Sex Roles, Vol. 27, Nos. 3/4, 1992

Sources of Variability in Perceptions of and Responses to Sexual Harassment

Tricia S. Jones
Temple University

Martin S. Remland
West Chester University

Social exchange theory was used to explain sexual harassment interactions in terms of perceived or actual inequities in incurred costs or rewards between targets and perpetrators. A factorial experiment was conducted in which the effects of severity of harassment, target response, target gender, and rater gender on perceptions of harassment, perpetrator appropriateness and target appropriateness and suggested responses to harassment were examined. Ninety-four male and 116 female students from two eastern universities served as subjects. The sample was approximately 90% Caucasian and was composed of traditional (18–22-year-old) undergraduates. Results indicated that all independent variables affected perceptions of and responses to sexual harassment situations.

Sexual harassment in academe is a serious problem as Dzeich and Werner (1984) conclude in their comprehensive review of sexual harassment research in university and college settings. Targets of harassment in academe generally have less power and fewer avenues of recourse available than their corporate counterparts (Reilly, Carpenter, Dull, & Bartlett, 1982).

Usually conceptualizing harassment as a women's issue, researchers of academic harassment often restrict sampling to exclusively female populations (Benson & Thomson, 1982; Till, 1980) or depict harassment as exclusively female-target/male-perpetrator interactions (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984; Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Reilly et al., 1982; Rossi & Weber-Rudin, 1983; Sigal, Gibbs, Belford, Ronan, & Gervasio, 1987; Weber-

0360-0025/92/0800-0121$06.50/0

Burdin & Rossi, 1982). Such restrictions are justified by evidence that women are more likely than men to be targets of sexual harassment (Konrad & Gutek, 1986).

Yet men can be and often are targets of sexual harassment. As Hazzard's (1989) recent review of legal harassment cases reveals, male targets may suffer similarly severe behavior and experience equally serious negative consequences of harassment. A 1985 Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission (EEOC) study reported that 14% of government workers' sexual harassment charges were filed by men (Havemann, 1988)—figures that correspond closely to results from surveys of similar populations (Merit System Protection Board, 1981).

Although some studies of harassment in academe report that women are more likely to be harassed than men (Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Reilly, Lott, & Galloghy, 1986; Sigal et al., 1987), others indicate little difference in rates of harassment reports from male and female students. Mazer and Percival (1989) found that a high percentage of female (89%) and male (85.1%) undergraduates reported experiencing sexual harassment. Fisher, Wine, and Caplan (1987) also failed to discover gender differences in harassment experiences of staff in a Canadian academic institution.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of target gender, severity of sexual harassment behavior, target responses to harassing behaviors, and rater gender on perceptions of sexual harassment. This investigation, consonant with earlier studies (Jones, Remland, & Brunner, 1987; Remland & Jones, 1985) explains expected effects from a social exchange theoretic perspective.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: A SOCIAL EXCHANGE VIEW

Many social scientists characterize the development and termination of interpersonal relationships as a complex process of social exchange (Roloff, 1981). The stability of a given relationship depends upon what the relational partners consider an "equitable" exchange of resources. Relationships deteriorate, or are perceived as unsatisfactory, when one party feels incurred costs outweigh benefits. From this perspective, interpersonal communication has been defined as "a symbolic process by which two people bound together in a relationship provide each other with resources or negotiate the exchange of resources" (Roloff, 1981, p. 30).

The interactants' communication is related to the attainment of positively valued resources in two ways. First, communication may be consid-

ered a resource (e.g., status displays, information, etc.) to be exchanged. Second, communication may be used to negotiate an exchange.

In sexual harassment situations, communication is the means by which an exchange of resources is negotiated (e.g., sexal favors in exchange for information, money, job security, guidance, etc.). Definitions of sexual harassment acknowledge the nonreciprocal nature of the transactions between the perpetrator and target. From a social exchange perspective, the target person considers the costs associated with the sexual behavior or proposal to exceed the benefits.

Severity of Harassing Behavior

Behaviors differ in terms of perceived severity of harassment. Terpstra and Baker (1987) asked male and female students to assess the perceived severity of a variety of social-sexual behaviors. The most severe behaviors were sexual propositions linked to potential rewards or costs, physical contact of an obviously sexual nature, and sexual assault or rape. Moderately severe behaviors included sexual gestures, sexual remarks, graffiti of a sexual nature directed toward a specific individual, sexual propositions not linked to rewards or costs, and physical contact of a potentially sexual nature. Whistles, repeated requests for dates, starting behavior, and shoulder squeezes were perceived as least severe.

Using data from a national sample of undergraduate women, Till (1980) developed an harassment classification system, including gender harassment (generalized sexist remarks and behavior), seductive behavior (inappropriate and offensive behavior but sanction-free advances), sexual bribery (solicitation of sexual activity or other sex-related behavior by promise of reward), threat (the coercion of sexual activity by threats of punishment), and sexual imposition (assault and rape). Testing Till's system, Fitzgerald and Hesson-McInnis (1989) found that conditions of a required sexual exchange (Till's categories of sexual bribery and threat) accounted for most of the variance in perceptions of sexual harassment. The more explicit the nature of a sexual exchange, i.e., the more clearly the perpetrator indicated that performance of sexual behavior was attached to rewards or punishments, the more likely raters were to perceive the situation as harassing. York's (1989) survey of 15 professional EEOC officers in academic institutions confirm these results, finding that most officers used three cues to determine whether a report incident constituted a case of sexual harassment and whether charges of sexual harassment should be filed: (1) the existence of coercion (in the form of proffered threats or

promises), (2) the target's reaction to the behavior, and (3) the job consequences for the target.

