

# The Moderating Effect of Equal Opportunity Support and Confidence in Grievance Procedures on Sexual Harassment from Different Perpetrators

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**ABSTRACT.** This study drew on three theoretical perspectives – attribution theory, power, and role identity theory – to compare the job-related outcomes of sexual harassment from organizational insiders (i.e., supervisors and co-workers) and organizational outsiders (i.e., offenders and members of the public) in a sample ( $n = 482$ ) of UK police officers and police support staff. Results showed that sexual harassment from insiders was related to higher intentions to quit, over-performance demands, and lower job satisfaction, whereas sexual harassment from outsiders was not significantly related to any of the outcome variables investigated. We also examined two moderator variables: equal opportunity support and confidence in grievance procedures. Consistent with our hypotheses, equal opportunity support mitigated the effects of sexual harassment from supervisors on intent to quit and over-performance demands. Confidence in grievance procedures moderated the relationship between sexual harassment from supervisors and all outcome variables. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** attribution theory, equal opportunity, power, role identity, sexual harassment

Over the last two decades, a large literature has accumulated in the area of sexual harassment (Cortina and Berdahl, 2008). While early research aimed to understand the sources of motivation for sexual harassment and its prevalence (e.g., Gutek, 1985; Gutek and Morasch, 1982; MacKinnon, 1979), later research moved toward issues of definition and measurement (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Magley et al., 1999). More recently, researchers have conducted integrative work to identify key consequences and new questions (Willness et al., 2007), showing that sexual

harassment is negatively related to a range of individual and organizational outcomes including psychological and physical well-being (Barling et al., 1996; Chan et al., 2008), job satisfaction (Lapierre et al., 2005), organizational commitment (Harned et al., 2002), and intent to stay with the organization (e.g., O’Connell and Korabik, 2000).

Although research to date has examined the effects of sexual harassment on different targets (i.e., men and women) and the impact of different types and levels of severity of harassment (e.g., Languhout et al., 2005), there has been less theoretical and empirical attention paid to potential differential effects of sexual harassment from different perpetrators (Raver and Gelfand, 2005; Willness et al., 2007). The sexual harassment literature has typically focused on harassment from organizational insiders (i.e., supervisors and/or co-workers), with much less attention on whether and how sexual harassment from outsiders (i.e., customers and/or other members of the public) affects employees (see Gettman and Gelfand, 2007 for an exception). Further, sexual harassment from supervisors and co-workers are often operationalized together, such that the unique effects of supervisors and co-workers cannot be disentangled. As Raver and Gelfand (2005) suggested “the nature of perpetrators of sexual harassment is an important issue to address in future research...so that it assesses harassment from each source...separately” (p. 395). In this study, we take a multi-focal perspective by examining the effects of sexual harassment from three different perpetrators – supervisors, co-workers, and members of the public (“outsiders”) – to understand whether sexual harassment from different sources affects victims in different ways.

Existing evidence has also focused largely on the main effects of sexual harassment on outcomes, with less attention paid to factors that might mitigate the negative effects of sexual harassment (Willness et al., 2007). Research that has investigated mitigating factors has explored variables that are often beyond the control of the organization, such as victim sex (i.e., the gender of the victim; Berdahl et al., 1996), ethnicity (e.g., Buchanan and Fitzgerald, 2008; Buchanan et al., 2008), and self-labeling (i.e., whether or not a victim labels their experience as sexual harassment; Magley et al., 1999). Researchers have also considered perpetrator factors such as the perpetrator's legitimate or formal organizational power (O'Connell and Korabik, 2000). Although findings from these studies have significantly contributed to our understanding of sexual harassment, we believe that there is also a need to investigate the effect of contextual moderators over which organizations can exercise some control. In the present study, therefore, we examine two such factors: employees' perception of their organization's support of equal opportunity initiatives and employees' confidence in their organization's grievance procedures.

In the present study, we examine the experience of sexual harassment in a police context. We chose this context to study our research questions for several reasons. Our first research question aims to understand the effects of sexual harassment from different sources, particularly external sources relative to internal sources. A police environment is an appropriate context to do this because police personnel (both officers and support staff) are likely to experience sexual harassment from insiders (e.g., co-workers and supervisors) as well as outsiders (e.g., members of the public). Our second research question aims to understand whether employees' perceptions of their organization's support of equal opportunity initiatives and employees' confidence in their organization's grievance procedures mitigate the negative effects of sexual harassment. The male-dominated police environment is an appropriate context to study employees' perceptions of their organization's support of equal opportunity as there is considerable evidence of discrimination against women within police cultures (e.g., Brown et al., 1995). Prior research suggests that women in police organizations often report that men receive more desirable job assignments (Holdaway and Parker,

1998). At the same time, there is evidence that many male police officers perceive that females have been hired in place of a more deserving male due to gender quotas (Holdaway and Parker, 1998). In addition, given that perceived inequality from both men and women tends to feature strongly in police environments, confidence in grievance procedures may be an important moderator of the adverse effects of sexual harassment.

### **Theoretical background and hypotheses: why the perpetrator matters**

Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive or threatening (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). The experience of sexual harassment is likely to be degrading regardless of the identity of the perpetrator. However, the perpetrator's relationship with the victim may evoke different responses from the victim toward his or her job and organization. Three theoretical perspectives support the idea that there will be different outcomes of sexual harassment depending upon the source of the harassment: (1) attribution theory, (2) perspectives on power, and (3) role identity theory.

#### *Attribution theory*

Research has suggested that individuals who experience a negative act analyze the behavior to determine its cause (Martinko et al., 2002). Attribution theory is concerned with the information that people use to make causal inferences about behavior (Heider, 1958). Weiner (1985) suggested that attributions are made up of an underlying structure with at least three dimensions, namely controllability (whether the transgressor could have avoided the behavior), stability (whether the behavior is perceived to derive from stable factors), and locus (whether the behavior was a result of factors within the transgressor or within the environment). When observers perceive the behavior of the transgressor to be controllable, stable, and internal in locus, they will be more likely to attribute responsibility to the transgressor for any negative outcomes.

