're doing?"	.417 ^b	.144	.055
Male's account (Baseline = said nothing)			
Apologies			
"I'm sorry."	-1.876 ^c	.383	-.106
"I'm sorry; I shouldn't have done that."	-2.252 ^c	.360	-.146
"I'm sorry; I feel awful about this."	-1.728 ^c	.385	-.099
"I'm sorry; it won't happen again."	-1.282 ^b	.394	-.071
Excuses—internal attribution			
"I didn't do anything."	-.306	.380	-.018
"I'm not usually like this."	-.711	.388	-.040
"I guess I misunderstood you."	-1.208 ^b	.371	-.074
"I'm so horny I couldn't help myself."	.469	.419	.023
"I don't know what came over me."	1.171 ^b	.377	-.070
Excuses—external attribution			
"Your roommate said you wanted to."	.855 ^a	.372	.052
"You should have said something sooner."	.173	.430	.008
"The guys dared me to do it."	.945 ^a	.371	.058
"I'm so drunk I don't know what I'm doing."	.141	.390	.008
Justifications			
"What did you expect, when you act that way?"	1.301 ^b	.400	.070
"Women always say no but mean yes."	2.941 ^c	.357	.193

Table III. Continued

Dimension and level	<i>b</i>	SE	β
"You know you want it, so relax and enjoy it."	2.795 ^c	.361	.181
"What are you so upset about? It's no big deal."	.589	.378	.035
"I was just kidding."	-.615	.362	-.039
"How was I to know you didn't want that?"	-.022	.366	-.001
"Everyone else does it."	.893 ^a	.386	.050
"I'm a man and that's the way men are."	2.567 ^c	.391	.142
Regression intercept	6.177 ^c	.363	
$R^2 = .404$			
$N = 2308$			

^a $p = .05$ or less.

^b $p = .01$ or less.

^c $p = .001$ or less.

Analyses

In spite of the less-than-ideal distribution of their dependent variables, Rossi and his colleagues made use of OLS regression with binary dummy variables for the levels of the dimensions they investigated. Rossi and Anderson, however, also provide an equation based on logistic regression (1982, p. 57), which gives results similar to their OLS equations. We have followed the earlier studies in using OLS regression with dummy variables. (Readers should be aware, however, that errors associated with ceiling effects in our response scale may give a downward bias to some regression coefficients.) Thus, each level of the various dimensions investigated has been coded as 1 if present and 0 if absent. The regression equation then omits one dummy variable for each dimension (the levels designated as "Baseline" in Table III). Coefficients thus represent the mean difference in ratings between vignettes containing the given level and vignettes containing the baseline level for that dimension, all other dimensions held constant. The purpose of analysis with dummy variables is to ascertain which particular levels of each dimension have the greatest impact on judgments about seriousness.

Some of the analyses presented below follow Rossi and Anderson (1982) in using a technique known as "coding proportional to effect." This technique involves rescaling the original variables for the dimensions by using the coefficients that result from regression with dummy variables to recode the categories (levels) of the dimension variables; this process, in effect, recreates a single variable for each dimension out of the series of dummy variables. When these rescaled variables are entered as independent variables in an OLS regression equation, the standardized regression coefficients (β weights) for the rescaled variables indicate the relative importance of the various dimensions to the regression solution. Thus, this technique allows us

to ascertain how the dimensions we are investigating compare in their overall impact on respondents' judgments about seriousness.

RESULTS

Regression with Dummy Variables

The regression analysis of seriousness ratings for our vignettes portraying student-student sexual harassment (Table III) yields results that are in many ways parallel to those from earlier studies of faculty-student harassment (Rossi & Anderson, 1982; Reilly *et al.*, 1982; Weber-Burdin & Rossi, 1982). In Table III, unstandardized regression coefficients (labeled *b*) indicate the average difference in ratings between a vignette with the given level and one having the baseline level of that dimension. For instance, the first coefficient in Table III shows that stories describing incidents in which the female student was said to be a freshman were judged as only very slightly more serious (0.047 points on our 15-point rating scale) than stories describing a female student said to be a senior. The standard error of 0.018 for this coefficient, which is larger than the coefficient, indicates that this small difference is not statistically significant, and the standardized coefficient of 0.007 (β weight) confirms that the difference is substantively tiny. Obviously, the status of the female student in the vignette has very little impact on judgments of seriousness. Similarly, Table III shows that the status of the male student makes no significant difference. These results agree with earlier studies in finding status distinctions among students to be relatively unimportant for seriousness ratings.