Social exchange theory supports the notion that severe behaviors will be perceived as more costly, and therefore as more harassing, than less severe behaviors. When severity is defined by the explicitness of the behavior and specific rewards or punishments tied to the behavior, that behavior costs the target on at least two levels. First, if the sexual nature of the behavior is unwelcome, the more explicitly sexual the behavior the more costly it will be. The cost of sexual behavior may be conceived of as cost due to invasion of privacy. "Subtle" sexual behaviors, such as staring or innuendo, may be offensive, but they cost relatively little in terms of intrusiveness. However, as behaviors become more severe, for example, gradations of sexually related touch, the degree of invasiveness and the degree of cost concomitantly increases. Second, sexual bribery or threat explicitly details the additional consequences of the behavior, above and beyond the mere reception of the act. In this way, sexual bribery or threat increases the cost and underscores the power imbalance between the target and the perpetrator. Recognition of existing power imbalances costs the target in terms of status. Observers' perceptions of harassment should also lead them to disapprove of the perpetrator's behaviors due to the increased costs requested of the target. Corresponding sympathy for the target should result in more favorable perceptions of the target. As a result, we suggest the following:

Hypothesis 1: The greater the severity of the perpetrator's behavior, the more raters will perceive the behavior as sexually harassing, will disapprove of the perpetrator, and will approve of the target.

Nature of the Target's Response

York's (1989) research clearly indicates that the target's response affects perceptions of sexual harassment. The more "negative" the target's communication behavior (expressing displeasure and rejection) the more harassing the perpetrator will appear. In contrast, the more positive the target's behavior (expressing pleasure or acceptance) the less the perpetrator will be seen as harassing.

In two studies, support was found for a direct test of the above hypothesis. Remland and Jones (1985) presented student subjects with vignettes depicting incidents of sexual harassment between a male superior and a female subordinate. The subordinate's reactions were manipulated in four conditions: verbally and nonverbally positive, verbally positive and nonverbally negative, verbally negative and nonverbally positive, and ver-

bally and nonverbally negative. Raters perceived more sexual harassment, disapproved of the perpetrator more, and approved of the target more when the target's behavior included negative verbal or nonverbal responses than when the target was unequivocally positive. However, raters did not discriminate between a consistently negative reaction by the target and reactions that included mixed messages. In a follow-up study, Jones et al. (1987) used identical vignettes (although the target's responses were only manipulated in two conditions—verbally and nonverbally positive or verbally and nonverbally negative), and found that raters perceived more harassment and perceived the perpetrator more unfavorably when the target's responses were negative rather than positive.

Other research supports these results. Weber-Burdin and Rossi (1982) found that a target's suggestive behavior decreased judges' ratings of the seriousness and degree of harassment. Rossi and Weber-Burdin (1983) again found that positive or suggestive responses by the target decreased perceptions of sexual harassment for both male and female judges, although men were more likely than women to use positive target responses to "excuse" all but the most severe types of harassment. Apparently, if the target's responses indicate that the perpetrator's behavior is welcome or pleasing, raters see the perpetrator's behavior as less costly and harassing to the target than when the target unambiguously reacts with displeasure.

Targets' responses can effect observers' attributions of responsibility for harassment. Kenig and Ryan (1966) found that males were more likely than females to perceive targets of harassment as contributing to their own situation, either by provoking the behavior or not appropriately handling the "normal sexual attention" from males. Carducci (1987) manipulated targets' responses in terms of affective and behavioral outcomes. In scenarios describing interactions between a male and a female worker, the female target was portrayed as either responding with negative affect (feeling guilty about the perpetrator's behavior), positive affect (feeling flattered), positive physical reaction (feeling confident), or negative physical reaction (feeling sick and anxious). Positive affective outcomes resulted in more attribution of responsibility to the target, while negative affective outcomes resulted in the least attribution.

When targets communicatively indicate the unwelcomeness of the perpetrator's behavior, observers are more likely to perceive the target as incurring costs from the behavior and as involved in an inequitable exchange situation. To the extent that the target seems receptive to the perpetrator, either behaviorally or affectively, observers are likely to interpret the situation as a consciously desired exchange on the part of the target. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Raters will perceive a situation as more harassing, will disapprove of the perpetrator more, and will approve of the target more when the target's responses are negative than when the target's responses are positive or neutral.

Gender of the Target

Very little attention has been given to examinations of male targets of harassment. Only two studies have directly addressed this question. Valentine-French and Radtke (1989) asked male and female students to respond to vignettes of male faculty/female student and female faculty/male student harassment, and manipulated target's reactions in three conditions: the target attributed blame to self, the target attributed blame to the perpetrator, or the target did not attribute blame. Target gender did not effect perceptions of harassment or perceptions of the character of the harasser; however, female raters attributed more responsibility to female targets while male raters did not differ in the attributions of responsibility to male or female targets.

Allen, Armstrong, Clarin, and Velasquez (1988) studied the effects of target gender, rater gender, and levels of severity on perceptions of the perpetrator's appropriateness and need to report the incident. While severity of the behavior produced expected results, no effects were found for the gender of the target variable.

The absence of any effect for target gender is puzzling. On one hand, there is reason to assume that harassing behavior is more costly to women than men. Lott, Reilly, and Howard (1982) report that men consider sexual behavior on the job and at school as more natural, more expected, and less serious than women. In a telephone survey of 827 women and 405 men in the Los Angeles area, men were four times more likely than women to be flattered by sexual overtures on the job and were four times less likely to be insulted by such behavior (Konrad & Gutek, 1986). Adams et al. (1983) report that male students were significantly less likely than women students to interpret sexual advances as offensive or as interfering with their work/school progress.

Apparently, men are less likely than women to perceive sexually related behavior as costly and more likely than women to perceive it as rewarding. The recognition of these attitudes by others, possibly reflecting a societal norm (Lott et al., 1982), suggest that observers will perceive sexual behavior as more costly and harassing for women than for men.