Evidence from other areas related to sexual harassment, such as workplace aggression and revenge, emphasize the blaming aspect of attributions (Aquino et al., 2001; Martinko et al., 2002). While blame attributions tend to focus on blame of the self-as-victim versus the perpetrator, blame may also be extended to the organization. When making sense of a sexual harassment experience, employees may determine that the cause of the aggression was either external or internal to the organization. If employees attribute responsibility for an incident of sexual harassment to someone outside the organization (i.e., external attribution), then attitudes and behaviors toward the organization should remain unaffected. In contrast, if employees determine that the cause of the aggression was within the control of the organization and therefore make an internal attribution, then their attitudes and behaviors toward the organization should be negatively affected.

Attribution theory offers an explanation for why employees might develop different attitudes toward the organization depending on the source of sexual harassment (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2000). Organizational insiders, such as supervisors and co-workers, are representatives of the organization. Employees hold psychological contracts with organizations that consist of unwritten expectations of their job roles and duties, and of the organization's obligations toward employees (Rousseau, 1995). One such expectation is that employees will not come to harm as a result of a deliberate act by organizational members. Therefore, when employees experience sexual harassment from co-workers and supervisors (i.e., "insiders"), their psychological contract with the organization is violated. The higher the occurrence of sexual harassment from insiders, the more likely employees are to blame the organization because the organization has, in theory, the control to stop the behavior (e.g., by disciplining perpetrators). As harassment from insiders continues, employees may begin to perceive sexual harassment as a stable factor that is internal to the organization, and therefore more likely to continue in the future. Therefore, sexual harassment from insiders should be more likely to negatively impact employees' work-related outcomes than sexual harassment from outsiders.

In contrast, individuals who experience sexual harassment from an outsider, such as a customer, client, or other member of the public, should be less

likely to perceive the organization as responsible. Sexual harassment from an outsider is less controllable because the organization does not usually have the ability to formally sanction or discipline the behavior of outsiders.<sup>1</sup> In addition, specific outsiders often do not have continuing relationships with a particular employee, such that the organization would have the opportunity to intervene and stop harassing behavior. Therefore, sexual harassment from outsiders is less likely to be seen as under the control of the organization, less stable (i.e., less likely to reoccur), and more of a situational factor (e.g., the nature of the job) than sexual harassment from insiders. Sexual harassment from outsiders should be less likely to negatively impact employees' work-related outcomes than sexual harassment from insiders.

#### *Power perspectives*

Attribution theory suggests the organization's perceived responsibility for the sexually harassing behavior may differ depending on the source of the harassment. In contrast, a power perspective focuses on the latitude of the victim of sexual harassment to respond to the transgressor. The experience of sexual harassment from a supervisor, co-worker, or outsider is likely to have different meanings for an employee because of the different power relationships at play. In their seminal review of power, French and Raven (1959) identify five bases from which power is derived: legitimate, coercive, reward, expert, and referent. Legitimate power reflects one's role or position. Coercive and reward power reflects one's ability to punish or reward, respectively. Expert power reflects one's experience or special knowledge. Referent power reflects one's likeability. In an organizational context, supervisors generally have the power to control employees' work schedules and resources (i.e., legitimate power), to penalize employees by assigning undesirable duties or terminating the employment relationship (i.e., coercive power), or rewarding employees with wage increases and promotions (i.e., reward power).

The ability of a supervisor to punish and reward employees combined with the importance of the job to the employee may limit an employee's ability to respond to unwanted sexual attention from a supervisor. Further, employees may be more likely

to identify adverse behaviors as “harassment” if they are enacted by the supervisor (see review by Gruber et al., 1996). That is, while poor behavior by co-workers (e.g., rude jokes and remarks) might be more normative, professional behavior is likely to be expected from supervisors. However, theory on coping with sexual harassment has suggested that if the perpetrator of sexual harassment is a supervisor, the target is less likely to report the harassing behavior (e.g., Knapp et al., 1997). This may be because, although employees are more likely to recognize the behavior as sexual harassment, employees in lower status roles are also in less of a position to bring about change, and more vulnerable to punishment than higher status employees. Fear of job loss or undesirable working conditions may lead an employee to endure the harassment from a supervisor, which would subsequently lead to more negative attitudes toward the supervisor and the organization.

The power imbalance in the supervisor–subordinate relationships may be especially salient in a police organization. Police organizations traditionally take a command-and-control approach (Angell, 1971; Corder, 1978; Jermier and Berkes, 1979; Reams et al., 1975; Sandier and Mintz, 1974). That is, they tend to endorse a strict hierarchy, which emphasizes authoritarianism and impersonality. As such, the ability of a supervisor to reward or punish their subordinates may make employees of police organizations (both officers and support staff) especially unlikely to confront or report sexual harassment perpetrated by their superiors. However, as previously discussed, the endurance of such behavior is likely to result in more negative attitudes about the organization.

Co-workers, on the other hand, do not have the same degree of legitimate, reward, or coercive power over an employee relative to supervisors. However, co-workers often have referent power; that is, power that is derived from their likeability (French and Raven, 1959). Co-workers therefore have some influence over employees to the extent that they can manipulate social relationships within the organization. Further, co-workers have the ability to affect an employee’s sense of belonging in the organization and in their work group (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). The referent power of one’s co-workers is likely to be particularly salient in organizations with strong social norms such as police organizations, in which

employees’ need to be accepted in their role is particularly strong (Manning and Van Maanen, 1978). Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that people have a fundamental need to belong. Employees who reject sexual attention or who report it may risk their acceptance in the organization or the organizational group to which they belong. In addition, although co-workers may have the same level of formal power, co-worker-to-co-worker harassment can affect informal access to power, such as access to social or informal information networks (Cleveland and Kerst, 1993).