The next dimension shown in Table III concerns the prior relationship between the characters in the story; several level of this dimension do have a significant effect on seriousness ratings. A previous romantic relationship lowers ratings by more than a point on the scale, and the female student's attempts to avoid the male student raise the seriousness ratings by about half a point over the baseline relationship ("had occasionally spoken with"). Lack of any previous contact ("had never spoken with") also makes a statistically significant difference in the direction of increased seriousness. Results from the earlier studies generally follow the same pattern: the closer the prior relationship, the less serious the incident is perceived to be.

Table III shows that none of the levels tested of the social setting dimension or of the male's verbal behavior has any significant effect on ratings. Earlier did find strongly significant results associated with the male's verbal behavior (e.g., Reilly *et al.*, 1982, Table I). The earlier studies, however, included many

more levels of male verbal behavior and many that were much more threatening than those used here. Furthermore, the focus in these earlier studies was, of course, on faculty–student incidents. Very likely, personal remarks that may be seen as inappropriate when offered by an instructor are judged more permissible from another student.

The next dimension, the male's physical behavior, clearly has a strong impact on judgments of seriousness. The first two levels listed ("stared at her breasts" and "put his arm around her waist") both raise seriousness ratings by about 1½ points over the baseline action of touching hands. The remaining two levels have coefficients of over 4 points, the largest coefficients shown in Table III. All of these coefficients are statistically significant at the 0.001 level. Even though we used a restricted range of behaviors for this dimension, our results confirm earlier findings that respondents take the male's actions as a major determinant in judging the seriousness of incidents of possible harassment.

A dimension that we investigated but that was not included in earlier studies was the female student's response to the male's actions. The earlier studies incorporated a dimension describing the female's initial actions, including several behaviors that might be interpreted as seductive, but Weber-Burdin and Rossi found this dimension to be less important for judgments of seriousness than for determining the definiteness of harassment (1982, pp. 118–119). Given our focus on seriousness of harassment, we elected to drop the initial-action dimension and substitute a dimension describing the female's response. We expected this dimension to help define the possibly ambiguous situations occurring between students. Table III shows that the female's response does have a small but statistically significant impact on judgments: a verbal protest, even if politely phrased, tends to increase the perceived seriousness of the situation.

Finally, we come to our main substantive focus, the male's account of his action. Table III shows the accounts grouped into four categories: apologies, excuses with internal attribution, excuses with external attribution, and justifications. Inspection of results for the first of these four categories reveals that all of the apologies we tested were effective in reducing the rated seriousness of the incident, in comparison to the baseline level of saying nothing. Coefficients range from about -1.2 to -2.3 , all highly significant.

Internal excuses were less clearly differentiated from saying nothing, although most of the coefficients again are negative, indicating that these excuses may help somewhat to deflect blame for the action. The most effective excuses appear to be the male's claim not to have understood the female's intent and his claim not to have known what came over him, both with coeffi-

coefficients of approximately -1.2 . The excuse of having lost control because of sexual drive has a positive rather than negative coefficient, although it is not judged to be significantly more serious than saying nothing.

The external excuses all have positive coefficients, suggesting that they are less effective than saying nothing in terms of displacing blame from the male actor. Indeed, two of these excuses have coefficients of almost $+1.0$, indicating that either blaming a roommate or attributing the action to a dare is significantly worse than saying nothing.