On the other hand, target gender may be less salient for observers than the target's responses. Neither Valentine-French and Radtke (1989)

nor Allen et al. (1988) tested the effects of a target's communication or the interactions of target's responses with target gender. Concomitantly, perceived salience of the severity of harassment rather than target gender may have affected results as Allen et al. (1988) suggest. Given the equivocal results of earlier research, we propose the following research questions:

RQ 1: What effect does target gender have on perceptions of sexual harassment, perpetrator appropriateness, and target appropriateness?

RQ 2: Does target gender interact with severity of harassing behavior and/or target response to affect perceptions of sexual harassment, perpetrator appropriateness, and target appropriateness?

Gender of the Rater

Generally, women are more likely than men to perceive subtler, "less severe" forms of behavior as harassing (Adams et al., 1983; Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Popovich, Licata, Nokovich, Martelli, & Zoloty, 1986; Priest & Fullerton, 1985; Valentine-French & Radtke, 1989), possibly because of men's greater tolerance for harassment in general (Reilly et al., 1986) or women's tendency to define harassment in terms of process and men's tendency to define harassment in terms of consequences of the behavior (Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989). However, some findings indicate little if any gender differences in raters' perceptions of sexual harassment behaviors (Reilly et al., 1985; Terpstra & Baker, 1987).

Women, more likely to be targets of harassment than men, may be more sensitive to any potentially harassing behaviors. While men and women may agree on the costliness of the most severe forms of harassment, women are likely to regard all forms as costly to some extent. Perhaps this is a function of the consequences accrued from harassment. Some research suggests that women targets report more serious negative consequences of harassment than men targets (Reilly et al., 1986).

Rater gender may affect perceptions of the appropriateness of the perpetrator (Remland & Jones, 1985) or interact with target response. Jones et al. (1987) reported that males perceived more harassment than females when the response of the target was positive, but males and females did not differ in their perceptions when the target's response was negative. A target's response may be perceived by observers as an index of the perceived or actual threat to the target; thus, the more severe the reaction, the more the behavior is perceived as costly and inappropriate.

When the target's response is positive, women will be less likely than men to regard the behavior as harassing. Women may require other women to uphold certain standards of behavior to maintain social perceptions of harassment as costly. When a woman responds positively to harassment, her behavior may be seen as condemnatory of all potential women targets; thus, she may be judged more harshly than a woman who responds in a manner (negative) that clearly indicates the costs of harassment (Konrad & Gutek, 1986). Men may expect women to respond to harassment in a manner congruent with sex role stereotypes, i.e., without becoming excessively negative or shrill. Thus, we suggest the following:

Hypothesis 5: Women will perceive more harassment and will disapprove of the perpetrator more than men in all conditions of severity.

Hypothesis 6: Men will perceive more harassment than women, will disapprove of the perpetrator more, and will approve of the target more when the target's responses are positive rather than negative.

Responses to Sexual Harassment

Targets of harassment generally respond passively, either by avoiding the harasser or declining to take formal action against the harasser (Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982). Student targets rarely, if ever, report incidents to university officials (Adams et al., 1983).

Propensity to report harassment is affected by other factors. Significantly more men than women undergraduates indicate unwillingness to report serious harassment (Adams et al., 1983), possibly due to male students' beliefs that they can handle harassment without outside intervention (Kenig & Ryan, 1986). The target's response may also affect reporting. Students were more likely to advocate reporting when the target's responses involved negative physical reaction than positive physical or affective reaction (Carducci, 1987). The severity of the harassing behavior also affects respondents' perceptions of appropriate action. The more students perceive the perpetrator's behavior as inappropriate or severe, the more likely they are to report the behavior (Allen et al., 1988).

Preferred, strategic, communicative responses to harassment have not been investigated directly. Bingham and Burleson (1989), addressing a related question, tested the perceived effectiveness of targets' response messages, which were varied according to design logics and goal structures. Specifically, messages of a female target being harassed by a male superior

were manipulated in terms of minimal, unifunctional, and multifunctional goals, and in terms of expressive, conventional, and rhetorical design logics. Student judges rated the effectiveness of response types. None of the message types were perceived as more effective at stopping harassment than others, with female subjects being less optimistic than male subjects about the potential for messages to dissuade the harasser from continuation and possible retaliation.

Thus, when considering generic responses to harassment, it appears that respondents are likely to see proactive and formalistic responses as unwise or unwarranted unless the harassment is particularly severe or costly. While gender of the rater, target response, and severity of harassment may affect proferred actions, the form and extent of such actions in certain conditions is not yet predictable. Due to continuing questions regarding response to harassment, we ask the following research questions:

RQ 3: What types of responses do raters suggest targets use in incidents of harassment?

RQ 4: How are suggested responses affected by severity of the harassment, target response, target gender, and rater gender?

METHODS

A $2 \times 3 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial experiment was conducted in which the effects of severity of harassment (moderate vs. severe), target response (neutral vs. negative vs. positive), target gender (male vs. female), and rater gender (male vs. female) on perceptions of harassment, perpetrator appropriateness, target appropriateness, and suggested response to harassment were examined. Severity of harassment was treated as a within-subjects variable.

Subjects

Two hundred ten undergraduates (94 males and 116 females) from introductory communication courses in two eastern universities were given vignettes describing two incidents of an opposite-sex professor (perpetrator)/student (target) sexual harassment interaction. (There is the possibility that the subjects' knowledge of any sexual harassment policies of their universities may have affected their responses in this study. In order to assess this impact, the nature of existing sexual harassment policies at these universities was examined. One university did not have a policy on sexual harassment while the other did. In the sample obtained from the latter,

subjects were informally polled by the researchers following the administration of the study. None of the subjects admitted any knowledge of the existence or specific content of the sexual harassment policy.) Although data for racial/ethnic composition of the sample were not collected, approximately 10% of the sample was non-Caucasian. The majority of subjects were traditional (18–22-year-old) college students. Subjects were randomly assigned to conditions.

