

An overview of the literature on antecedents, perceptions and behavioural consequences of sexual harassment

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Abstract *The detrimental effects of sexual harassment have been documented in the literature over the past 35 years, and recognized as a serious problem for all working women. In this paper, we review the existing research surrounding the phenomenon of sexual harassment, focusing upon the factors that may facilitate its occurrence. We also provide an overview of the differences in perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment according to gender, organisational power and context. The negative impact of sexual harassment on its victims is also reviewed. Finally, the relatively new research on victims' responses to sexual harassment experiences and the link between this work and the stress and coping literature is recognized. Several suggestions are made for future research, policy making and treatment avenues.*

Keywords *sexual harassment; victims; antecedents; consequences; coping*

The injurious effects of sexual harassment on women in all arenas of life cannot be disputed. There has been invaluable research conducted over the past 35 years into the nature of sexual harassment and its causes and how it affects the lives of millions of working women. The highly publicized phenomenon of sexual harassment has become one of the most debated of social problems (Gutek, 1985; Sev'er, 1999; Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997), and many researchers have made important endeavours to examine, define and measure it (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1993, 1996; Gutek, 1985; MacKinnon, 1979; Pryor, 1987; Stockdale, 1996; Thomas & Kitzinger, 1997; for a review see Pina, Gannon & Saunders, 2009).

Expressions of sexuality in the workplace is a phenomenon that carries over the already existing societal structures of gender conduct and gender socialization in the workplace (Gutek, 1985). Problems, however, can arise with expressions of sexuality in the workplace because, for some women, this type of attention is often unwanted and discriminatory. Therefore, expressions of sexuality at work become an issue for workers, organisations and policy makers alike.

Types of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is one of the most prevalent forms of sexual aggression (Pina et al., 2009; Spitzberg, 1999). In fact, one in two women has experienced some form of sexual harassment

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or unwanted sexual behaviour in her lifetime [European Commission, 1998; Pina et al., 2009; US Merit Systems Protection Board (USMSPB), 1995]. A number of typologies have been put forward, based upon the necessity to create useful definitions of sexual harassment. Gruber and his colleagues (Gruber, 1992; Gruber, Smith & Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1996) developed the Inventory of Sexual Harassment (ISH) in order to categorize sexually harassing behaviours. The ISH distinguishes between three clusters of behaviours: verbal comments (e.g. comments on an employee's looks or clothing), verbal requests (e.g. repeated requests for dates, etc.) and non-verbal displays (e.g. staring, whistling), all of which range in severity (Gruber, 1992; Gruber et al., 1996). Timmerman and Bajema (1998) also categorized sexually harassing behaviours into the following main types: verbal (i.e. remarks about physical appearance, sexual jokes, verbal sexual advances), non-verbal (i.e. staring and whistling), physical (i.e. behaviours ranging from unsolicited physical contact to assault/rape) and quid pro quo (i.e. threats of reprisals if sexual advancement is refused, or promises of advantages if sexual advancement is accepted).

Another view (Fitzgerald, 1996; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Fitzgerald, Gelfand & Drasgow, 1995; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995) is that sexual harassment is a sexualized form of a work relationship that can take two main general forms; one is quid pro quo harassment, in which the victim is coerced into having sexual relations with a supervisor or co-worker under the threat of job-related reprisals or the promise of job-related advancements. The other form is hostile environment harassment, which encompasses two subcategories; gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention. Gender harassment refers to a situation in which female employees are subjected regularly to offensive, gender-related or sexual comments, and unwanted sexual attention refers to unreciprocated sexually related behaviour which may not be relevant to job-related outcomes. Both these types help in creating a hostile working environment for women (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1980; Fitzgerald, 1993; Lucero, Middleton, Finch & Valentine, 2003; MacKinnon, 1979). Furthermore, sexual harassment can also take three distinct forms with regard to perpetrator status: sexual harassment by superiors, sexual harassment by co-workers (peer-to-peer) and sexual harassment by subordinates (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; for a full review of the academic and legal definitions of sexual harassment see Pina et al., 2009).

In this paper, we focus upon the organisational and societal aspects of why sexual harassment occurs, by offering a succinct review of past research on the antecedents of sexual harassment (e.g. organisational climate, power differentials and perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment; Begany & Millburn, 2002; Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Driscoll, Kelly & Henderson, 1998; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Stockdale, Vaux & Cashin, 1995; Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007), as well as its consequences (e.g. stress, PTSD, feelings of powerlessness, fear, job dissatisfaction, quality of life; Hulin, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 1996; Lapierre, Spector & Leck, 2005; Mueller, De Coster & Estes, 2001). This paper will also focus upon women's varied responses to sexually harassing incidents (see Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998; Barling et al., 1996; Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Dougherty, 1999). While there is an abundance of research papers on the consequences of sexual harassment for the victim, to our knowledge there are few reviews that include the behavioural responses of victims and the elements that may drive or hinder those responses. It is of great importance to examine how those responses, on the part of the victim, may help in understanding sexual harassment more clearly and inform policy making and protective measures. It must be noted that victims of sexual harassment can belong to any gender and come from any social strata or socioeconomic background. However, in keeping with the majority of reported cases (European Commission, 1998; Stockdale, 1996; USMSPB, 1981, 1988, 1995), this paper will focus upon women as victims of sexual harassment.

Antecedents of sexual harassment

There have been several studies conducted in the past 20 years focusing upon the antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment (Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman & Drasgow, 1999; Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1997; Lapierre et al., 2005; Rotundo, Nguyen & Sackett, 2001; Willness et al., 2007), thus recognizing its severity and prevalence in work arenas. Willness et al. (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 41 studies examining direct experiences of sexual harassment ($n=70,000$), which produced staggering results. In particular, in terms of antecedents, the findings suggest that the organisational climate (tolerance of sexual harassment) and the job–gender context of an organisation (proportion of women in occupation/workgroup composition) play an important part in facilitating sexual harassment (Willness et al., 2007). In fact, the organisational climate is currently considered the strongest predictor of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Pryor, 1995; Welsh, 1999; Williams, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 1999). As Hulin et al. (1996) have argued, the permissiveness of the organisational climate will determine the perceived risk of the potential victim to complain, the possibility and the availability of sanctions for harassers and the reception of one's complaints by the organisation and colleagues with regard to how serious they are. Furthermore, according to Williams et al. (1999), unclear or absent organisational policies and procedures for dealing effectively with sexual harassment lead directly to negative employee experiences with associated health and job-related outcomes (Willness et al., 2007).

Gender ratio at work

The gender ratio in the workplace has been shown to have a definitive role in occurrences of sexual harassment (Willness et al., 2007). The literature surrounding this issue has focused upon the traditionality aspect of the occupation, with workplace environments where women are a numerical minority (i.e. traditionally masculine occupations) facing more gendered behaviour (i.e. displays of masculinity, aggression, sexism) and an increased likelihood of sexual harassment (European Commission, 1998; Gruber, 1998; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986; Terpstra & Baker, 1987; Wasti, Bergman, Glomb & Drasgow, 2000). Women working in male-dominated environments often become the target of sexual harassment as they are viewed as deviating from their gender role by taking on a man's job (Ragins & Scandura, 1995).