The justifications, too, have for the most part positive coefficients, which means that their use tends to backfire on the male actor by increasing the seriousness with which the situation is viewed. The justifications seen as most incriminating by our sample include some of the common rape myths: "Women always say no but means yes"; "You know you want it, so relax and enjoy it"; and "I'm a man and that's the way men are." All these have coefficients of over $2\frac{1}{2}$ points in the positive direction. Other justifications with significant coefficients of about 1 point include the plea that everyone else does it and the argument that the female actor is only getting what she asked for when she acts that way. Nevertheless, two of the justifications ("just kidding," and "how was I to know?") have negative but nonsignificant coefficients, suggesting that they are at least no worse for the male actor than saying nothing.

Overall, this analysis shows the male's verbal behavior in offering accounts for his action does have a significant impact on judgments of seriousness. The average difference between offering an apology and justifying one's action with a rape myth can be as much as 5 points [$2.94 - (-2.252) = 5.193$], which is equivalent in terms of our scale to the difference between an "ambiguous" action and a "moderately" to "highly" serious offense (see Table II).

Table III shows that the regression intercept for the regression equation is 6.177. This result gives the predicted seriousness for a vignette with all the baseline categories, and falls between the categories "ambiguous" and "slightly serious" on our scale. The multiple R^2 for the equation in Table III is 0.404, somewhat lower than that found by Rossi and Anderson (1982). Adding the dummy variables for the "accounts" dimension to a previous equation (not shown) containing only the dummy variables for the other dimensions increases R^2 by 0.172, an amount that is strongly significant statistically. The "nonaccount" dimensions are associated with little explained variance in part because we have restricted the range of several independent variables and because we focus on situations of student-student harassment, which are inherently more ambiguous than faculty-student harassment.

Table IV. Regression of Seriousness Ratings on Effect-Coded Dimensions

Dimensions	<i>b</i>	SE	β
Status of female student	1.000	2.469	.007
Status of male student	1.000	.811	.020
Prior relationship	1.000 ^b	.099	.163
Social setting	1.000	.623	.026
Male's verbal behavior	1.000	1.429	.011
Male's physical behavior	1.000 ^b	.035	.458
Female's response	1.000 ^a	.325	.050
Male's account	1.000 ^b	.039	.417
Regression intercept	6.177 ^b	.158	
$R^2 = .404$			
$N = 2308$			

^a*p* = .01 or less.

^b*p* = .001 or less.

Comparing Dimensions

Although Table III demonstrates that accounts can have a strong impact on judgments about the seriousness of sexual harassment, the table provides no way to compare the relative contributions of the various dimensions examined. The use of coding proportional to effects to rescale variables for the dimensions, as seen in Table IV, permits such comparisons. In this technique, the coefficients for dummy variables from Table III have been collected together to create a single variable for each dimension. The baseline level of each dimension is recoded as 0, and all of the other levels of the dimension are recoded to match their regression coefficients. What we have in Table IV, then, is not a new set of results but a way of summarizing the results from Table III. In particular, this table allows us to compare the overall contributions of the various dimensions to the regression solution.

The reader will notice immediately that all of the unstandardized regression coefficients in Table IV are exactly 1.0. This is simply an artifact of the coding scheme. The real interest in Table IV is in the standardized regression coefficients (β 's), which index the relative contributions of the various dimensions to the equation. As expected, the male's physical behavior, with a β of 0.458, has the largest weight, but the coefficient for the male's account is not much smaller, at 0.417. Thus, our first two hypotheses—that the male's behavior will be the most important influence on the perceived seriousness of the incident and that the male's account will likewise have an important influence on seriousness—are supported. The only other dimensions with statistically significant β weights are prior relationship and the fe-

male's response, both with much smaller coefficients. Evidently, the male's account has considerable influence on judgments of seriousness, at least within the restricted range of student-student encounters we are investigating.

Types of Accounts

The pattern of coefficients in Table III indicate that the different types of accounts – apologies, excuses, and justifications – have substantially different effects on judgments of seriousness. Table V presents this finding more succinctly. Table V reports a regression analysis in which all dimension *except* the male's account are represented by variables coded in proportion to effect, and the dimension of male's account is represented by a series of dummy variables, one for each of four types of accounts (with the category "said nothing" again omitted from the analysis). In other words, Table V duplicates Table IV except that the account variable has been broken up into dummy variables for types of accounts.