In contrast to organizational insiders such as supervisors and co-workers, organizational outsiders such as clients and members of the public often have relatively little power over employees. In fact, in some instances, employees have power over outsiders because they can refuse to provide organizational services to disruptive or harassing clients. Police officers and police support staff, in particular, may be perceived to be in a position of legitimate or coercive power vis-à-vis organizational outsiders. Therefore, sexual harassment from outsiders should be less likely to affect the work-related outcomes of employees than sexual harassment from organizational insiders.

### *Study hypotheses*

Thus far, we have suggested that because employees are likely to blame the organization more for sexual harassment from insiders than from outsiders and because power relationships limit an employee’s ability to respond to sexual harassment from insiders, we expect work-related outcomes to differ depending on the source of the harassment.

In this study, we focus on job attitudes because the preceding theoretical explanations suggest that these outcomes will depend on the source of sexual harassment. In particular, we examine intent to quit and job satisfaction. Past research has reported a significant relationship between sexual harassment from insiders and both of these outcomes (Lapierre et al., 2005; Willness et al., 2007). Specifically, employees who continually experience sexual harassment from co-workers and supervisors, and who are unable to confront transgressors for the aforementioned reasons, are more likely to be dissatisfied with their job, and less likely to stay with the organization (Fitzgerald et al., 1995, 1997; Glomb et al., 1999; Mueller et al., 2001).

However, as argued in the preceding sections, these relationships may depend on the source of the harassment. Our hypotheses are:

*Hypothesis 1:* Sexual harassment from supervisors (H1a) and co-workers (H1b), but not outsiders (H1c), will be positively related to intention to quit the organization.

*Hypothesis 2:* Sexual harassment from supervisors (H2a) and co-workers (H2b), but not outsiders (H2c), will be negatively related to job satisfaction.

Role identity theory has particular implications for the way employees respond to sexual harassment. Individuals in an organization occupy work roles, such as the role of “police officer,” from which they derive meaning and a sense of identity. Identity is about the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation into the self of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance (e.g., Fuller, 2009; Thoits, 1986). According to identity theory, negative psychological outcomes arise when one cannot maintain self-relevant meanings that are congruent with one’s identity standard in a given situation (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Employees who view themselves as fitting within a particular role, such as “police officer,” and who then experience an identity threat in the form of sexual harassment, may be likely to work harder to prove their worth in that role. Parker and Griffin (2002) found that employees who experience gender harassment were more likely to perceive over-performance demands, i.e., to believe that they must work harder than those of the dominant gender to prove their ability. We similarly argue that victims of sexual harassment from insiders will perceive over-performance demands. Victims of sexual harassment from insiders are likely to perceive an identity threat; therefore, they may work harder to reinforce their identity as a police officer. However, rather than posing an identity threat, sexual harassment from *outsiders* may actually *reinforce* the identity of employees within a police sample, as the role of a police officer is to protect society from individuals who engage in aberrant activity such as sexual harassment. Therefore, we do not expect victims of sexual harassment from outsiders to affect over-performance demands.

*Hypothesis 3:* Sexual harassment from supervisors (H3a) and co-workers (H3b), but not outsiders (H3c), will be positively related to over-performance demands.

#### *Mitigating the negative effects of sexual harassment*

We theorized that perceived organizational responsibility (attribution theory), the latitude of employees to respond to sexual harassment (power), and the extent to which the harassment is in line with role expectations (identity theory) help to explain why employees may respond differently to sexual harassment from different perpetrators. One implication of these arguments is that the degree to which the organization is perceived to and would like to protect its employees, and the degree to which employees feel able to address sexual harassment to prevent its reoccurrence, will mitigate its negative effects. Research to date has emphasized the importance of grievance policies and other procedures to help mitigate the effects of sexual harassment; however, few studies have evaluated such procedures (Cortina and Berdahl, 2008). We investigate two potential moderating factors in this study: employees’ perception of their organization’s support of equal opportunity initiatives and employees’ confidence in their organization’s grievance procedures.

First, we expect that perceptions of an equitable work environment in which employees perceive that management cares about issues of harassment will help to mitigate the negative effects of sexual harassment. Research has identified women in male-dominated organizations as particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment; however, males are also victims of sexual harassment from both women and men (Berdahl, 2007; Berdahl et al., 1996). Berdahl et al. (1996) found that men identified different behaviors to be harassing from the behaviors that women identified. In particular, they identified comments such as “you men are all alike” (p. 540) as sexual harassment. Further, they indicated that comments from other men, such as making fun of a man for taking time off to help with child care, are a form of sexual harassment.

Organizations that emphasize equal opportunity should help mitigate the negative effects of sexual harassment for both genders because victims may

perceive such organizations to value fairness and diversity. Policies on equal opportunity in the work environment emphasizes equal treatment of men and women in their roles both within the workplace (e.g., job assignments) and at home (e.g., parental leave), therefore fostering an environment that attempts to eliminate perceptions of gender inequality. If employees perceive that the organization cares about a fair and equal environment for all employees, they are more likely to feel they will be supported by the organization if they are harassed. Therefore, they may be less likely to become distressed or dissatisfied or to quit.

*Hypothesis 4:* Equal opportunity support will moderate the relationship between co-worker (H4a) and supervisor (H4b) sexual harassment and job satisfaction. Specifically, the negative relationship between sexual harassment and job satisfaction will be stronger when equal opportunity support is low.

*Hypothesis 5:* Equal opportunity support will moderate the relationship between co-worker (H5a) and supervisor (H5b) sexual harassment and intent to quit. Specifically, the positive relationship between sexual harassment and intent to quit will be stronger when equal opportunity support is low.