Stimulus Materials

Subjects were given a packet containing two vignettes and the dependent measures for each vignette. Subjects were told that the researchers were interested in obtaining their comparative reactions to these situations. The vignettes described a meeting between a student and a professor in the professor's office. An introduction to the vignette explained that the student was soliciting help from the professor on a paper assignment. Each student assessed two vignettes, one portraying severe harassment and the other moderate harassment. Target response and target gender were manipulated as between subjects variables.

Severity of harassment was manipulated in two conditions. The moderate harassment condition had the professor resting his/her hand on the student's shoulder, holding the student's hand, indicating an interest in meeting with the student again, putting his/her arm around the student's shoulders, slightly hugging the student, and commenting on the student's attire. The severe condition described the professor rubbing the student's neck, sitting very close to the student, rubbing his/her hand on the student's thigh, and explaining that the paper grade depended upon compliance with sexual demands. These manipulations are consistent with research reports of severity perceptions of harassment behaviors (Adams et al., 1983; Terpstra & Baker, 1987), and with previous operationalizations of severity conditions in harassment research (Allen et al., 1988).

Because the severity variable was treated as within subjects, the order of severity conditions was varied. Half the subjects read the severe condition followed by the moderate condition. The other half responded first to the moderate and then to the severe condition.

Target response was manipulated in three conditions: neutral, negative, and positive. In the neutral condition, the target's responses were not described except for one verbal statement ("I don't know") at the end of the vignette. In the negative condition, the target was described as nonverbally negative (pushing the professor's hand away, speaking in an angry tone of voice, running for the door, and breaking the professor's embrace)

and verbally negative (declaring an interest in being evaluated only on merit, and insisting on no present or future cooperation with the professor's intentions). In the positive condition, the target was described as nonverbally positive (smiling, touching the professor's hand, langhing) and verbally positive (stating an interest in meeting at the professor's house, being flattered by the professor's attention, and indicating acquiescence to the professor's sexual requests). These manipulations are similar to those used in earlier research (Jones et al., 1987; Remland & Jones, 1985).

Target gender was depicted as either a male student interacting with a female professor or as a female student interacting with a male professor. Rater gender was either male or female.

Measures

Subjects were asked to complete each of the following measures for each vignette. Perceptions of the degree of harassment were measured using a 9-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree.* Perceptions of the perpetrator appropriateness were measured using five 7-point semantic differential scales (*intelligent/unintelligent, unethical/ethical, good/bad, inappropriate/appropriate,* and *acceptable/unacceptable*). Scores from each scale were summed to produce an overall perpetrator appropriateness score for each subject. Similarly, perceptions of target appropriateness were assessed using the same five 7-point semantic differential scales, summated for an overall target appropriateness score.

Additionally, two open-ended questions were asked of each subject for each vignette. Following their response to the degree of harassment scale, subjects were asked to explain their harassment rating in the question, "What information was presented in the scenario that affected your decision?" To assess the subjects' suggestions for appropriate responses to harassment, the second question asked, "If you were the student in this incident, what would you have said or done in this situation?"

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prior to multivariate analyses, internal reliability for the perpetrator appropriateness and target appropriateness variables were assessed. Cronbach's alpha for each scale, respectively, was .89 and .96. Correlations between perpetrator appropriateness, target appropriateness, and sexual harassment rating indicated that both perpetrator appropriateness (r = −.53) and the target appropriateness (r = .24) were significantly related to

perceptions of harassment ($p \leq .01$), although there was no significant relationship between the two appropriateness measures ($r = -.04$). Due to significant relationships between dependent variables, data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA).

Results of the MANOVA revealed the following significant interaction and main effects: severity by target response [Wilks's lambda = .89, app. $F(6, 666) = 6.05, p \leq .001$], target response by target gender [Wilks's lambda = .94, app. $F(6, 666) = 3.23, p \leq .01$], target response by rater gender [Wilks's lambda = .94, app. $F(6, 666) = 3.22, p \leq .01$], severity [Wilks's lambda = .77, app. $F(3, 333) = 32.31, p \leq .0001$], target response [Wilks's lambda = .40, app. $F(6, 666) = 64.25, p \leq .0001$], and rater gender [Wilks's lambda = .93, app. $F(3, 333) = 7.76, p \leq .001$]. Although not significant at the $p \leq .05$ criterion, the main effect for target gender [Wilks's lambda = .97, app. $F(3, 333) = 2.36, p \leq .07$] approached significance and was retained in further analyses. Follow-up univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed, and where appropriate, univariate effects were interpreted using Dunn's post hoc multiple comparisons. Effect sizes were determined by calculation of eta squared.

The data from the open-ended question concerning information used to assess degree of harassment were content analyzed and yielded six categories: (1) evidence of mutual attraction or compliance suggesting lack of harassment, (2) overreaction by the target, (3) indications that the professor's nonverbal behaviors (especially touch behaviors) were excessively sexual, (4) perceptions that the professor's verbal statements were excessively sexual or threatening, (5) indications that the professor's nonverbal behaviors were appropriate or indicative of caring/comforting, and (6) suggestions that the professor's verbal statements were not explicitly threatening.

The data from the second open-ended question were content analyzed to discover basic response types. Eight categories of response emerged: (1) report the behavior to authorities, (2) verbally confront the harasser (by indicating displeasure and/or requesting that the behavior stop), (3) becoming verbally or physically violent with the harasser, (4) attempting to refocus the discussion on the task at hand, (5) using nonverbal behaviors to show discomfort with the harasser's behavior, (6) unconditionally complying with the harasser, (7) conditionally complying with the harasser (depending on the perpetrator's attractiveness or the importance of the grade), and (8) avoiding the perpetrator by leaving the office or dropping the class.

For both categorical variables, frequency of category use was coded for all levels of each independent variable. Chi-squared analyses were conducted and Cramer's V coefficient was calculated to determine effect size for all significant findings.