The variance explained (R^2) by the equation in Table V is considerably lower than in Table IV, because of information lost when all the accounts of a particular type are combined into a single dichotomous variable. For the same reason, the rescaled dimensional variables no longer produce unstandardized regression coefficients of exactly 1.0. The β weights, however,

Table V. Regression of Seriousness Ratings on Effect-Coded Dimensions with Type of Account

Dimensions and level	<i>b</i>	SE	β
Status of female student	4.935	2.593	.032
Status of male student	1.057	.855	.021
Prior relationship	.978 ^c	.105	.160
Social setting	1.140	.655	.030
Male's verbal behavior	1.345	1.506	.015
Male's physical behavior	.980 ^c	.037	.449
Female's response	.991 ^b	.342	.050
Male's account			
Apologies	-1.831 ^c	.308	-.199
Internal excuses	-.685 ^a	.303	-.079
External excuses	.582	.311	.061
Justifications	1.303 ^c	.290	.179
Regression intercept	6.132 ^c	.320	
$R^2 = .342$			
$N = 2308$			

^a*p* = .05 or less.

^b*p* = .01 or less.

^c*p* = .001 or less.

have not been substantially altered by the substitution of dummy variables for one dimension.

The regression coefficients for types of accounts confirm that, consistent with our third hypothesis, apologies mitigate the seriousness rating very significantly in comparison to the baseline of saying nothing, or to offering excuses or justifications. In addition, consistent with our fourth hypothesis, justifications tend to increase the serious rating almost as strongly. Excuses on average help or hurt depending (respectively) on the internal or external attribution of the excuse, consistent with our fifth hypothesis. Although external excuses are not significantly different from the baseline of saying nothing, the gap of over 1 point [$0.582 - (-0.685) = 1.267$] between the two types of excuses is clearly large enough to be statistically significant.

Comparison of Judgments by Subgroups

Rossi and his colleagues found little evidence of differences between subgroups of respondents in patterns of ratings. In particular, male and female respondents tended to rate stories in about the same way (Rossi & Anderson, 1982, p. 49 ff.). With our focus on student-student situations, which are probably less clearcut than the faculty-student situations studied earlier, we expected to find that gender would make more of a difference in perceptions. Table VI presents two regression equations that are parallel to the regression of effect coded dimensions in Table IV, except that the rescaling

Table VI. Regression of Seriousness Ratings on Effect-Coded Dimensions: Separately for Female and Male Respondents

Dimension	Female respondents			Male respondents		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Status of female student	1.000	2.619	.009	1.000	13.648	.002
Status of male student	1.000	.671	.033	1.000	13.411	.002
Prior relationship	1.000 ^c	.146	.156	1.000 ^c	.124	.182
Social setting	1.000	1.315	.017	1.000 ^b	.352	.064
Male's verbal behavior	1.000	.539	.042	1.000	.910	.025
Male's physical behavior	1.000 ^c	.052	.433	1.000 ^c	.045	.496
Female's response	1.000 ^a	.412	.055	1.000 ^a	.396	.057
Male's account	1.000 ^c	.052	.438	1.000 ^c	.056	.400
Regression intercept	6.557 ^c	.233		5.716 ^c	.224	
	$R^2 = .390$			$R^2 = .449$		
	$N = 1198$			$N = 1110$		

^a*p* = .05 or less.

^b*p* = .01 or less.

^c*p* = .001 or less.

and analysis were carried out separately for subgroups of female and male respondents.

The β weights in Table VI for the two subgroups are generally similar, except that male respondents appear to place more emphasis on physical behavior and setting, and a bit less emphasis on accounts. In the physical behavior dimension, men apparently perceive a greater range of seriousness than do women between the baseline action of merely touching hands and the more physically aggressive actions, such as placing a hand on a breast or grabbing clothes and forcing contact. Examination of the dummy-variable solutions (not shown) reveals the source of discrepancy in rating with regard to setting: men judge incidents which occur at a party or at *The Bar*, a local student hangout, to be somewhat less serious than incidents occurring in the relative privacy of a dorm lounge; women appear to make no such distinctions. [An analysis of variance (not shown) confirms that the gender by action and gender by setting interaction effects are statistically significant. There is also a statistically significant interaction between gender and the male's verbal behavior: incidents in which the male student compliments the female by "noting how good she looks" are rated as somewhat less serious by men but more serious by women than incidents involving talk on the more neutral subject of classes.]