We also expect equal opportunity support to mitigate the relationship between sexual harassment and over-performance demands. If employees perceive that the organization treats men and women equally, then an identity threat arising from sexual harassment from an insider should not lead employees to feel that they have to work harder to prove themselves. Rather, employees should be more likely to seek support by using the equal opportunity policy to help cope. Hence,

*Hypothesis 6:* Equal opportunity support will moderate the relationship between co-worker (H6a) and supervisor (H6b) sexual harassment and over-performance demands. Specifically, the positive relationship between sexual harassment and over-performance demands will be stronger when equal opportunity support is low.

While organizational support for equal opportunity is crucial for creating a welcoming and equal environment, employees must also feel confident that they can address concerns with management if

an incident of inequality (such as sexual harassment) occurs. Evidence suggests that formal grievance procedures may be effective in reducing the incidence of sexual harassment (Rowe, 1996); however, limited research has examined the potential mitigating effects of employee confidence in grievance procedures. Indeed, some researchers suggest that formal procedures may have disadvantages because they can be adversarial, and can also be mismanaged (Cortina and Berdahl, 2008).

We suggest that employee confidence in formal internal (i.e., non-union) grievance procedures will help mitigate the negative effects of sexual harassment. Returning to attribution theory discussed above (Weiner, 1985), employees who perceive that their complaint will be taken seriously by their organization should feel more personal control (i.e., make a more internal attribution of control) than those who do not feel that their complaint will be taken seriously. An internal attribution of control should allow these employees to feel less powerless than their peers who make an external attribution. Therefore, confidence in grievance procedures may mitigate the adverse effects of sexual harassment because employees may perceive these procedures as an effective means of coping. We expect employee confidence in grievance procedures to mitigate the adverse effects of sexual harassment from supervisors and co-workers. However, because grievance procedures deal with internal harassment between employees, they should have no mitigating effect on sexual harassment from outsiders. This null effect is particularly likely in the present context because employees of police organizations have the authority to penalize outsiders who perpetrate sexual harassment without relying on management intervention. Therefore, employees who have a high level of confidence in their organization's grievance procedures may be less likely to become distressed or dissatisfied or to quit, because they will feel that they have a higher level of control over the harassment.

*Hypothesis 7:* Confidence in grievance procedures will moderate the relationship between co-worker (H7a) and supervisor (H7b) sexual harassment and job satisfaction. Specifically, the negative relationship between sexual harassment and job satisfaction will be stronger when confidence in grievance procedures is low.

*Hypothesis 8:* Confidence in grievance procedures will moderate the relationship between co-worker (H8a) and supervisor (H8b) sexual harassment and intent to quit. Specifically, the positive relationship between sexual harassment and intent to quit will be stronger when confidence in grievance procedures is low.

We also expect confidence in grievance procedures to mitigate the relationship between sexual harassment and over-performance demands. If employees perceive that the organization will take their complaints seriously, then sexual harassment from an insider should not lead employees to feel that they have to work harder to prove themselves. Rather, employees should be more likely to formally complain to their organization to help cope with and prevent sexual harassment from reoccurring.

*Hypothesis 9:* Confidence in grievance procedures will moderate the relationship between co-worker (H9a) and supervisor (H9b) sexual harassment and over-performance demands. Specifically, the positive relationship between sexual harassment and over-performance demands will be stronger when confidence in grievance procedures is low.

## Method

### *Procedure and participants*

We collected survey data from a UK police organization in the north of England at a time when women police officers made up only 17% of the work force. The research was commissioned to identify and evaluate key equal opportunities' policies and practices within the organization. All women police officers, a 17% stratified random sample of male police officers, all female support staff, and all male support staff were given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire sent through the internal postal system. In order to ensure a reasonable spread across the service, the male police officer sample was stratified on the basis of rank (above and below sergeant) and department (criminal investigation departments and other departments). A sampling procedure was used for male police officers because their numbers far

outweighed any other group. A working group including representatives from all levels of the organization oversaw the project. Participants returned the surveys by posting them directly to the researchers with confidentiality of responses explicitly assured.

The total response rate was approximately 60% ( $n = 482$ ). The response rates across groups were similar (male police officers = 53%; female police officers = 62%; male support staff = 68%; female support staff = 56%). Overall, 55% of the sample was women. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 63 years ( $M = 39.29$ ,  $SD = 10.41$ ), and their tenure ranged from a few months to 37 years ( $M = 9.88$ ,  $SD = 8.64$ ). Most participants were probation constables or constables (77%), and most were married or living with their partner (79%). Nearly the entire sample (99.5%) was Caucasian. Comparisons of sample statistics against organizational statistics suggested that the sample was representative of the broader organization in all respects other than gender (which was intentionally equalized).

### *Measures*

#### *Sexual harassment*

A measure of sexual harassment from different sources was developed specifically for the study. Respondents were asked how often, in the last 6 months, they were "subjected to any unwanted verbal or physical conduct that was sexual in nature or that had a sexual dimension" from each of the following sources: members of the public, offenders, support staff they work with, police officers they work with, or their supervisor/manager. The response scale was 1 (*never*), 2 (*once*), 3 (*a few times*), 4 (*several times*), and 5 (*many times*). An index of *harassment from outsiders* was created from the average frequency of exposure to unwanted conduct from members of the public and offenders (two items). *Harassment from co-workers* was created from the average frequency of exposure to unwanted conduct from support staff and from police officers (two items). Finally, *harassment from supervisors* was created from the frequency of exposure to unwanted conduct from supervisors (one item). The definition used in the measure (i.e., being subjected to unwanted conduct) was the police organization's accepted definition of sexual harassment; however,

it is also consistent with most definitions of sexual harassment used in the research community (see Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

We chose not to use an established scale such as the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1988) primarily due to space restrictions on the survey; however, there were several other reasons for our choice. First, the goal of our study was to examine sexual harassment toward both men and women. Prior research has demonstrated that while men do experience sexual harassment, the behaviors they identify are different than the behaviors identified by woman (Berdahl et al., 1996). Second, because our aim was to assess sexual harassment from three different sources, we were concerned that victims may experience the same behaviors perpetrated by different sources in a different manner. Previous research shows that individuals often experience the same behaviors from co-workers and supervisors quite differently – for example, they are more likely to consider adverse behaviors from supervisors as harassing (see Gruber et al., 1996) than the same behavior perpetrated by a co-worker or organizational outsiders. Using the SEQ, we would therefore expect different relationships between potentially adverse behaviors and outcomes as a function of source purely because the same behaviors are interpreted differently. Alternatively, directly measuring *perceptions* of sexual harassment helps us understand how this perception (rather than the *experience* of specific behaviors which might or might not lead to that perception) affects outcomes.