When women are the minority in the workplace, otherwise termed as “token”, they become decidedly salient (Pryor & Whalen, 1997; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989) and may encounter hostility on this basis (Gutek, 1985). In such contexts, gender is hypothesized to become a salient feature of the work roles for women, thus leading to a more sexualized working environment (Gutek & Cohen, 1987; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986; Ragins & Scandura, 1995; Williams et al., 1999). For that reason alone, women may be less likely to speak out against sexual harassment, fearing greater visibility, alienation and retaliation from male co-workers and supervisors (Carothers & Crull, 1984).

It may be hypothesized, therefore, that female-dominated occupations should note less prevalence of sexual harassment than male-dominated occupations. However, according to Gutek and Morasch (1982), female-dominated occupations are not free from sexual harassment either. Ragins and Scandura (1995) also report that there were no differences in their sample of male- and female-dominated workplaces with regard to sexual harassment experiences. The differences seem to lie in who perpetrates sexual harassment in either workplace (Lach & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1993; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000), and it appears that in female-dominated professions the harassment seems more likely to come from supervisors

(European Commission, 1998). It is, however, interesting to note the contrasting fact that in the nursing professions, in particular, the majority of nurses are most probably harassed by male patients but, for registered nurses in particular, Finnis and Robbins (1994) found that there was an increased likelihood that other staff members and male nurses would also be involved in harassment (Finnis & Robbins, 1994; Robbins, Bender, & Finnis, 1997).

Carothers and Crull (1984) posit that the sexual harassment experienced by women in traditionally female occupations is more likely to be of the *quid pro quo* nature. They explain that the harasser internalizes the sex role that society prescribes for women (i.e. as a sexual object) and then consequently interacts inappropriately with women within the workplace. By contrast, in non-traditional careers, women are more likely to experience hostile environment harassment from men, at all levels of the workplace. This is hypothesized to be the result of perceptions of threat to men's socioeconomic status, and harassment at all levels of the organisation is men's response to that threat (Carothers & Crull, 1984; Whaley, 1997).

However, it must be noted that types of sexual harassment are not mutually exclusive, and both types can co-exist in workplaces. Rates in harassment experience and reporting will vary according to the particular type of harassment occurring (i.e. gender versus *quid pro quo*) as *quid pro quo* harassment is generally more identifiable than gender harassment, but not necessarily more prevalent (European Commission, 1998).

Organisational climate and characteristics

Although sexual harassment is related typically to behaviours in a corporate workplace or academic setting, people who work with antisocial individuals also experience sexual harassment and are at risk of experiencing sexualized behaviour from offenders or patients (Hatch-Maillette & Scalora, 2002). According to Ednie (1996), forensic settings may facilitate violence and victimization for female staff, as the patients' criminal histories play prominent roles in the everyday functions of staff and male patients may threaten female staff with physical or sexual violence (Ednie, 1996; Hatch-Maillette & Scalora, 2002). Furthermore, female nurses who are identified as being sexual targets for known sexual offenders, or for whom offenders have expressed sexualized interest or fantasies, may be moved to work in other wards or hospitals, which will have an impact upon their everyday working roles and self-esteem (Gannon, 2009).

Sexual harassment appears to permeate all manner of professions, including police and military officers, medical and health professions, bus and taxi drivers and waitresses and waiters (Brown, 1998; European Commission, 1998; Williams et al., 1999). According to Ragins and Scandura (1995), blue-collar working women report more sexual harassment experiences than their white-collar counterparts, but were less likely to react to it, and chose to simply ignore it. In other words, most blue-collar working women accept sexual harassment as part of their job (Ragins & Scandura, 1995).

Finally, the organisational context in terms of permissiveness and perceptions of tolerance of sexual harassment, as well as the presence of and adherence to policies and prevention strategies play a crucial role in the incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment (European Commission, 1998; Fitzgerald, Hulin & Drasgow, 1994; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Ragins & Scandura, 1995). When policies are non-existent or not clearly defined, women will be hesitant to label their experiences as harassment, leading to under-reporting of the phenomenon (Riger, 1991). Furthermore, if an organisation adheres strongly to their policies against sexual harassment, there is a reduction in severe sexual harassment incidents (i.e. sexual coercion; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). This indicates clearly that the mere presence of a sexual harassment policy is not enough to safeguard women's rights at work, or

to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. While adherence to policies appear effective in reducing severe forms of sexual harassment, their effectiveness with gender harassment is not yet clear (O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). Nevertheless, policies must be clear for all employees and strictly adhered to by organisations in order to create a safer environment and prevent harassment from occurring (Dekker & Barling, 1998; Mueller et al., 2001; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000).

Sexual harassment and power

It is broadly accepted that one of the central antecedents underlying sexual harassment is power (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993). Feminist scholars argue that sexual harassment is, in fact, misuse of power used to subordinate women in society (MacKinnon, 1983). The classic definitions identify social power as the ability of a person to affect the rewards and costs of another person without the other having any control over the situation (French & Raven, 1959; Russell, 1938). If the harasser has no control over the victim's employment and financial state then the victim could engage in reprisal, official complaining or simply walking away from the situation at no personal cost. Hence, it is clear why sexual harassment can be seen as a case of misuse of power (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor & Strack, 1995).

The norms that define western societies suggest that there are powerful and powerless individuals, the relationship of which should be defined by hierarchy, and consequently the exercise of power within that hierarchy should be expected and accepted (Lips, 1991). Furthermore, patterns in western societies suggest that men typically hold more power than women and the stereotypes prevailing between genders are that men are goal-orientated, powerful and aggressive, whereas women are passive-receptive and family-orientated (Allgeier & McCormick, 1983; Eagly & Mladinic, 1989).

Organisational power may be viewed as the institutionalization of the aforementioned societal power structure within organisations (Pfeffer, 1981; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Research conducted by Eagly and colleagues (Eagly, 1983; Eagly & Wood, 1982; Eagly & Mladinic, 1989) has highlighted the fact that gender-related differences in formal status may be the cause of differences in influence between men and women. Men tend to occupy more high-status positions, whereas women are more likely to hold less powerful positions, therefore having fewer opportunities to exercise power over men. Eagly (1983) also noted that the individuals who occupy higher organisational positions are expected to make demands of individuals that occupy lower-status positions. Harassing behaviours may, therefore, be perceived by some of the higher-status people as extensions of that right. The obvious outcome of such beliefs is that men holding higher-status positions may be more accepting of such beliefs and, therefore, more likely to harass lower status female individuals.

Research indicates that the status of the perpetrator relative to the target of the harassment gives rise to several issues (Cleveland, 1994; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). Superiors can exercise power in two ways: (1) by controlling work-related outcomes, such as promotions, evaluations, salaries and schedules, or (2) by threatening possible non-compliance with organisational orders, sanctions or demotions, or in some cases work termination (O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Thacker & Gohmann, 1996). Therefore, according to O'Connell and Korabik (2000), the supervisor's status and power within the organisation may be misused in order to achieve sexual favours from women-targets within his or her realm. Indeed, Gutek (1985) posits that it is supervisors who will frequently engage in these most severe (*quid pro quo*) types of harassment (O'Connell & Korabik, 2000).