Perhaps in part because women are less willing to make distinctions between possible incidents of sexual harassment on the basis of physical action or setting, the variance explained (R^2) is somewhat smaller for the female subgroup of respondents than for the male subgroup. The regression intercept for the female subgroup is somewhat higher than for males, reflecting a tendency on the part of the women to see all such incidents as a little more serious than do men. Rossi and his colleagues noticed a similar pattern in their data (Rossi & Anderson, 1982, pp. 50-51).

Following Rossi and Anderson (1982, p. 51) we have approached the issue of gender differences in yet another way by entering variables for gender, age, and experience with sexual harassment into an effect-coded regression for the sample as a whole. Table VII duplicates Table IV, except that the equation includes gender and age as predictors, as well as two dummy variables derived from a question on whether the respondent has "ever been the target of sexual harassment." The response categories *once or twice* and *many times* have been coded as separate dummy variables, with the response category *never* serving as a baseline for this variable in the analysis. The unstandardized regression coefficients for the effect-coded dimensions in Table VII diverge from 1.0 because of the additional variables in the equation and because a small amount of missing data on these additional variables reduces the effective size of the sample.

Table VII. Regression of Seriousness Ratings on Effect-Coded Dimensions and Respondent Characteristics

	<i>b</i>	SE	β
Dimensions			
Status of female student	1.069	2.465	.007
Status of male student	1.071	.809	.021
Prior relationship	1.005 ^b	.099	.164
Social setting	.947	.622	.025
Male's verbal behavior	.835	1.426	.009
Male's physical behavior	1.017 ^b	.035	.465
Female's response	1.056 ^a	.324	.053
Male's account	1.004 ^b	.039	.418
Respondent characteristics			
Age	-.041	.047	-.015
Gender	.261	.135	.037
Target once or twice	.425 ^a	.141	.059
Target many times	.975 ^b	.183	.111
Regression intercept	5.783 ^b	.238	
$R^2 = .422$			
$N = 2258$			

^a*p* = .01 or less.^b*p* = .001 or less.

Like Rossi and Anderson, we find that age is unrelated to the ratings, but unlike Rossi and Anderson, we find that the regression coefficient for gender fails to reach statistical significance. When dummy variables for experience with sexual harassment are not included in the regression, the gender variable does have a significant coefficient, but gender and experience with sexual harassment are strongly related, so that controlling for sexual harassment considerably reduces the effect of gender in our data. Rossi and Anderson included a variable for experience with sexual harassment in their equation, but it did not distinguish between infrequent and frequent experiences. They also included a variable for victimization experience on the part of a close friend, which we are not able to replicate. We conclude that a major factor accounting for the differences in perceptions of men and women on these issues may be the extent of their experience as targets of sexual harassment.

Finally, we address the question of whether female and male respondents tend to evaluate male accounts for sexual misbehavior in similar ways. Table VIII duplicates the analysis in Table V of types of accounts, except that the regression equations have been computed separately for female and male subgroups of respondents. Comparison of the coefficients for types of accounts in the two equations of Table VIII suggests that men and women do evaluate accounts in much the same ways, despite disagreeing somewhat on how serious these situations are. The ordering of categories and

differences between coefficients for categories are similar for the two subgroups.