#### *Equal opportunity support*

Equal opportunity support was assessed using four items that were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Instructions were as follows: “These questions ask whether you have sufficient support for problems related to Equal Opportunities (EO), such as if you felt you were being bullied or harassed.” Example items include “If I had an EO-related problem (such as harassment), I would know someone at work to turn to for support” and “My supervisor acts to reduce/eliminate adverse behaviors (e.g., name calling, sexist or racist jokes) in my work environment.” Cronbach’s alpha for the four items was 0.81.

#### *Confidence in grievance procedures*

Confidence in grievance procedures was assessed using three items that were rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). An example item is: “How *confident* are you in the grievance procedure?” Cronbach’s alpha for the three items was acceptable at 0.78.

#### *Job satisfaction*

We used a single-item job satisfaction measure. Participants indicated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely satisfied*) their response to the question: “Overall, considering all aspects, how satisfied are you with your job?” This item is similar to one of the three items used by Judge et al. (1994) to assess job satisfaction (“All things considered, are you satisfied with your present job?”). Although single-item measures are often criticized, Wanous et al. (1997) conducted a meta-analysis that showed the minimum reliability of single-item measures of job satisfaction can be estimated at 0.70, which is a respectable level of reliability. These researchers also found that single-item measures of job satisfaction were strongly correlated with multiple-item measures of overall job satisfaction (estimated correlation of 0.72).

#### *Intention to quit*

Intention to quit was assessed by four items (Seashore et al., 1982) which were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An example item is: “I often think about quitting (this organization).” The mean of participants’ responses to these items was used as our index of their intent to quit. Cronbach’s alpha for the four items was 0.88.

#### *Over-performance demands*

Over-performance demands was measured using four items rated on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*). We included the four items developed by Parker and Griffin (2002). Example items include “Do you feel you have to work twice as hard as many of your colleagues?” and “Do you feel obliged to say ‘yes’ to all work requests?” Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was 0.78.

#### *Control variables*

Participants indicated their gender, age, and job status (i.e., whether they worked part time or full



time). In addition, we controlled for whether the respondent was a police officer or a member of the support staff.

## Results

Table I shows the descriptive statistics and inter-correlations for the study variables. In initial support of Hypotheses 1a and 1b, sexual harassment from supervisors ( $r = 0.13, p < 0.05$ ) and co-workers ( $r = 0.12, p < 0.05$ ) was positively related to intent to quit. Similarly, in support of Hypotheses 2a and 2b, sexual harassment from supervisors ( $r = -0.14, p < 0.05$ ) and co-workers ( $r = -0.20, p < 0.01$ ) was negatively related to job satisfaction. Sexual harassment from outsiders was not significantly related to either intent to quit ( $r = -0.06, ns$ ) or job satisfaction ( $r = -0.04, ns$ ), supporting Hypotheses 1c and 2c. Sexual harassment from co-workers ( $r = 0.19, p < 0.01$ ) and outsiders ( $r = 0.11, p < 0.05$ ), but not supervisors, ( $r = 0.09, ns$ ) was positively related to over-performance demands, partially supporting Hypothesis 4.

To further test Hypotheses 1a through 3c, we conducted multiple regression analysis. After controlling for age, gender, job type, and job status, step 2 in Table II shows that sexual harassment from supervisors is significantly related to intent to quit ( $\beta = 0.12, p < 0.05$ ) while co-worker's sexual harassment is significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.15, p < 0.01$ ) and over-performance demands ( $\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$ ). Sexual harassment from outsiders is not significantly related to intent to quit ( $\beta = 0.08, ns$ ), job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.04, ns$ ), or over-performance demands ( $\beta = 0.01, ns$ ). These results partially support Hypotheses 1a through 3c.

We tested Hypotheses 4a through 9b using moderated hierarchical regression. As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), we centered the predictor (i.e., sexual harassment from supervisors, co-workers, and outsiders) and moderator variables (i.e., equal opportunity support and confidence in grievance procedures) using their respective scale means. We then calculated two-way interaction terms, consisting of sexual harassment from each source multiplied by equal opportunity support (Table II) and confidence in grievance procedures (Table III). We conducted

two separate moderator analyses, one for each of the proposed moderators.

Step 4 in Tables II and III presents the moderated regression results. In support of Hypotheses 4b and 6b, sexual harassment from supervisors interacted with equal opportunity support in predicting intent to quit ( $\beta = -0.16, p < 0.05$ ) and over-performance demands ( $\beta = -0.23, p < 0.01$ ); see Table II for an overview of these findings. Figure 1 depicts the pattern of findings for the moderating effect of equal opportunity support on the relationship between sexual harassment from supervisors and intent to quit. The same pattern holds for over-performance demands. To interpret the nature of the interactions, we plotted the interaction using the method recommended by Jaccard et al. (1990). This involves inserting high (1 SD above the mean) and low (1 SD below the mean) values for the sexual harassment variables into the regression equation, and then examining the relationship between sources of harassment and the outcome variables. When equal opportunity support is low, there is a positive relationship between sexual harassment and turnover intentions. However, when equal opportunity support is high, the slope is negative. Hypotheses 4a, 5a, and 6a, which argued the equal opportunity support would moderate the relationship between co-worker sexual harassment and outcome variables, were not supported. Further, equal opportunity support did not moderate the relationship between supervisor sexual harassment on job satisfaction. Thus, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