Differences in perceived power can be apparent among co-workers and although it tends to be of the less severe kind (i.e. hostile environment), sexual harassment among co-workers

appears to be the most frequent type of sexual harassment (European Commission, 1998; USMSPB, 1995). This finding is most perplexing, as there is not a clearly defined power difference between the perpetrator and the victim, and it leads to the conclusion that there may be processes other than power that are needed to explain the sexual harassment (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993). A co-worker or a fellow student has no formal position of power over the victim, and cannot influence the victim's future employment status. However, research evidence suggests that there are covert ways of exercising power over a colleague; for example, by using gender harassment as a tactic of devaluation, or by providing or withholding aid, cooperation and support. Co-workers are a source of job-relevant information to each other, and in many instances cooperation between colleagues is needed in joint projects; thus, if cooperation is deliberately withheld, a hostile work environment is created (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Schulz, 1998).

Interestingly, women in power positions within organisations have been found to experience sexual harassment by men who hold less powerful positions (Graverholz, 1989), what Benson (1984) termed "contrapower harassment". This form of harassment is usually of the less severe type (e.g. derogatory gender-based comments, sexist jokes), but it nevertheless succeeds in creating a hostile and negative environment towards women. The harassment in this case is targeted towards the gender differences, and is often aimed at devaluing the woman in the power position by focusing upon stereotypical characteristics of women (e.g. helplessness and passivity; Gutek, 1985). Therefore, sexual harassment by peers or subordinates can be seen as an attempt to gain power or equalize the power differences between the harasser and the victim (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). In terms of gender ratio, this type of sexual harassment may occur where women in power positions are numerical minorities. It can, therefore, be argued that the harassment may be a result of the combination of the woman being a "token" in the workplace, and an attempt to equalize the power-differentials by subordinate men. However, women in higher positions need not be numerical minorities for them to be harassed by subordinates. This behaviour can generalize to varied gender-ratios within organisations. An illustration of this may be the harassment of female academics by students (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; DeSouza & Fansler, 2003; Graverholz, 1989; McKinney, 1990, 1992). DeSouza and Fansley (2003) conducted a study on sexual harassment experiences of male and female academics ($n=209$) and male students' likelihood to sexually harass ($n=158$). Results indicated that one-third of students admitted in engaging in sexually harassing behaviour towards academics, and academics reported a variety of sexually harassing behaviours, predominantly from male students, ranging from sexist comments to sexual harassment.

Characteristics of sexual harassment perpetrators

Until recent years, the explanations for the occurrence of sexual harassment have focused upon sociocultural explanations. Feminist theories posit that sexual coercion and harassment stems from men's general desire to maintain their power advantage over women within society (Bohner, Weisbrod, Raymond, Barzvi, & Schwarz, 1993; Brownmiller, 1975; MacKinnon, 1979). More recently, however, researchers have begun to recognize that individual differences play a powerful role in facilitating sexual harassment (for a review see Pina et al., 2009).

The most valid and widely used measure to assess men's proclivity to sexually harass is the Likelihood to Sexually Harass scale (LSH; Pryor, 1987). The scale assesses likelihood to sexually harass by using 10 different hypothetical scenarios and a series of self-report measures. These self-report measures require respondents to indicate how likely it is for them

to behave in a sexually harassing manner or to engage in other harassing behaviours (Driscoll et al., 1998; Pryor, 1987). A US study with undergraduates found that men score higher on LSH than women and that their perceptions of what defines sexually harassing behaviours differ, with men focusing upon issues of sexual attraction, which they define more broadly than women, and women focusing upon aspects of power which they define more broadly than men (Perry, Schmidtke & Kulik, 1998).

The likelihood to sexually harass may be facilitated by situational factors (Willness et al., 2007). For example, in situations allowing physical contact, men high on self-reported LSH engage in more attempts of sexual touching compared to low LSH men (Driscoll et al., 1998; Pryor 1987; Pryor, Giedd & Williams, 1995). Also, in situations where an experimenter presents a harassing role model who makes sexual innuendos about a female confederate, high LSH men are more likely to attempt to touch that female. When the female confederate is treated professionally by the experimenter, sexual advances from the male participants are less frequent (Pryor, LaVite & Stoller, 1993). This demonstrates clearly that permissiveness of the social climate is a strong facilitating factor for men who already hold some proclivity to sexually harass.

The likelihood to sexually harass has also been found to be related to several attitudes and gender-based or gender-related traits (Pryor, 1987; Pryor et al., 1995; Pryor & Stoller, 1994). For example, LSH is correlated with power/dominance, as well as attitudes towards sexual violence. Research has indicated that males who score highly on LSH hold beliefs about sexual behaviour that are adverse, endorse higher levels of rape-myths and are more accepting of interpersonal violence (Begany & Millburn, 2002; Pina et al., 2009; Pryor, 1987; Pryor et al., 1995; Pryor & Stoller, 1994). Men high on LSH also display a higher rape proclivity, have difficulty in perspective-taking and are higher in authoritarianism (Driscoll et al., 1998). Begany and Millburn (2002) also found that authoritarianism predicts LSH significantly, and that rape-myths as well as hostile sexism mediate the relationship between authoritarianism and LSH; thus, sexual harassment “as non-physically violent sexual aggression is a part of the same continuum as physically violent sexual aggression” (p. 125).

Victim vulnerability

There have been studies that have identified particular characteristics of sexual harassment victims in terms of risk factors and vulnerability issues (Cleveland, 1994; Coles, 1986; Fitzgerald et al., 1994; LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986; Mueller et al., 2001; O’Connell & Korabik, 2000). However, to date there has been no systematic study of these characteristics, especially in terms of antecedents for sexual harassment. As noted earlier, women tend to be represented overwhelmingly as targets of sexual harassment in most studies and surveys (European Commission, 1998; USMSPB, 1981, 1988, 1995). Some of the individual vulnerability characteristics that have been identified, however, are age (Coles, 1986; European Commission, 1998; Lach & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1993; O’Connell & Korabik, 2000), with younger employees (<35 years) being more likely to be targets of sexual harassment, and marital status (European Commission, 1998; LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986), with single or divorced women being targeted more frequently than married or widowed women.

However, with regard to education, results appear inconclusive. Some research (e.g. Coles, 1986; O’Connell & Korabik, 2000) shows that women with higher levels of education are more vulnerable to sexual harassment than women with less education, whereas other research (e.g. European Commission, 1998; Timmerman & Bajema, 1999) shows that women with a lower level of education are those most vulnerable to sexual harassment.

Although these results appear to be inconclusive, it may not be so upon closer inspection. According to O'Connell and Korabik (2000), women with higher educational levels may not necessarily be targeted more frequently, but may be more knowledgeable of what constitutes sexual harassment and how to report it.