Results for Severity of Harassment

Hypothesis 1 predicted that severity of harassment would affect perceptions of sexual harassment, perpetrator appropriateness, and target appropriateness. This hypothesis was partially supported.

The effect of severity of harassment on target appropriateness was not as predicted. Univariate ANOVAs indicated a severity by target response interaction effect for target appropriateness [$F(2, 335) = 16.25$, $p \leq .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$]. Negative target response was seen as more appropriate in the severe condition ($M = 32.36$, $SD = 4.75$) than the moderate condition ($M = 27.65$, $SD = 7.62$). Conversely, positive target response was seen as less inappropriate in the moderate condition ($M = 15.14$, $SD = 7.96$) than in the severe condition ($M = 9.68$, $SD = 5.73$). This result suggests that observers may expect a reaction to be congruent in degree with the action. If targets respond inconsistently, either too negatively given moderate harassment or too positively given severe harassment, they are seen as less appropriate. In such situations, appropriateness may be seen as the target's ability or willingness to signal incurred cost in a manner that matches observer's interpretations of cost.

ANOVAs further revealed a main effect for severity on perceptions of harassment [$F(1, 335) = 53.77$, $p \leq .0001$, $\eta^2 = .12$] and perpetrator appropriateness [$F(1, 335) = 82.05$, $p \leq .00001$, $\eta^2 = .18$]. Raters perceived more harassment in the severe condition ($M = 7.54$, $SD = 2.36$) than in the moderate condition ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 2.40$)—which confirms the manipulation efficacy of the severity conditions and supports previous research findings (Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Pryor, 1985; Terpstra & Baker, 1987).

Results of chi-squared analysis on the category data indicated a significant relationship between level of severity and explanations for perceptions of harassment ($\chi^2 = 68.93$, $df = 5$, $\leq p$ .0001, $V = .37$). Component chi-squared analyses suggested that when harassment was severe, subjects found the explicit verbal bribery of the professor critical in identifying sexual harassment ($\chi^2 = 11.07$, $df = 1$, $\leq p$ .001, $V = .26$) and found the indications of mutual attraction significant in not identifying harassment ($\chi^2 = 5.73$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .01$, $V = .30$). However, in the moderate conditions, respondents were more likely to suggest that the professor's nonverbal behaviors may be indicative of caring or comforting ($\chi^2 = 29.00$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .75$), or that the lack of an explicit verbal threat rendered the situation less harassing ($\chi^2 = 21.43$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .71$). Thus, verbal sexual bribery was most salient in identifying harassment in severe conditions, while absence of explicit bribery and potentially ambiguous nonverbal behaviors were salient in formation of alternate explanations of the inter-

action in the moderate conditions. Raters demonstrated an ability to assess costs incurred by the target due to the nature of the perpetrator's behavior and used these indices of cost to label the interaction as harassing or not.

Further, when harassment was severe, the perpetrator was perceived as less appropriate ($M = 6.80$, $SD = 3.00$) than when harassment was moderate ($M = 11.44$, $SD = 6.71$). Although observers perceived the perpetrator unfavorably in both severity conditions, the degree of disfavor was greater in the severe condition. Perceived inequity in cost/benefit ratios for target and perpetrator resulted in negative assessments of the inequitably rewarded party.

Results for Target Response

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the negative or neutral target response would result in raters perceiving more harassment, less perpetrator appropriateness, and more target appropriateness than a positive target response. Overall, this hypothesis was supported.

Univariate ANOVAs revealed a significant target response by target gender effect for target appropriateness [$F(2, 335) = 6.07$, $p \leq .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$] and perceptions of harassment [$F(2, 335) = 3.02$, $p \leq .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$]. When negative responses were given, female targets ($M = 31.38$, $SD = 9.87$) were perceived more favorably than male targets ($M = 28.43$, $SD = 6.54$). However, when positive responses were used, female targets ($M = 11.20$, $SD = 4.33$) were perceived less favorably than male targets ($M = 14.19$, $SD = 5.42$). The effects on perceptions of harassment were similar. When a female target responded negatively, the situation was perceived as more harassing ($M = 7.44$, $SD = 2.31$) than when a male target responded negatively ($M = 6.68$, $SD = 3.78$). Yet when a female target responded positively ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.23$) the situation was perceived as less harassing than when a male target responded positively ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 2.01$). Chi-squared analyses for the mutual attraction category ($\chi^2 = 3.69$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .24$) suggested that respondents perceived a female target responding positively as more indicative of mutual attraction, and therefore, not harassment, than a male target responding positively.

A possible explanation of these findings is that, since women are more likely to be targets of harassment than men (Adams et al., 1983) and accrue more negative consequences as a result of harassment than male targets (Reilly et al., 1986), harassment is assumed to be more costly for women than men. Correspondingly, women are expected to react in a manner that is congruent with perceived cost. If women do not meet these expectations, they may be penalized more for the perceived violation than men. The

analysis of observers' comments by target gender support this interpretation. Observers considered evidence of mutual attraction or compliance as more salient when the target was female than male, and observers were more likely to see "harassing" behaviors as other than harassment (i.e., caring or comforting) when the target was male rather than female.