Step 4 in Table III presents the moderated regression results for confidence in grievance procedures. In support of Hypotheses 7b, 8b, and 9b, sexual harassment from supervisors interacted with confidence in grievance procedures to significantly predict intent to quit ( $\beta = -0.13, p < 0.05$ ), job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.01$ ), and over-performance demands ( $\beta = -0.12, p < 0.05$ ); see Table III for an overview of these findings. Figure 2 depicts the pattern of findings for the moderating effect of confidence in grievance procedures on the relationship between supervisor sexual harassment and job satisfaction. The same pattern holds for the other two significant interactions; however, as job satisfaction is positively valenced while intent to quit and over-performance demands are negatively valenced, the values are reversed. Once again, to interpret the nature of the

TABLE I  
Descriptive statistics<sup>a</sup> and intercorrelations among study variables<sup>b</sup>

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Supervisor SH	1.07	0.37	1.00											
2. Co-worker SH	1.14	0.41	0.49**	1.00										
3. Outsider SH	1.37	0.85	0.31**	0.31**	1.00									
4. Job satisfaction	3.72	0.85	-0.14*	-0.20**	-0.04	1.00								
5. Intent to quit	2.13	0.94	0.13*	0.12*	-0.06	-0.54**	1.00							
6. Over-performance	2.19	0.86	0.09	0.19**	0.11*	-0.28**	0.29**	1.00						
7. Equal opportunities	3.35	0.68	-0.16*	-0.18**	-0.02	0.33**	-0.24**	-0.16**	1.00					
8. Confidence in grievance	2.85	0.96	-0.10*	-0.16**	-0.07	0.41**	-0.36**	-0.26**	0.56**	1.00				
9. Age	39.29	10.41	-0.05	-0.16**	-0.13**	0.11*	-0.05	-0.18**	0.19**	0.15**	1.00			
10. Sex <sup>c</sup>	1.55	0.50	0.07	0.16**	0.12*	-0.11*	0.07	0.13**	-0.05	0.01**	-0.34**	1.00		
11. Part <sup>d</sup>	1.07	0.26	0.06	0.01	0.01	0.07	-0.07	-0.16**	0.09*	0.11**	0.00	0.20**	1.00	
12. Support/police <sup>e</sup>	0.38	0.49	0.08	0.10*	0.32**	0.07	-0.14**	0.09*	-0.02	-0.02	-0.25**	-0.17**	-0.17**	1.00

\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>a</sup>Descriptive statistics are based on pairwise deletion of missing variables.

<sup>b</sup> $n$  ranges from 449 to 480.

<sup>c</sup>1 = male, 2 = female.

<sup>d</sup>1 = full time, 2 = part time.

<sup>e</sup>1 = police, 0 = support.

TABLE II  
Multiple regression and moderator analysis of perceptions of equal opportunity<sup>a,b</sup>

	Intent to quit				Job satisfaction				Over-performance demands			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Part time	-0.11*	-0.11*	-0.09	-0.09	0.13**	0.14**	0.11*	0.11*	-0.18**	-0.18**	-0.17**	-0.16**
Support/police	-0.16**	-0.15**	-0.15**	-0.14**	0.10	0.11*	0.10*	0.09	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.04
Age	-0.04	-0.03	-0.01	0.00	0.09	0.08	0.05	0.04	-0.12*	-0.11	-0.10	-0.10
Sex	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08	-0.09	-0.08	-0.08	-0.09	0.15**	0.13**	0.14**	0.15**
Supervisor SH		0.12*	0.10	0.00		-0.10	-0.06	-0.01		0.03	0.02	-0.12
Co-worker SH		0.08	0.06	0.07		-0.15**	-0.11*	-0.14*		0.13*	0.12*	0.13*
Outsider SH		-0.09	-0.07	-0.07		0.04	0.02	0.03		0.01	0.01	0.02
EO			-0.17**	-0.22**			0.25**	0.31**			-0.10*	-0.10*
Supervisor SH × EO				-0.16*				-0.09				-0.23**
Co-worker SH × EO				0.03				0.11				0.03
Outsider SH × EO				0.07				-0.07				0.05
R <sup>2</sup> change	0.04	0.07**	0.09**	0.10	0.04**	0.08**	0.14**	0.14	0.08**	0.10*	0.11*	0.13*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.03	0.05**	0.07**	0.08	0.03**	0.06**	0.12**	0.12	0.07**	0.08*	0.09*	0.11*

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>a</sup> $n$  ranges from 449 to 480.

<sup>b</sup>All independent and moderator variables are centered.

TABLE III  
Multiple regression and moderator analysis of confidence in grievance procedures<sup>a,b</sup>

	Intent to quit				Job satisfaction				Over-performance demands			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Part time	-0.12*	-0.13**	-0.09*	-0.09	0.12*	0.13**	0.10*	0.10	-0.18**	-0.18**	-0.16**	-0.15**
Support/police	-0.16**	-0.15**	-0.14**	-0.13*	0.10	0.11*	0.09*	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.04	0.04
Age	-0.04	-0.03	0.02	0.02	0.10	0.08	0.03	0.03	-0.12*	-0.11*	-0.07	-0.08
Sex	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	-0.09	-0.07	-0.07	-0.06	0.16**	-0.14**	0.13**	0.13**
Supervisor SH		0.12*	0.11*	0.05		-0.09	-0.08	0.02		0.04	0.03	-0.04
Co-worker SH		0.08	0.05	0.04		-0.14**	-0.10	-0.12*		0.13*	0.11	0.13*
Outsider SH		-0.08	-0.08	-0.08		0.03	0.03	0.03		0.00	0.00	-0.01
Grievance			-0.32**	-0.33**			0.36**	0.37**			-0.22**	-0.23*
Supervisor SH × grievance				-0.13*				0.19**				-0.12*
Co-worker SH × grievance				-0.08				0.02				0.02
Outsider SH × grievance				0.06				-0.06				-0.02
R <sup>2</sup> change	0.04*	0.07**	0.16**	0.19**	0.04**	0.08**	0.20**	0.23**	0.08**	0.10*	0.15**	0.16
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.03*	0.05**	0.15**	0.16**	0.03**	0.06**	0.18**	0.21**	0.07**	0.09*	0.13**	0.14

\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>a</sup> $n$  ranges from 449 to 480.