Furthermore, in their findings, O'Connell and Korabik (2000) report that women above 40 years of age were more willing to report that they had experienced gender harassment by both higher- and lower-status men. However, O'Connell and Korabik (2000) use ageism to explain these findings, rather than simply gender harassment (Kimmel, 1988; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Unger & Crawford, 1992). This shows that experiences of sexual harassment are clearly varied and complex, and trying to categorize women in risk factor groups may be presumptuous at this stage, as the relationships between the aforementioned factors are not linear or conclusive.

Perceptions of sexual harassment

Before women's responses to harassment are examined in detail, the issue of what women are willing to acknowledge as sexual harassment needs to be addressed. Perceptions of sexual harassment can be a very important factor in the antecedents, consequences and responses link.

Although what generally constitutes sexual harassment has been somewhat established (see Pina et al., 2009), research shows that women are often unwilling to acknowledge sexual harassment as occurring to them, especially when the question is asked explicitly (Alemany, 1998; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Stockdale et al., 1995). Fitzgerald (1996) reports, in a US study she conducted, that approximately 50% of female respondents had experienced offending events. Yet, surprisingly, only 20% of these same women reported having experienced sexual harassment (see also Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Stockdale et al., 1995).

Models of sexual harassment identification

After examining the existing literature surrounding layperson and observer perceptions of sexual harassment, Stockdale et al. (1995) summarized five general models or hypotheses for explaining how individuals come to identify behaviours as being sexually harassing. (It should be noted that although Stockdale et al. referred to these five accounts as "models", they are merely groups of factors hypothesized to influence sexual harassment acknowledgement.) The five general models summarized were: type of experience, attribution, affect, organisational power and personal characteristics. Stockdale et al. (1995) set about testing each of these proposed models using a self-report survey, in which detailed experience of previous sexual harassment incidences were collected from US university staff and students. Only respondents who had some experience of sexual harassment ($n=612$) were entered into the multiple logistic regressions, which were performed to examine how well variables generated under each model predicted sexual harassment acknowledgement.

With regard to type of experience, Stockdale et al. (1995) hypothesized that because sexually harassing acts span from subtle remarks and sexist jokes to direct physical assault, labelling an experience as sexual harassment will depend upon the type and severity of the experience. In other words, there is difficulty in perceiving such a range of behaviours as belonging to a continuum, so people often mistake gender harassment and sexual coercion as differing greatly with regard to categorization (Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989). Indeed, research using scenarios of sexual harassment shows consistently that the severity of the

offensive behaviour will indicate whether lay observers will label the behaviour as sexual harassment (Baker, Terpstra & Larnz, 1990; Hunter & McClelland, 1991; Terpstra & Baker, 1989). Interestingly, however, in testing this model, Stockdale et al. (1995) reported that individuals who had experienced sexual looks or touching were those most likely to acknowledge having been sexually harassed, yet those who had been asked to perform favours or who were sexually assaulted did not. Thus, severity *per se* did not appear to predict sexual harassment acknowledgement. This may be due to the fact that sexual assault could be labelled as such rather than sexual harassment.

In terms of attribution, Stockdale et al. (1995) hypothesized that individuals would be more likely to characterize behaviour as sexual harassment if the event was seen as consistent in frequency and persistency, if similar behaviours were infrequent in the work environment, and if the incident involved unique behaviour towards the target/victim (Stockdale et al., 1995). The findings did indeed show that consistent and unique behaviour increased the likelihood of sexual harassment acknowledgement. Interestingly, however, respondents were more likely to acknowledge sexual harassment if similar behaviours were more frequent in the work environment.

In terms of affect, Stockdale et al. (1995) hypothesized that some reports of unwanted sexual behaviour may be more or less upsetting to the victim than they would appear to an observer or third party. For example, Fitzgerald and Hesson-McInnis (1989) showed that observers found the more physically intrusive forms of sexual harassment to be more serious than gender harassment or sexual seduction. However, the evaluations and experiences of actual victims did not necessarily coincide with the observers' evaluations. Thus, severity of experience may not necessarily be related linearly to acknowledgment of the event as sexual harassment (Stockdale & Vaux, 1993). Upon testing the affect model, Stockdale et al. (1995) found that individuals who experienced negative affect were those most likely to acknowledge sexual harassment. Thus, it seems that the negative affect experienced as a result of the harassing experience (e.g. anger, fear, confusion, hostility) could be more important than the actual type of unwanted sexual behaviour experienced (Stockdale et al., 1995).

Organisational power refers to power within the organisation. Pryor (1985) found that behaviours used in scenarios were more likely to be labelled as sexually harassing if the perpetrator's status was higher than the victim's. Stockdale et al., therefore, predicted that the higher the occupational status and power of the perpetrator in relation to the victim the more likely respondents would acknowledge having been sexually harassed. Upon testing this model, Stockdale et al. (1995) found that individuals who experienced sexualized attention from superiors were those most likely to regard this behaviour as harassment. Sexualized attention from equals was also a significant predictor, but to a lesser extent than that of superiors. Thus, this model may offer some explanation for the low acknowledgement and reporting of sexual harassment in general, in that peer sexual harassment, where the perpetrator's status is equal to that of the victim's, is more frequent than superior harassment. Thus, peer sexual harassment may be slightly less recognizable for both victims and observers (Stockdale et al., 1995). This indicates that women's understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment is indeed linked to power and status.

Finally, in terms of the personal characteristics model, Stockdale et al. (1995) hypothesized that individuals perceive and react to sexual harassment differently and thus will exhibit differences in labelling their experiences as constituting sexual harassment. They proposed several possible influential factors, such as educational background, age, marital status, gender and ethnicity. However, upon testing this model, Stockdale et al. found that the only factor that predicted acknowledgment differences significantly was gender, with females more ready to acknowledge sexual harassment than males. This is something that researchers

claim might have something to do with the difference in the experience of the event between the genders (Stockdale et al., 1995; see Gender differences in perception).

We posit that perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment have a bidirectional relationship with the antecedents and that they are informed by the consequences of the sexual harassment experience (see Figure 1). Based upon the aforementioned literature on antecedents, it can be hypothesized that women will readily accept and acknowledge the behaviour as sexual harassment if they are working in a stable and safe organisational environment, where the climate is not tolerant of sexual harassment. We also hypothesize that the negative experience and adverse consequences of sexual harassment are also likely to inform perceptions of sexual harassment for some victims (e.g. Stockdale et al., 1995).

Gender differences in perception/attractiveness

Researchers have documented thoroughly that the variability in perceptions of sexual harassment depends upon many factors, such as gender, situational context and attractiveness (Blumenthal, 1998; Golden, Johnson & Lopez, 2002; Pryor, 1995; Rotundo et al., 2002). One of the individual characteristics that has received much attention in the literature is gender (Rotundo et al., 2001).

Gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment are evident in many studies (Blumenthal, 1998; Kenig & Ryan, 1986; Wiener, Hurt, Russell, Mannen & Gasper, 1997). What is usually shown is that women are less tolerant of sexual harassment. They tend to report sexual harassment more often and they perceive a broader range of behaviours as sexual harassment than do men (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1991; Golden et al., 2002; Gutek, Morasch & Cohen, 1983; Kenig & Ryan, 1986). A simple explanation for this finding could lie in the differences in gender-role socialization (Quinn, 2002). Men who are socialized in sexually aggressive, patriarchal societies, with negative views towards women, who have high belief in rape myths and are higher in self-reported rape proclivity are less likely to view certain behaviours as sexually harassing (Stockdale, 1993). Paradoxically, however, research has shown that the more both genders adhere to traditional gender roles, the more likely they are to consider such behaviours as acceptable or within the range of normalcy. Therefore, the

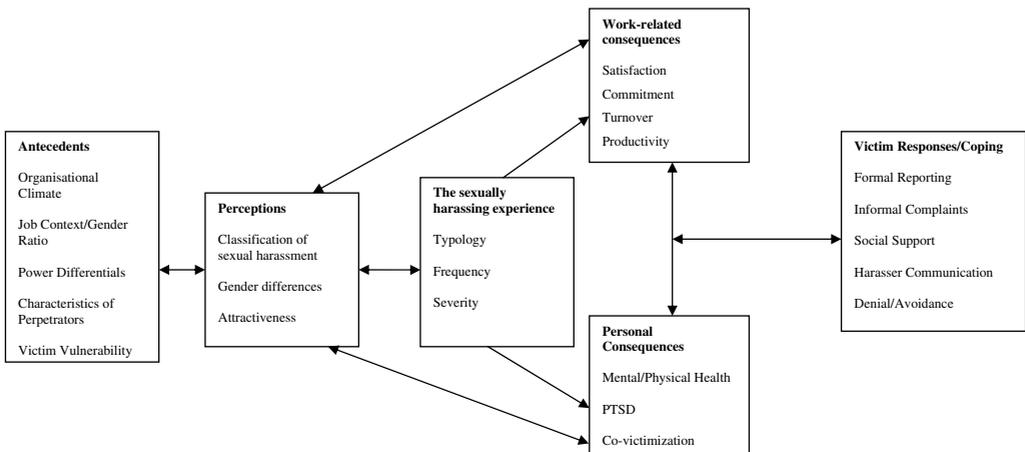


FIGURE 1. A schematic overview of antecedent and consequence variables in relation to perception of and actual sexual harassment experiences.

more normal one thinks these behaviours are, the more likely they are to deny any harm intended in those behaviours (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Pryor, 1987; Quinn, 2002).

Females also tend to perceive the more subtle forms of sexual harassment more easily than do males. In other words, while both sexes view overtly oppressive behaviours such as sexual assault and quid pro quo as being clear sexual harassment cases, men do not perceive the more subtle behaviours as such (Gutek & O'Connor, 1995; Kenig & Ryan, 1986).

However, there are some empirical studies that have not replicated gender differences in perceptions (Baker, Terpstra & Cutler, 1990; Pryor, 1985). Other studies have also been unable to demonstrate that gender differences are related to other factors, such as professional status of the perceiver, or the age of the rater, or perceiver, of the harassing behaviour (Blumenthal, 1998; Burian, Yanico & Martinez, 1998; Gutek et al., 1999; Gutek & O'Connor, 1995). Even among the studies that have found a gender difference, meta-analyses of those studies reveal that these differences are not usually associated with large effect sizes (Rotundo et al., 2001).

Golden et al. (2002) conducted a study with both male and female college students ($n = 150$) on appearance cues and attractiveness, and their findings strongly indicated an effect of appearance on perceptions of sexual harassment for both genders. In particular, if the potential victim was an attractive female, or if the potential harasser was less attractive, in both those instances ambiguous situations were more likely to be perceived as sexual harassment (Golden et al., 2002). Conversely, if the female victim was rated as unattractive and the harasser was rated as attractive, any actions directed at the female were less likely to be identified as harassing. Interestingly, the raters also attributed less dominant traits to the less attractive males. Furthermore, it was the effect of the female target's attractiveness that influenced the ratings more strongly, rather than the attractiveness of the male harasser. Similar findings on the effect of physical attractiveness in perceptions of sexual harassment have been reported by Popovice et al. (1996), Castellow, Wuensch and Moore (1990) and Pryor and Day (1988).

Consequences of sexual harassment

There is a growing body of literature that has investigated the psychological effects of sexual harassment on its victims (Crull, 1982; DiTomaso, 1989; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Glomb et al., 1999; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Johnson & Sacco, 1995; Lapierre et al., 2005; Mueller et al., 2001; Munson, Hulin & Drasgow, 2000; Pryor, 1995; Ragins & Scandura, 1995; Richman et al., 1999; Satterfield & Muehlenhard, 1997; Thacker & Gohman, 1996; Timmerman & Bajema, 1999; Willness et al., 2007). For many women, sexual harassment is considered male violence, even in its mildest form. The subtle threat inherent in sexual harassment and the unpredictability of the outcome of these situations are commonplace experiences of working women (Johnson & Sacco, 1995). This threat commonly carries a sexual component to it that, many claim, serves as a warning to women of their vulnerability to assault. The uncertainty in the outcome of those behaviours that could possibly evolve into something violent, the intrusion and violation of personal space, the feelings of powerlessness, vulnerability and fear are what Kelly (1988) describes as similarities between actual violence and sexual harassment. Kelly (1988) highlights the fact that what are coined as minor, non-violent incidents may often not be dealt with as minor by the women who experience them.

Outcomes that are a direct result of sexual harassment are usually divided into two broad categories consistent with Fitzgerald et al.'s (1995) model: work-related outcomes, relevant to

the victims' professional lives or psychological and health outcomes that are relevant to the victims' personal lives (Munson et al., 2000; Pryor, 1995; see Figure 1).

Work-related consequences

With regard to work-related outcome variables, job satisfaction is one of the variables examined most frequently within the sexual harassment literature. Overall, sexual aggression and harassment in the workplace has been found to greatly reduce job satisfaction (Ironson, 1992; Mueller et al., 2001; Munson et al., 2000; Lapierre et al., 2005; USMSPB, 1981). Some studies have shown that this job dissatisfaction includes dissatisfaction towards work, co-workers and/or supervisors (e.g. Barling et al., 1996; Glomb et al., 1997; Schneider, Swan & Fitzgerald, 1997), and others have shown a direct pattern of increasing job satisfaction, with reduced perceptions of sexual harassment victimization (e.g. Mueller et al., 2001).

Sexually harassing experiences at work have also been found to greatly reduce how attached and committed workers feel to their organisation (Willness et al., 2007). Harassed employees often feel that their organisation is partly responsible for their experiences and how often these occur, as well as in not supporting them and protecting them, by implementing strict no-harassment policies (Hogler, Frame & Thornton, 2002; Willness et al., 2007). Such discontentment may lead to feelings of anger towards the perpetrator and the organisation (for failing to protect them or tolerating such behaviours), and consequently greater detachment from the organisation (Willness et al., 2007).