Univariate ANOVAs revealed a target response main effect for perceptions of sexual harassment [$F(2, 335) = 19.88$, $p \leq .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$] and target appropriateness [$F(2, 335) = 224.93$, $p \leq .00001$, $\eta^2 = .52$]. Raters perceived significantly more harassment when the target's response was neutral ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 2.23$) or negative ($M = 7.15$, $SD = 2.31$) than positive ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 2.62$). The target was perceived as more appropriate when the response was negative ($M = 30.03$, $SD = 6.74$) or neutral ($M = 27.34$, $SD = 7.16$) than positive ($M = 12.41$, $SD = 7.43$). The effect for perpetrator appropriateness approached significance [$F(2, 335) = 2.71$, $p \leq .06$, $\eta^2 = .01$]. The perpetrator was seen as more appropriate when the target's response was positive ($M = 9.75$, $SD = 5.93$) than neutral ($M = 9.23$, $SD = 5.51$) or negative ($M = 8.44$, $SD = 5.59$). Chi-squared analyses for target response on perceptions of harassment were also significant ($\chi^2 = 193.50$, $df = 10$, $p \leq .0001$, $V = .44$). When targets responded neutrally, the perpetrator's explicit verbal bribery was salient in determining harassment ($\chi^2 = 19.94$, $df = 2$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .24$). When targets responded negatively, raters saw the target as overreacting ($\chi^2 = 32.25$, $df = 2$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .82$). Yet when targets responded positively, raters perceived the situation as mutual attraction ($\chi^2 = 116.39$, $df = 2$, $p \leq .0001$, $V = .96$). Without evidence of cost, the observers concluded that the situation must not be harassing. Even when the situation was perceived as harassing, observers noted the potential for an explicitly negative target response to be overreaction.

Although these findings support earlier results of differences between positive and negative target response (Jones et al., 1987; Remland & Jones, 1985; Rossi & Weber-Burdin, 1983; Weber-Burdin & Rossi, 1982), the impact of the neutral target response condition was previously untested. Why were negative and neutral target responses perceived so similarly? One explanation is that the severity of harassment, even in the moderate condition, was extreme enough to communicate potential costs to the target without the need for an explicitly negative response. The means for perceptions of harassment in both severity conditions (severe = 7.54, moderate = 5.98, on a 9-point scale) support this assumption, as do the conclusions of the chi-square analyses that observers focused on the verbal bribery of the perpetrator to explain harassment when the target's response was neutral. If both harassment conditions were perceived as clearly harassing, the target would have to respond in a manner that denied those initial perceptions

for ratings of harassment to be significantly affected. Again, the results for the positive target response and observers' identification of mutual attraction in that condition supports this explanation. Further, observers' comments that negative target responses were overreactive suggests that, in clearly harassing situations, targets may actually damage their ability to obtain support from others by using negative rather than neutral responses.

Results for Target Gender

Two research questions were posed concerning the effects of target gender. The first asked whether target gender would affect perceptions of harassment, perpetrator appropriateness, or target appropriateness. Target gender did impact perpetrator appropriateness [$F(1, 335) = 6.89$, $p \leq .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$]. Raters perceived the perpetrator less unfavorably when the target was male ($M = 9.78$, $SD = 6.35$) than when the target was female ($M = 8.50$, $SD = 4.92$).

Although there was no significant univariate ANOVA effect for target gender on perceptions of harassment, there was a significant result for this variable in the chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 14.69$, $df = 5$, $p \leq .01$, $V = .17$). When the target was female, raters were more likely to see evidence of mutual attraction ($\chi^2 = 3.57$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .24$) as indicative of no harassment; however, when the target was male, raters were more likely to see the professor's nonverbal behavior as indicative of caring/comforting ($\chi^2 = 4.17$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .38$).

As reported by other researchers (Allen et al., 1988; Valentine-French & Radtke, 1989), target gender alone did not affect perceptions of sexual harassment, although it did affect perceptions of the perpetrator's appropriateness. Because of the portrayal of harassment in opposite-sex interactions, this finding may be due more to the gender of the perpetrator in the vignettes than to the gender of the target. Observers may have found it difficult to imagine a female professor "harassing" a student, and thus explained her behavior as indicative of caring or comforting unless explicit sexual bribery was used. However, since males are more likely to be the harassers, especially in academic situations (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984), student observers may have assumed a greater negative intention on the part of the male professor and responded accordingly. Alternatively, the absence of a target gender effect for perceptions of harassment may be due to assumptions that sexual advances are less costly for males than females (Konrad & Gutek, 1986; Lott et al., 1982). The results of the target gender by target response interaction, which also serves as an answer to the second question concerning whether target gender interacts with target response,

lends credence to this argument. If men are assumed to welcome sexual advances (or at least act as if they do), then male targets who respond in an extremely negative manner may be seen as violating social expections of masculinity. Thus, as was found, negative responses are less acceptable and positive responses are more acceptable when performed by a male than a female target.

Results for Rater Gender

Hypothesis 5 proposed that females would perceive more harassment and disapprove of the perpetrator more than men. This hypothesis was fully supported. Univariate ANOVAs revealed that rater gender affected perceptions of harassment [$F(1, 335) = 8.23$, $p \leq .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$)] and perpetrator appropriateness [$F(1, 335) = 20.00$, $p \leq .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$]. Female raters perceived more harassment ($M = 7.01$, $SD = 2.46$) than male raters ($M = 6.45$, $SD = 2.52$). Female raters also disapproved of the perpetrator ($M = 8.09$, $SD = 4.99$) more than male raters ($M = 10.39$, $SD = 6.22$).

Results of the chi-squared analyses revealed a significant effect for rater gender on perceptions of harassment ($\chi^2 = 11.18$, $df = 5$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .15$). Female respondents were more likely than males to cite evidence of mutual attraction ($\chi^2 = 3.57$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .24$), to focus on the professor's inappropriate nonverbal ($\chi^2 = 19.67$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .33$) and inappropriate verbal behavior ($\chi^2 = 14.38$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .29$) in identifying situations of harassment.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that men would perceive more harassment and disapprove of the perpetrator more than women when the target's responses were positive rather than negative. This hypothesis was partially supported. Univariate ANOVAs revealed an effect for target appropriateness [$F(2, 335) = 7.59$, $p \leq .001$, ($\eta^2 = .02$]. As predicted, the target was rated more favorably by females ($M = 32.14$, $SD = 5.13$) than males ($M = 27.52$, $SD = 7.56$) when the target's responses were negative. However, males ($M = 13.76$, $SD = 7.93$) saw the target less unfavorably than female raters ($M = 11.46$, $SD = 6.95$) when the target's responses were positive.