<sup>b</sup>All independent and moderator variables are centered.

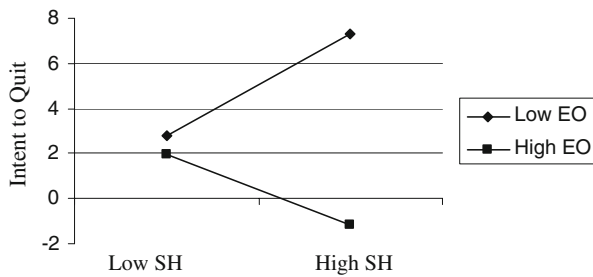


Figure 1. Interaction between sexual harassment from a supervisor and perceptions of equal opportunity on intent to quit.

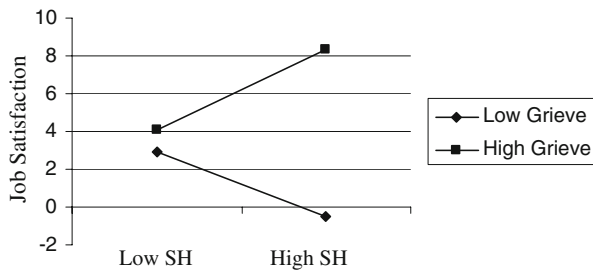


Figure 2. Interaction between sexual harassment from a supervisor and confidence in grievance procedures on job satisfaction.

interactions, we plotted the interaction using the method recommended by Jaccard et al. (1990) described above. When confidence in grievance procedures is low, there is a negative relationship between sexual harassment and job satisfaction. However, when confidence in grievance procedures is high, the slope is positive. Hypotheses 7a, 8a, and 9a, which argued that confidence in grievance procedures would moderate the relationship between co-worker sexual harassment and outcome variables, were not supported.

## Discussion

In this study, we investigated two research questions. First, does sexual harassment from different perpetrators differentially predict employee outcomes? Second, does employees' perception of their organization's support of equal opportunity initiatives and employees' confidence in their organization's grievance procedures moderate the effects of sexual

harassment from different perpetrators? We address each of these research questions in turn.

An important conclusion from this study is that the sexual harassment outcomes appear to differ depending on who perpetrates the harassment. Sexual harassment from supervisors and co-workers had significant negative effects on victims' attitudes and behavioral intentions. Specifically, sexual harassment from supervisors was significantly and positively associated with employees' intent to quit, and sexual harassment from co-workers was significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction and significantly and positively associated with over-performance demands. However, sexual harassment from organizational outsiders did not significantly relate to any of the outcome variables. Therefore, only sexual harassment from organizational insiders seemed to have a negative effect on organizational outcomes.

Theoretically, these findings challenge some existing ideas about the effects of sexual harassment. For example, sexual harassment is often described as an organizational stressor. Fitzgerald et al.'s (1995) model of sexual harassment as a source of job stress suggests that sexual harassment induces feelings of distress. These feelings of distress lead to decreased job satisfaction and an increase in work withdrawal behaviors (Hanisch and Hulin, 1990). However, the lack of a negative effect for harassment from outsiders found in the current study suggests responses to harassment are more complex than a general distress reaction. That is, there may be some boundary conditions to the idea that sexual harassment, as an organizational stressor, will have adverse outcomes for employees. Since sexual harassment from outsiders is generally not under the control of the organization (attribution theory), outsiders often have little power over employees (power perspectives), and outsider harassment often does not threaten and indeed may reinforce employees' role identities (role identity theory), employees may interpret such harassment as inconsequential or manageable, even though they might see the same behavior from an organizational insider as offensive, unwanted, or uncomfortable.

The lack of evidence supporting the adverse effects of sexual harassment from organizational outsiders supports our review of attribution, power, and role identity theories. That is, these perspectives suggest that the negative effects of sexual harassment from organizational insiders on work-related

outcomes result from more than just “distress” with unwelcome conduct as current theory suggests. Rather, sexual harassment from organizational insiders may have a very different *meaning* for employees than sexual harassment from organizational outsiders. Attribution theory suggests that employees may be more likely to perceive that the organization is *responsible* for sexual harassment perpetrated by organizational insiders than sexual harassment perpetrated by organizational outsiders. In addition, power perspectives suggest employees may be more likely to perceive sexual harassment as *inescapable* when it is perpetrated by powerful others such as supervisors (i.e., high in legitimate, reward, and coercive power) and co-workers (i.e., high in referent power) than sexual harassment perpetrated by relatively powerless others, such as organizational outsiders. Finally, role identity theory suggests that employees may perceive sexual harassment as a *threat to their identity* when it is perpetrated by important others, such as superiors and peers, than sexual harassment perpetrated by unimportant others, such as organizational outsiders. Though each theory offers a potential explanation for the current findings, future research is needed to determine the relative contribution of each.

In terms of our second research question, the current research helps identify some key moderators of the negative effects of sexual harassment. We found that employees’ perception of their organization’s support of equal opportunity initiatives mitigated the negative effects of sexual harassment from supervisors on two of the outcome variables (intent to quit and over-performance demands). In addition, employees’ confidence in their organizations’ grievance procedures mitigated the negative effects of sexual harassment from supervisors on all three of our outcome variables. These findings are important because they provide some clear practical direction to organizations. The finding suggests that organizations that have clear equal opportunity policies and that implement consistent grievance procedures may be effective in helping employees cope with sexual harassment from *supervisors*. Interestingly, neither equal opportunity support nor confidence in grievance procedures moderated the effects of sexual harassment from co-workers. Therefore, there appears to be a need for stronger internal policies to deal with sexual harassment when the perpetrator is a *co-worker*.