Sexual harassment incidences have also been linked to withdrawal from the organisation (Gruber, 2003; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald & DeNardo, 1999; Schneider et al., 1997). Withdrawal is usually measured by two different constructs, work withdrawal (being late, neglectful, avoiding work tasks) and job withdrawal (turnover, or intention to leave organisation; Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991). The meta-analytical study by Willness et al. (2007) indicates that sexual harassment and both types of organisational withdrawal are correlated positively, but work withdrawal is related more strongly to sexual harassment, with most employees reporting behaviours such as task avoidance and absenteeism rather than quitting their jobs.

Another cost of sexual harassment is worker productivity (Lengnick-Hall, 1995), with diminished quantity and quality of work, diminished ability to cooperate and work with others and negative attitudes towards productivity. Sometimes, victims of sexual harassment have been found to engage in retaliatory and aggressive behaviours as well as work/task avoidance and neglect (Gruber & Smith, 1995).

Research conducted by Williams et al. (1999), in the military workforce, showed that the stronger the anti-harassment policies, the more committed women reported to be to their organisation, and more importantly, implementation of those policies reduced the frequency of sexual harassment incidences. The findings of Willness et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis, however, show that the relationship between sexual harassment and organisational commitment is influenced greatly by the organisational climate and more research is needed to establish whether there is a directional relationship between sexual harassment and workers' attitudes towards the organisation. The aforementioned findings suggest strongly the necessity for clear anti-harassment policies in workplaces that would, first and foremost, protect and safeguard the constitutional needs of workers, but also protect the organisations from loss of productivity, worker dissatisfaction and costly lawsuits.

Personal consequences

On a personal level, sexual harassment experiences have an overall negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of victims, which have been documented extensively (Crull, 1982; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand & Magley, 1997; Munson et al., 2000; Pryor, 1995; Willness et al., 2007) from two main perspectives: overall subjective well-being and reactions to stressful situations. In general, more than half of harassed employees describe negative consequences for their personal well-being as a direct result of sexual harassment (European Commission, 1998). Many harassed employees report a great range of affect, from anger, fear and sadness to depression, humiliation and mistrust (Crocker & Kalemba, 1999; Loy & Stewart, 1984; Pryor, 1995; USMSPB, 1981). Some even report stress-related psychosomatic symptoms as a direct consequence of sexual harassment at work. These symptoms include headaches and muscle pains, nausea, exhaustion, palpitations and sleeping disruptions (European Commission, 1998; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Magley et al., 1999; Willness et al., 2007).

There is also research proposing that sexual harassment is linked to the negative effects and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a large proportion of the victims (Avina & O'Donohue, 2002; Dansky & Kilpatrick, 1997; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Koss, 1990; Willness et al., 2007). Avina and O'Donohue (2002) criticized DSM-IV's lack of operational conditions for meeting diagnostic criteria, therefore claiming that this results in relying heavily upon clinical judgement for what constitutes trauma. Although some severe forms of sexual harassment involve actual bodily threat and injury, which meets some of the DSM-IV criteria of PTSD, according to Avina & O'Donohue (2002) more subtle forms of sexual harassment that may indeed accumulate to perceptions of physical threat, or feelings of helplessness, currently do not meet criteria for PTSD, but need to be explored further to understand their full impact. Indeed, Willness et al. (2007) verified in their meta-analysis that experiencing sexual harassment (usually the most severe *quid pro quo* types) is correlated positively with symptoms of PTSD. As experiences of sexual harassment are largely subjective, and the severity of the negative outcomes may vary greatly depending on the type of harassment and victim personality characteristics, wider criteria may need to be applied to encompass what constitutes trauma (Avina & O'Donohue, 2002). Moreover, the negative effects of sexual harassment have a lasting impact on life satisfaction and usually persevere over time (Munson et al., 2001; Pryor, 1995; Willness et al., 2007).

Research has also linked indirect exposure to sexual harassment with negative psychological outcomes in what is termed "co-victimization" (Jacobson, Koehler & Jones-Brown, 1987; Shakoor & Chalmers, 1991), in which others directly witness or experience the victimization of another. Research conducted by Glomb et al. (1997) shows that incidences of direct and indirect exposure to sexual harassment have a more profound impact than thought previously, exerting the same detrimental influence on personal and psychological wellbeing as well as job satisfaction. Consistent with their predictions, Glomb et al. (1997) found that women who perceived their organisations to be tolerant of sexual harassment were more likely to belong to a work group that is infused with sexual harassment, as well as being more likely to experience sexual harassment themselves.

The psychological impact of sexual harassment on its victims is undisputable, and multidimensional in its nature (Pryor, 1995). It can affect victims in both direct and indirect ways (Glomb et al., 1997), and is also heavily reliant upon the type of sexual harassment perpetrated (Pryor, 1995). The organisational status and role of the harasser is linked directly with the type of experience for the victim, both in terms of professional and personal outcomes. For instance, a perpetrator who holds organisational power over the victim is more

likely to cause negative worker productivity as well as negative attitudes towards the organisation (Pryor, 1995). The type and severity of the harassment is also linked directly to the personal outcomes of harassment for the victim, with more coercive types of harassment tending to result in more severe emotional problems that can last over time (Pryor, 1995).

Victims' responses to sexual harassment

There is an ever-increasing interest within the sexual harassment literature in women's responses and resistance to sexual harassment (Dougherty, 1999; Gruber, 1998; Pryor, 1995). It is critical for the understanding of sexual harassment and its effects on women, as well as for strategies to combat sexual harassment effectively, to examine how women tend to respond to sexually harassing incidents.

It has been argued by researchers that resistance to sexual harassment and the resistance of existing *status quo* within the organisation can have one of two effects: either perpetuate, or change the existing *status quo* (Clair, 1994; Clair, Chapman & Kunkel, 1996). One way to change the existing *status quo* is through the voicing and sharing of commonalities in experiences of sexual harassment by its victims, therefore raising awareness of the phenomenon and its unacceptability (Dougherty, 1999).

It is undisputed that women's experiences of and reactions to sexual harassment are varied, personal and complex. There are many factors that can be related to women's reactions (emotional or behavioural), such as organisational status, power, affect (fear, anger), self-esteem and assertion, victim-offender relationship, perceived efficacy and organisational tolerance of sexual harassment (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998; Barling et al., 1996; Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Gartner & Macmillan, 1995). However, reporting of sexual harassment and filing grievances or taking legal action remains very low (6% of respondents in USMSPB, 1995; Charney & Russell, 1994).

With regard to victims' types of responses to sexual harassment, a review of the past literature suggests four general types (Bingham, 1991; Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Livingston, 1982). These responses are: formal reports, informal complaints, social support strategies and attempts to communicate with the harasser (Bingham & Scherer, 1993). Formal and informal complaints to relevant authorities appear to be the least likely strategies adopted by sexually harassed employees. For example, USMSPB (1981) report that only 2.5% of harassed employees sought legal action and 11% made reports to authorities. The 1995 USMSPB sexual harassment report indicates a slight rise in formal action, with 6% of employees seeking legal action. However, as 76% of the victims indicated knowing the formal complaint channels, this percentage still remains very low.