The results for rater gender supported hypothesized effects. Female raters perceived more harassment and disapproved of the perpetrator more than male raters, as other researchers have suggested (Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Popovich et al., 1986). Analysis of categorical data also revealed that, as expected, women are more sensitive to less explicitly harassing behaviors than men (Adams et al., 1983). In concert with other reported effects in this study, the assumption that women perceive harassment as more costly than men appears valid.

Also as predicted, rater gender interacted with target response to affect target appropriateness (Jones et al., 1987). Female raters approved of the target more than male raters when the target's response was negative, but male raters approved of the target more than female raters when the target's response was positive. As Konrad and Gutek (1986) argued, women are often more punitive than men toward female targets who respond positively to harassment. If women perceive harassment as more costly than men and have a greater probability of becoming targets of harassment, they may expect other women to respond in ways that clearly communicate the costliness of this behavior to others. When female targets respond positively, other women may fear that such response reduces the general perceptions of harassment as costly, and thus reduces their chances as potential victims for others to recognize and take action against harassment.

Responses to Sexual Harassment

Research Question 3 inquired about how raters suggest responding to situations of harassment. Previously, observers' preferences for suggested responses to harassment have received little attention. The results for the categorical response data in this study contribute to a general understanding of how others may react in a harassment situation. Earlier research has implied that targets of harassment are generally passive, often avoiding the harasser rather than taking action in confronting or reporting the perpetrator (Adams et al., 1983; Tangri et al., 1982). Consonant with these findings, this study reports that a minority of subjects (24% for each category) suggested either verbally confronting the harasser or reporting the perpetrator to authorities. Subjects were less likely to suggest avoiding the harasser or reporting the perpetrator to authorities. Subjects were less likely to suggest avoiding the harasser (19%). A small percentage of subjects suggested complying with the perpetrator's sexual advances, either conditionally (5%) or unconditionally (2%), using verbal or physical violence (3.5%), refocusing the discussion (4.5%), or showing nonverbal discomfort (7%).

Research Question 4 asked whether suggested responses were affected by severity of harassment, target response, target gender, or rater gender. Category data were subjected to chi-squared analyses, which indicated that each independent variable affected suggested response.

Severity of harassment affected response strategies ($\chi^2 = 14.06$, $df = 7$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .16$). The only response type that differed due to level of severity was reporting behavior ($\chi^2 = 10.49$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .27$). Respondents were more likely to suggest reporting the perpetrator when the harassment was severe rather than moderate. Apparently, as found by

Allen et al. (1988), subjects felt clearly harassing situations demand a more proactive response to defray potential costs and obtain necessary protection.

The result for target's response was also significant ($\chi^2 = 44.86$, $df = 14$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .20$). Respondents were more likely to suggest showing nonverbal discomfort ($\chi^2 = 21.10$, $df = 2$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .51$) or complying with the perpetrator ($\chi^2 = 7.97$, $df = 2$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .60$) when the target response was positive. Respondents were more likely to suggest avoiding the perpetrator ($\chi^2 = 15.84$, $df = 2$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .26$) when the target's response was neutral than positive or negative. These results may indicate modeling behavior for the positive target response condition. Subjects may have assumed that the target in the vignette did not react as if the situation were costly, and thus they should not either. However, a neutral target response may have suggested to observers that the target felt impotent to confront the harasser, and thus avoidance was a preferred strategy. Unlike Carducci (1987), no differences in suggested responses were discovered for the negative target condition. Since the negative target response was explicit, and perhaps extreme, subjects may have felt no additional action was necessary. It is difficult to determine the extent to which these results were affected by the specific manipulations of target responses in the vignettes. It would be valuable to discover how subjects suggest responding when presented with a general statement of target reaction (was negative, positive, etc.) rather than detailed descriptions of actual behaviors.

Response strategies differed by target gender ($\chi^2 = 23.36$, $df = 7$, $p \leq .01$, $V = .21$). When the target was female (and the professor male), respondents were more likely to suggest reporting the perpetrator ($\chi^2 = 8.45$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .01$, $V = .24$), becoming violent ($\chi^2 = 8.05$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .01$, $V = .62$), or avoiding the harasser ($\chi^2 = 5.05$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .21$) than when the target was male (and the professor female). However, when the target was male rather than female, subjects were more likely to suggest complying with the harasser ($\chi^2 = 5.05$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .55$). Perhaps observers assumed that sexual harassment was more costly to female targets, and thus more overt protection should be sought.

Rater gender also significantly affected suggested response ($\chi^2 = 69.83$, $df = 7$, $p \leq .0001$, $V = .36$). Female respondents were more likely to suggest reporting the perpetrator ($\chi^2 = 15.45$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .32$), verbally confronting the perpetrator ($\chi^2 = 15.45$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .32$), showing nonverbal discomfort ($\chi^2 = 19.60$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .001$, $V = .70$), and avoiding the harasser ($\chi^2 = 6.88$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .01$, $V = .24$) than male respondents, confirming earlier research findings (Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Kenig & Ryan, 1986) that women are more likely to report harassment than men. Male respondents were more likely than females to

suggest unconditionally complying ($\chi^2 = 3.60$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .05$, $V = .60$) or complying conditionally with the perpetrator ($\chi^2 = 27.13$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .0001$, $V = .94$), as Tangri et al. (1982) found. Overall, women subjects displayed more motivation to dissuade the perpetrator in some fashion, which suggests their perceptions of the costs of harassment, while men were more likely to see the harassment as less costly and as an acceptable form of interaction.