DISCUSSION

In this analysis, we have examined the question of what determines the perceived seriousness of student–student sexual harassment. As part of this analysis, we have replicated key aspects of Rossi et al.'s study of faculty–student sexual harassment, finding support for many of their conclusions. We find, as they did, that the behavior of the male offender is the most important single aspect of such incidents, that the prior relationship of the two actors is significant, and that the social setting has little effect. In an extension of their analysis, we also show that the woman's verbal response to the man's behavior has a significant effect on perceived seriousness, and thus that the process of defining the situation depicted in these vignettes depends in part on how the woman reacts (see Shotland & Goodstein, 1983). [The woman's reaction may have long-term effects as well. Murnen, Perot, and Byrne (1989) note that the minority of women in their study who offered an active verbal response to a sexual assault later blamed themselves less for the attack.] Most importantly, however, we show that the man's verbal account for his behavior influences perceived seriousness almost as much as does the man's original behavior.

This demonstration of the comparative effect of a man's accounts is unique. Other studies have shown that accounts make a difference in how people react to misconduct (e.g., Blumstein *et al.*, 1974; Shields, 1979; Hupka *et al.*, 1987), and that people in trouble are inclined to offer certain accounts rather than others (e.g., Scully & Marolla, 1984). But other studies have not shown that accounts can effect the evaluation of a behavior almost as strongly as does the offensive behavior itself.

We cannot draw from this study conclusions about how actors negotiate among themselves over sexual misconduct, since the respondents here are evaluating other people's behaviors and verbal statements. But we can infer from this study that observers who are called upon to evaluate such situations rely both on the behaviors they observe *and* on the statements of both parties involved. Here, at least accounts act as a significant part of the process of interpreting potentially serious forms of social misconduct.

In this instance, we are also able to show that some of the self-interested interpretations of behavior that the perpetrator offers in these vignettes fail to convince our respondents and, in fact, lead to worse overall evaluations of the seriousness of the situation than silence would have provoked. Thus, apologies and some excuses (those that focus attention on one's temporary

Table VIII. Regression of Seriousness Ratings on Effect-Coded Dimensions and Account Types: Separately for Female and Male Respondents

Dimension	Female respondents			Male respondents		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Status of female student	3.673	2.770	.032	17.820	14.286	.030
Status of male student	.972	.711	.033	-2.265	14.152	-.004
Prior relationship	.911 ^c	.155	.142	1.033 ^c	.130	.188
Social setting	1.322	1.390	.023	1.094 ^b	.370	.070
Male's verbal behavior	1.270 ^a	.572	.054	1.084	.957	.027
Male's physical behavior	.988 ^c	.055	.428	.979 ^c	.047	.486
Female's response	1.119 ^a	.436	.062	.846 ^a	.416	.048
Male's account						
Apologies	-1.606 ^c	.414	-.179	-2.055 ^c	.445	-.218
Internal excuses	-.605	.410	-.069	-.734	.443	-.086
External excuses	.647	.425	.066	.569	.451	.062
Justifications	1.562 ^c	.390	.216	1.058 ^a	.428	.144
Regression intercept	6.513 ^c	.435		5.715 ^c	.474	
	$R^2 = .320$			$R^2 = .396$		
	$N = 1198$			$N = 1110$		

^a*p* = .05 or less.^b*p* = .01 or less.^c*p* = .001 or less.

failure to follow culturally appropriate norms) reduce the perceived seriousness of these sexual misbehaviors. But justifications and other excuses (those that blame others for one's failure to act appropriately) increase the perceived seriousness of these sexual behaviors. Clearly, trying to convince an audience that one recognizes the error of one's ways and will follow moral guidelines in the future is the "safe" way of dealing with these forms of sexual misconduct.

Interestingly, we do not find significant gender differences in the basic pattern by which accounts influence perceived seriousness. While female respondents take these situations to be more serious than do male respondents, both males and females are about equally likely to accept apologies and internal excuses, and equally unlikely to accept justifications and external excuses. Even in rejecting those justifications that are based on widespread rape myths, male and female respondents react with about equal intensity.

Such a result may seem surprising for a campus on which female students are much more likely than male students to consider themselves feminists, to accept a broad definition of sexual harassment, to have been sexually harassed while at college, and to reject strongly the myth that sexual harassment is precipitated by the person harassed (McClelland & Hunter, 1989). One might expect, on such a campus, that female students would react differently to accounts for sexual harassment (whether apologies, excuses, or justifications) than would male students.