#### *Limitations and future research*

As with all research, this study has a number of limitations that need to be noted. First, our measure of sexual harassment was not consistent with that commonly used in the literature. As indicated in our description of this measure, we had several reasons for operationalizing sexual harassment in this way. Further, we attempted to avoid the problems with self-labeling (Magley et al., 1999; Munson et al., 2001) by ensuring we did not explicitly ask participants whether they had experienced sexual harassment. Nevertheless, future research should replicate these findings using a more traditional measure to enable cross-study comparisons. Similarly, the present study used a single-item measure of job satisfaction; however, as noted in the “**Method**” section, evidence suggests that single-item measures of job satisfaction can be valid (Wanous et al., 1997).

A further limitation is the single-source, self-report nature of the data, which means that common method variance might explain some of the significant results. However, as has been noted by Wall et al. (1996), interactions are much less likely to be present if common method variance is operating because the effect of a self-report bias would be to inflate the main effects; this was not the case in the current study. In addition, the fact that there were differential patterns of correlations between sexual harassment from different sources, and in ways that were largely consistent with our expectations, suggests that the results cannot be attributed to common method variance alone.

The generalizability of the resulting model might also be a concern in this study. For example, the finding that harassment from outsiders might have few negative effects and might depend on staff having some power over those outsiders. Many occupations that deal with outsiders have some degree of power over outsiders, even if it is simply to allow employees to deny services to outsiders. However, there are also contexts where outsiders might have considerable power over staff, such as cases in which clients have large accounts with the organization (Gettman and Gelfand, 2007). In such contexts, we would suggest that power, role identity, and attributions will still be important determinants of the differential effect of harassment from insiders and outsiders, but exactly how these influences play out might differ.

We expect that the findings for internal harassment and the moderating role of equal opportunity support and in grievance procedures should generalize more broadly. In this respect, there is reason to believe that this sample will not differ significantly from the general population. For example, though they did not examine police samples in their meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment, Willness et al. (2007) did compare the outcomes of sexual harassment in studies that used military and non-military samples. They reasoned that due to the relatively unique structure and culture created by the persistence of male-dominated hierarchies and the disproportional ratio of men to women (Pryor, 1995), the experience of sexually harassed women in the military may differ from the experience of women in the general population. However, with the exception of work satisfaction, which was more strongly (and inversely) related to sexual harassment in the military samples, their analysis did not find any significant differences between the two samples on any of the outcome variables investigated (i.e., organizational climate, job gender-context, supervisor satisfaction, co-worker satisfaction, organizational commitment, mental health, and physical health). While we did not study a military organization *per se*, police organizations have traditionally followed a quasi-military approach (i.e., strict hierarchy, authoritarianism, and impersonality; Angell, 1971; Cordner, 1978; Jermier and Berkes, 1979; Reams et al., 1975; Sandier and Mintz, 1974); thus they may be sufficiently similar in structure and culture to military organizations for Willness et al.'s meta-analytic findings to generalize to our police sample.

The significant correlations between sexual harassment perpetrated by supervisors, co-workers, and outsiders (see Table 1) suggest an important area for future research. Specifically, these strong positive relationships may reflect a tendency for those who commonly perceive themselves to be victimized by one source to also be victimized by other sources (i.e., representing a possible "whiner" effect; Glomb et al., 1997). However, in this case, the "whiner" effect is unlikely to explain our findings because we found differential relationships between sexual harassment from different sources. More likely, this may be indicative of toxic work environments, in which sexually harassing behaviors are perpetrated by multiple sources (or alternatively, not perpetrated at all). In

such environments, sexual harassment may invoke reciprocated harassment (i.e., as in an aggression spiral; Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Friedman et al., 2000). These competing explanations should be investigated in future research.

In general, very little research has attempted to understand why harassment has the effects it does, or the underpinning mechanisms (see Parker and Griffin, 2002 for an exception). The present study suggests that sexual harassment is more complex than a distress issue. We posited three mechanisms (i.e., attributions, power, and role identity) which may explain the differential outcomes depending on the perpetrator of sexual harassment. Future research needs to investigate these and other potential mechanisms across a broader range of contexts. Experimental research is conducive to testing internal validity and therefore may provide a valuable test for determining whether power, attributions, or role identity is the most important explanatory factor, or whether a combination of these or other factors are at play. The ecological validity of these findings would require future field research. For example, researchers could draw from samples in which the outsider has higher and lower levels of power over employees. In addition, researchers could ask employees to rate their level of power relative to outsiders and the degree to which insiders and outsiders affect employees' perceived role identity. Such research would help disentangle the power versus role identity explanations put forward here.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that organizations need to recognize that sexual harassment from different sources have different implications (see also Hershcovis and Barling, 2009). In an interview with a police sergeant, the sergeant commented that in the police force, it is often said that you need to be able to "take a bit of harassment from your peers" because you have to be able to "take it out there." The implication of comments such as these is that if you cannot take it from your peers, you will not make it as a police officer. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that these two forms of harassment are completely different phenomena with very different meanings for employees. From a

practical perspective, the current study suggests an emphasis that moves beyond issues of sensitivity when educating staff about harassment and why it is damaging; rather, managers and employees need to understand that harassment is an act that relates to power, identity, and relationships within organizations.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions to the level of outsider control organizations may have. One such exception (i.e., the ability to intimidate offenders) may be uniquely true of our police sample. Nonetheless, many organizations do not have the same level of control over organizational outsiders as they do over insiders.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Amy Christie, Julian Barling, Jana Raver, and Nick Turner for feedback on earlier drafts of this manuscript, and the study participants for their cooperation. We express our appreciation to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the UK Health and Safety Executive for their financial support.

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