CONCLUSION

Social exchange theory provides a potent rationale for explaining the significant effects of severity of harassment behavior, target response, target gender, and rater gender on perceptions of harassment, perpetrator appropriateness, target appropriateness, and preferred responses to harassment. The notion of signaled and perceived costs in a harassment encounter, which differs depending upon the nature of the behavior, the gender of the observer, and the gender of target, confirms previous research findings, and adds to our understanding of the complex social reality of harassment.

The use of student respondents to assess sources of variability in perceptions of and responses to academic harassment situations in this research increases the plausibility of the findings. However, as with all vignette research, questions remain about the subjects' interpretations of written vs. visual behavioral cues. Replication studies using videotaped stimulus materials would improve the external validity of this research. Similarly, inclusion of a nonharassment condition is warranted. Subjects may perceive the situation differently and suggest alternate response strategies when evidence of harassment is not as obvious. Finally, information concerning the subjects' opinions of the efficacy of suggested response strategies was not obtained. Although suggested strategies probably reveal some implicit assumptions regarding utility, further investigation to confirm this is necessary.

REFERENCES

Adams, J. W., Kottke, J. L., & Padgitt, J. S. (1983). Sexual harassment of university students. *Journal of College Student Personnel, 24,* 484-490.

Allen, M. J., Armstrong, C. A., Clarin, A. A., & Velasquez, J. G. (1988). *Severity and gender effects on ratings of sexual harassment.* ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED 300 737.

Benson, D. J., & Thomson, G. E. (1982). Sexual harassment on a university campus: The confluence of authority relations, sexual interest, and gender stratification. *Social Problems, 29,* 236-251.

Bingham, S. G., & Burleson, B. (1989). Multiple effects of messages with multiple goals: Some perceived outcomes of responses to sexual harassment. *Human Communication Research, 16,* 184-216.

Carducci, B. J. (1987). *Affective and attributional reactions to sexual harassment as determined by outcome.* ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED 282 118.

Dzeich, B., & Weiner, L. (1984). *The lecherous professor: Sexual harassment on campus.* Boston: Beacon.

Fisher, G. M., Wine, J. D., & Caplan, P. J. (1987, June). *Sexual harassment among staff in a Canadian academic work setting.* Paper presented at the Canadian Psychological Association convention, Vancouver, BC.

Fitzgerald, L. F., & Hesson-McInnis, M. (1989). The dimensions of sexual harassment: A structural analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 35,* 309-326.

Havemann, J. (1988, June 30). 47% of femal civil servents report sexual harassment. *The Washington Post,* p. 1.

Hazzard, T. (1989). *Sexual harassment: What's good for the goose is good for the gander.* ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED 310 981.

Jones, T. S., Remland, M. S., & Brunner, C. C. (1987). Effects of employment relationship, response of recipient, and sex of rater on perceptions of sexual harassment. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 65,* 55-63.

Kenig, S., & Ryan, J. (1986). Sex differences in level of tolerance and attribution of blame for sexual harassment on a university campus. *Sex Roles, 15,* 535-549.

Konrad, A. M., & Gutek, B. A. (1986). Impact of work experiences on attitudes toward sexual harassment. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 31,* 422-438.

Lott, B., Reilly, M. E., & Howard, D. (1982). Sexual assault and harassment: A campus community case study. *Signs, 8,* 296-319.

Mazer, D. B., & Percival, E. F. (1989). Students' experiences of sexual harassment at a small university. *Sex Roles, 20,* 1-22.

Merit Systems Protection Board (1981). *Sexual harassment in the federal workplace: Is it a problem?* Washington DC: Government Printing Office.

Popovich, P. M., Licata, B. J., Nokovich, D., Martelli, T., & Zoloty, S. (1986). Assessing the incidence and perceptions of sexual harassment behaviors among American undergraduates. *Journal of Psychology, 120,* 387-396.

Priest, R. F., & Fullerton, T. (1985). *Psychometric and theoretical issues in the study of sexual harassment.* Eric Document Reproduction No. ED 266 359.

Pryor, J. B. (1985). The lay person's understanding of sexual harassment. *Sex Roles, 13,* 273-286.

Reilly, M. E., Lott, B., & Galloghy, S. M. (1986). Sexual harassment of university students. *Sex Roles, 15,* 333-358.

Reilly, T., Carpenter, S., Dull, V., & Bartlett, K. (1982). The factorial survey: An approach to defining sexual harassment on campus. *Journal of Social Issues, 38,* 99-109.

Remland, M. R., & Jones, T. S. (1985). Sex differences, communication consistency, and judgments of sexual harassment in a performance appraisal interview. *The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 50,* 156-176.

Roloff, M. (1981). *Interpersonal communication: A social exchange approach.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Rossi, P. H., & Weber-Burdin, E. (1983). Sexual harassment on campus. *Social Science Research, 12,* 131-158.

Sigal, J., Gibbs, M., Belford, S., Ronan, S., & Gervasio, A. (1987). *Sexual harassment on three college campuses.* ERIC Document Reproduction No. ED 282 118.

Tangri, S. S., Burt, M. R., & Johnson, L. B. (1982). Sexual harassment at work: Three explanatory models. *Journal of Social Issues, 38,* 33-54.

Terpstra, D. E., & Baker, D. D. (1987). A hierarchy of sexual harassment. *Journal of Psychology, 121,* 599-605.

Till, F. J. (1980). *Sexual harassment: A report on the sexual harassment of students.* Washington, DC: National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs.

Valentine-French, S., & Radtke, H. L. (1989). Attributions of responsibility for an incident of sexual harassment in a university setting. *Sex Roles, 21,* 545-555.

Weber-Burdin, E., & Rossi, P. H. (1982). Defining sexual harassment on campus: A replication and extension. *Journal of Social Issues, 38,* 111-120.

York, K. M. (1989). Defining sexual harassment in workplaces: A policy capturing approach. *Academy of Management Journal, 32,* 830-850.