The reason for the low formal reporting trends appears to be linked to the organisational structure. Approximately half of those using the formal option reported that the situation improved slightly, whereas 33% reported the situation actually worsening. The worsening of the situation is linked to how permissive the organisational environment is of sexually harassing behaviours. The USMSPB (1995) survey indicates that most respondents/victims of sexual harassment did not think that their claims were serious enough (50%), they thought that reporting would make the situation at work unpleasant (29%), they did not believe anything would be done (20%) or they thought that reporting the behaviour would affect their career adversely (17%).

Seeking social support from friends and co-workers appears to be a commonly reported strategy in the sexual harassment literature, but only social support from friends is reported as

actually helping the victims (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Livingston, 1982). A possible reason for this preference is the closeness, comfort and support the victims receive from their close, personal network. It is possible that confiding in co-workers is perceived as more risky, because victims may be doubted by co-workers, or advised not to act (Bingham & Scherer, 1993).

Personal attempts to resolve the issue and confronting the harasser have been reported in some cases as helping the situation (Terpstra, 1986). The positive outcome of confronting the harasser is dependent upon the directness, assertiveness and aggressiveness of the confrontation (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Gruber & Bjorn, 1986). However, that response is found to also be dependent upon the harasser's organisational status. The higher the status of the harasser, the least likely it becomes that the victims will choose confrontation, perhaps fearing job-related reprisals, alienation or retaliation (Bingham & Scherer, 1993).

Research on the typology of victim's responses to sexual harassment has found links between behavioural responses and type of occupation (LaFontaine & Tredeau, 1986; Livingston, 1982; Ragins & Scandura, 1995). For example, research by Ragins and Scandura (1995) shows that blue-collar women in male-type occupations reported experiencing more sexual harassment than white-collar women, but they were less likely to take active approaches towards the harassers, such as confrontation or reporting, and were more likely to ignore the harassment. Among white-collar women, however, the more frequent the harassment the more likely they were to take active, aggressive responses. Ragins and Scandura (1995) note that blue-collar women face greater alienation and lack of colleague support than their white-collar counterparts, who are perhaps more protected by the organisations, and that blue-collar women fear more physical attacks, or may view sexual harassment as an inherent part of the job (Gutek, 1985; Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982).

Research by Adams-Roy and Barling (1998), with regard to predictors of women's decisions to report sexual harassment, makes a distinction between organisational and personal factors which would lead to different responses towards sexually harassing behaviours. Adams-Roy and Barling (1998) hypothesized that organisational factors would predict the likelihood to report sexual harassment via the formal route, while personal factors would determine whether or not women would confront the harasser (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998). Their findings indicated that women who reported sexual harassment via the formal complaint route actually showed worse perceptions of organisational justice than the women who chose not to report or to confront the harasser. Their explanation is that the study responses were taken after the response had occurred. As such, the reaction from the organisation as a result might have been disappointing. With respect to personal characteristics, their results show a significant linear relationship between negative assertiveness (i.e. the willingness to express annoyance or irritation; Gambrill, 1977) and confronting the harasser.

Coping as a response to sexual harassment

As sexual harassment is conceptualized nowadays as a workplace stressor and has well-documented stress-related effects (e.g. Munson et al., 2001), it is only natural that it should be examined within the general stress framework (Lazarus, 1966, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Organisational stressors cause workers to deviate from their normal functioning patterns at work (Summers, DeNisi & DeCotiis, 1989) and therefore require a coping mechanism (Munson et al., 2001).

With regard to coping and sexual harassment, researchers have adopted multidimensional frameworks (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg & Dubois, 1997). The

Knapp et al. (1997) framework introduced a two \times two typology of sexual harassment, based upon what they termed “focus” and “mode”. Focus refers to whether coping is focused upon the self or the perpetrator, and mode refers to whether the victim is supported or unsupported with regard to external assistance (Knapp et al., 1997; Wasti & Cortina, 2002). Similar to the types of responses identified by Bingham and Scherer (1993), Knapp et al. (1997) also recognized four response strategies for coping with sexual harassment: advocacy seeking (formal complaint, grievances), social support, avoidance/denial and confrontation/negotiation (with perpetrator; Knapp et al., 1997; Wasti & Cortina, 2002). According to Knapp et al. (1997), advocacy seeking and social coping are supported in terms of mode of response, whereas the remaining two are unsupported. In terms of focus, avoidance/denial and social coping are self-focused whereas the remaining two are perpetrator-focused. Wasti and Cortina (2002) examined women’s responses to sexual harassment cross-culturally and found some support for each of Knapp et al.’s (1997) four response strategies for coping with sexual harassment (see also Malamut & Offerman, 2001). Wasti and Cortina did, however, recognize that their methodology (which was cross-sectional and survey-based) was unable to capture fully the range of interacting factors involved in the development and facilitation of coping responses to sexual harassment.

Interestingly, Cortina and Wasti (2005) proposed that an individual’s coping response to sexual harassment would probably stem from four main groups or levels of explanatory factors: (1) the individual, (2) the microcontext (i.e. the harassing situation), (3) the mesocontext (i.e. the organisational context) and (4) the macrocontext (i.e. the cultural context). Cortina and Wasti conducted four surveys—cross culturally—to examine women’s experiences of sexual harassment, and coping responses to sexual harassment (measured using the Coping with Sexual Harassment Questionnaire; Fitzgerald, 1990). Using k-means cluster analysis techniques, Cortina and Wasti examined the best-fitting cluster solutions for describing both professional and non-professional women’s coping configurations. The results showed that both professional and non-professional women were best grouped according to three main clusters: (1) avoidant-negotiators, who coped by avoiding contact with the stressor or thoughts about the stressor, yet made attempts to negotiate with that stressor (i.e. the perpetrator), (2) support-seekers, who employed tactics similar to the avoidant-negotiators, but also sought social or workplace supports and (3) detached women, who detached themselves not only from the harassment, but also from any implementation of coping responses (i.e. they did not appear to utilize any coping responses). Cortina and Wasti (2005) sought to differentiate these three clusters using core sociodemographic and other descriptive variables, operationalized to reflect each one of the four levels of explanatory factors.