The lack of these gender differences raises a number of questions, some of which we will try to answer in further analyses of these data. In general, we need to determine whether acceptance of these accounts depends on women's and men's experiences (with sexual harassment, for instance), on their attitudes, on the specific character of the accounts offered, or on a combination of these factors.

For instance, we know from this study that students' own experience with sexual harassment largely explains the effect of gender on perceived seriousness. Does personal experience with sexual harassment also have an influence on acceptability of accounts? Perhaps. Furthermore, we know from other studies that rejection of sexist attitudes is associated with lower rape tolerance among both males and females (Hall, Howard, & Boezio, 1986; Burt, 1980). Does rejection of sexist attitudes also affect the perceived seriousness of these incidents either directly or perhaps by influencing the acceptability of these accounts? Answering such question should help us learn more about the dynamics of accounting processes, especially as they relate to the perceived seriousness of harassing behaviors.

On a practical level, many educational institutions, including Grinnell College, have programs in place to educate their students about the unacceptability of sexual harassment, often by delegitimizing rape myths. Our results suggest that such programs work, since many justifications and excuses, particularly those that invoke rape myths, currently *increase* perceived seriousness for both male and female students at this campus. However, these programs might also concentrate on reducing the acceptability of other excuses which still *reduce* the perceived seriousness of such misconduct on this campus, particularly those excuses that plead poor judgment ("I guess I misunderstood you") or accident ("I don't know what came over me"). Educational efforts to reduce the acceptability of these accounts may further increase the willingness of those harassed to report harassment and further reduce the inclination of others to engage in sexually harassing behaviors.

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Appendix 1. Typical Page from Questionnaire

SCENE 1001

Heather, a freshman, for some time had been avoiding Ted, a senior. They encountered each other by chance at a party. After noting how good she looked, Ted stared at her breasts. She told him, "Please stop," and he said, "You know you want it, so relax and enjoy it."

SCENE 1002

Heather, a black student, had been friends for some time with Jeff, a white student. They encountered each other by chance in the dorm lounge while watching TV. After they talked for a while, Jeff said, "Why don't the black students stop complaining? You don't belong here anyway." Heather frowned and said, "What?!" and Jeff said, "Can't you take a joke?"

SCENE 1003

Joan, a freshman, had occasionally spoken with Jenny, a freshman. They encountered each other by chance while drinking coffee at the Forum. Jenny exhaled cigarette smoke near where Joan sat. Joan frowned and said, "Please stop," and Jenny said, "I'm sorry."

FROM YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE... HOW SERIOUS IS THE OFFENSE, IF ANY, DESCRIBED IN THIS STORY? (PLEASE CIRCLE A NUMBER.)

	0
EXTREMELY TRIVIAL	1
	2
TRIVIAL	3
	4
AMBIGUOUS	5
	6
SLIGHTLY SERIOUS	7
	8
MODERATELY SERIOUS	9
	10
HIGHLY SERIOUS	11
	12
EXTREMELY SERIOUS	13
	14

FROM YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE... HOW SERIOUS IS THE OFFENSE, IF ANY, DESCRIBED IN THIS STORY? (PLEASE CIRCLE A NUMBER.)

	0
EXTREMELY TRIVIAL	1
	2
TRIVIAL	3
	4
AMBIGUOUS	5
	6
SLIGHTLY SERIOUS	7
	8
MODERATELY SERIOUS	9
	10
HIGHLY SERIOUS	11
	12
EXTREMELY SERIOUS	13
	14

FROM YOUR OWN PERSPECTIVE... HOW SERIOUS IS THE OFFENSE, IF ANY, DESCRIBED IN THIS STORY? (PLEASE CIRCLE A NUMBER.)

	0
EXTREMELY TRIVIAL	1
	2
TRIVIAL	3
	4
AMBIGUOUS	5
	6
SLIGHTLY SERIOUS	7
	8
MODERATELY SERIOUS	9
	10
HIGHLY SERIOUS	11
	12
EXTREMELY SERIOUS	13
	14