At the individual level, Cortina and Wasti (2005) found that, generally, age appeared to be associated with coping clusters. For example, older professional and non-professional women tended to be over-represented in the detached coping response cluster relative to the avoidant-negotiator cluster. Cortina and Wasti (2005) explain this finding by arguing that older women may prefer not to jeopardize the safety of their job with what they perceive as being “risky” coping strategies. At the microcontext level, the type of sexual harassment experienced and frequency of that harassment appeared to be associated with coping clusters. That is, women who experienced more stressful, frequent, harassment were those who exhibited the broadest coping profiles (i.e. through utilizing negotiation or social support-seeking). Cortina and Wasti (2005) argue that this finding is externally valid, supporting the pre-existing coping literature which illustrates that individuals use more varied coping mechanisms when faced with more severe and pervasive stressors. At the mesocontext level, organisational tolerance of sexual harassment appeared to be associated with coping clusters. For example, for non-professional women, avoidant-negotiators tended to view their

organisation as being more permissive of harassment than women who were detached. Cortina and Wasti suggest that detached women may simply have experienced less invasive harassment due to the less permissive work environment, alleviating the need for coping responses (2005). At the macrocontext level, culture appeared to be associated with coping clusters. Here, women from patriarchal backgrounds (e.g. Hispanic Americans) tended to be over-represented in the avoidant-negotiator cluster, and women from less patriarchal backgrounds (e.g. Anglo Americans) tended to be over-represented in the detached coping cluster. It is unclear exactly why this would be the case, although Cortina and Wasti (2005) suggest that women from patriarchal backgrounds may simply be employing coping mechanisms—in the form of negotiation—that are more protective towards the perpetrator.

Cortina and Wasti's (2005) study provides some interesting insight into the coping profiles of working women and highlights the complexity of women's coping responses to sexual harassment. In other words, women are likely to cope with, and tackle, sexual harassment using varied responses. Nevertheless, it is unclear from this study exactly how coping behaviour unfolds for victims of sexual harassment, and this is something that clearly warrants closer examination. For example, which method do women choose to use first, and under what circumstances? Clearly, additional studies, using varied methodological designs would help to answer such questions more clearly.

Future research and conclusions

Research on the topic of sexual harassment has verified the prevalence and pervasiveness of the phenomenon in society today. Sexual harassment affects a wide spectrum of people, and is a form of sexist discrimination that possibly affects the greatest proportion of the population (Bargh et al., 1995). It has been noted that sexually harassing and coercive behaviours are more prevalent than the more physically violent forms of aggression (Spitzberg, 1999), and approximately one in every two women has experienced some form of sexually unwanted behaviour (European Commission, 1998).

The negative and deleterious effects of sexual harassment on a personal and organisational level are unquestionable and documented thoroughly in the literature. In terms of the psychological effects of sexual harassment, research indicates negative consequences for employees' personal well-being as a direct result of falling victim to sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Many harassed employees report experiencing a great range of emotions, including anger, fear, sadness, depression and humiliation. Many also report psychosomatic symptoms as a direct consequence of sexual harassment at work, as well as symptoms related to PTSD (European Commission, 1998; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Magley et al., 1999; Willness, et al. 2007). Sexual harassment has also been documented to have a detrimental effect at the organisational level. Job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation and worker productivity have all been shown to be reduced greatly as a result of sexually harassing experiences (Lapierre et al., 2005; Lengnick-Hall, 1995; Willness et al., 2007).

The research findings discussed above indicate strongly that investigating the causes of sexual harassment, but also investigating how women respond to various sexual harassment incidents, are of great importance for future research directions. Previous research has focused upon the contexts under which sexual harassment is likely to occur (European Commission, 1998; Fitzgerald, Hulin & Drasgow, 1994; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Ragins & Scandura, 1995). In particular, in terms of antecedents, an organisational climate that is tolerant of sexual harassment and organisations where women are a numerical minority

have been considered strong predictors of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Wasti et al., 2000; Williams et al., 1999; Willness et al., 2007).

Although the concept of power is central to the understanding of sexual harassment, and it is widely believed that the position of power within an organisation is what enables some perpetrators to make requests of subordinates, this type of sexual harassment appears to be less prevalent (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; European Commission, 1998; USMSPB, 1995). The most frequent type of sexual harassment is that between co-workers, which is somewhat perplexing in terms of power differentials (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; European Commission, 1998; USMSPB, 1995). No clear power differences are evident between colleagues. However, Cleveland and Kerst (1993) have argued that the issue lies within the concept of perceived, rather than actual, power. There are more covert ways of exercising power over a colleague, and these concepts need to be examined further in future research. In particular, it would be interesting to examine perceived power and how this may affect women's strategies of coping with sexual harassment.

There has been extensive research on the negative consequences of sexual harassment on its victims (Willness et al., 2007). However, there has been limited research focusing upon how women cope with sexual harassment and what strategies they are likely to adopt as a response to being sexually harassed (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Wasti & Cortina, 2002). More recent work has attempted to link sexual harassment and the coping literature (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Knapp et al., 1997; Wasti & Cortina, 2002). This research has suggested that women are likely to use a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with sexual harassment depending upon the context and the severity of the behaviour (Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Knapp et al., 1997; Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Nevertheless, there is an evident need for experimental research, looking particularly at specific harassment incidents and coping choices and the relationship between them. There is also a need to develop studies that focus more explicitly upon the sequence of coping behaviours adopted by sexual harassment victims, and how such responses are adapted and evaluated as sexual harassment progresses.

It is very important for further research to focus upon how women respond to various cases of sexual harassment. These response strategies can provide valuable information in order for researchers and practitioners alike to create a clear conceptual framework for sexual harassment aetiology and policy. Under this framework, more specific interventions can be created in order to ensure the implementation of effective anti-harassment policies in the workplace. Viewing the various negative effects of sexual harassment on female employees, it becomes all the more apparent that all workplaces today need clear anti-harassment policies, known to all staff, that will be adhered to strictly in order to protect both workers and organisations. Empirical work on antecedents and consequences and how they ultimately shape response strategies will also greatly inform policy making and effective strategies for combating sexual harassment at work.

The work of Cortina and Wasti (2005) has focused upon harassment victims' coping mechanisms, without first examining victims' perceptions or appraisals of various harassing contexts and consequent emotional reactions. Previous research suggests strongly that the way women perceive sexual harassment will influence, along with other factors (e.g. context, perceived power, organisational support) the types of coping strategies adopted (e.g. Pryor, 1995). Empirical research is needed to examine further the relationship between appraisals of the different types or severity of sexual harassment and the response strategies adopted by victims, as depicted in our schematic overview of the sexual harassment literature depicted in Figure 1.

Previous research also suggests that the way in which harassment victims react emotionally to unwanted sexual behaviour will affect the types of coping responses adopted (e.g. Pryor, 1995). Sexual harassment is known to elicit a variety of negative emotions from its victims (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1998; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Kelly, 1988; Magley et al., 1999). Thus, it would be very interesting to determine the role of those emotional experiences (e.g. anger, fear, surprise, frustration, sadness, humiliation, betrayal, etc.) on the coping strategies adopted to deal with sexual harassment.

Finally it is important, for our understanding of sexual harassment and its impact, to understand the aetiological process of sexual harassment in its full entirety. As yet, we are unclear about the full array of complex factors driving both sexual harassment and responses to this harassment. Researchers have examined a range of factors, some of which have been investigated in much detail (e.g. gender ratio, power differentials). Thus, the time has come for future researchers to investigate this phenomenon fully using methods that are sophisticated enough to detect the full range of factors and complex feedback mechanisms that exist between antecedents, perceptions and consequences of sexual harassment.

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