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The Antecedents and Consequences of Sexual Harassment in Organizations: An Integrated Model

Louise F. Fitzgerald, Charles L. Hulin, and Fritz Drasgow

In the short time it has been recognized as a serious social and organizational problem, sexual harassment has been shown to have substantial consequences for individuals and organizations alike. Considerable data have accumulated confirming that harassment is widespread in both the public (Culbertson, Rosenfeld, Booth-Kewley, & Magnusson, 1992; Martindale, 1990; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board [USMS], 1981, 1987) and private sectors (Gutek, 1985; Saunders, 1992; and others) and that it has significant consequences for employee health and psychological well-being. Like other, more familiar, forms of occupational stress, harassment has been linked to psychological distress (Crull, 1982, 1984; Saunders, 1992; Schneider & Swan, 1994, Testimony of D. G. Kilpatrick, 1992), to physical symptoms (Gelfand & Drasgow, 1994), and to a wide variety of stress-related illnesses (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Koss, 1990; Koss et al., 1994), as well as to increased use of health care (USMS, 1981, 1987) and use of and need for psychological services. Specific job-related consequences include decreased job satisfaction (Gruber, 1992; Schneider & Swan, 1994), self-reported decrements in job performance (USMS, 1981, 1987), job loss, unemployment, and career interruption (Coles, 1986; Gutek, 1985; Livingston, 1982). Lowered job satisfaction has in turn been causally linked to a variety of organizational withdrawal behaviors (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991). Given such data, it is not surprising to find that harassment also carries significant organizational costs of both a financial and a less tangible nature. In one recent report (USMS, 1987), it was estimated that sexual harassment cost the federal government more than $250 million in a 2-year period alone, and a study of the Fortune 500 (Wagner, 1992) has indicated that costs per company averaged $6.7 million annually, excluding the cost of litigation.

Despite the abundance of data, harassment is typically ignored in studies of occupational stress, and little coherent theory exists concerning factors that may give rise to it or conditions that may exacerbate or moderate its consequences. In this chapter, we describe an integrated model of the antecedents and outcomes of sexual harassment in organizations. Beginning with a brief
overview of legal and behavioral definitions, we highlight the similarity of definitions of harassment to traditional conceptualizations of psychological stress (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and briefly summarize the literature concerning its prevalence, correlates, and outcomes. We then develop a theoretical model that integrates these variables, outline a set of measures designed to assess it, and conclude with a discussion of the practical problems inherent in conducting sexual harassment research in organizations.

Overview of the Literature

Legal Definitions

Despite the recent attention commanded by this topic, considerable misunderstanding persists concerning the definition of harassment, including what behaviors are involved and the circumstances under which each qualifies as harassment. Much of this confusion arises from the fact that harassment is a legal concept as well as a psychological phenomenon (i.e., construct) and that the two are not completely isomorphic (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, in press; Gelfand, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, in press). According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), sexual harassment refers to

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, (as well as) other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature ... when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct ... is used as the basis for employment decisions...; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment. (EEOC, 1980, pp. 74676–74677)

Thus, from a legal perspective, harassment includes two broad classes of stimuli: quid pro quo and hostile environment. Quid pro quo situations involve instances of coercion in which some job benefit is conditioned on sexual cooperation; hostile environments, on the other hand, include a variety of sex-related actions and situations ranging from offensive verbal behavior (e.g., jokes, vulgar comments, or conversation of a derogatory or sexual nature) and unwanted sexual attention to sexual imposition or assault. The EEOC (1993) recently amended its guidelines to emphasize that hostile and derogatory gender-related behavior is prohibited even when no strictly sexual (i.e., erotic) intent is involved.

Legal decisions and accumulated case law have determined that both forms of harassment are illegal under both Title VII and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act (see, e.g., Alexander et al. v. Yale University, 1977/1980; Ellison v. Brady, 1991; Franklin v. Guinnett County School District, 1992; Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson, 1986; Robinson v. Jacksonville Shipyards, Inc., 1991), although the severity necessary to trigger the legal prohibition (particularly with respect to hostile environment cases) may be lower when the harasser is a single individual. To meet the standard of sexual harassment required not on "quid pro quo" bases (Fitzgerald, 1990).

The question of whether harassment, as legally disposed, has been "eliminated" from American society or if it has simply become more subtle is open to debate. What has come to the fore is a real concern that harassment is taking on a new or updated form in the workplace. As a result of this, the Sixth Amendment has been cited as a support for the right of women to be free of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Conduct arose in this scenario because it is considered to be harassment.

Men, however, have been left behind in a vacuum of law.

The Supreme Court has yet to address the issue of sexual harassment directly. However, cases of sexual harassment have been brought to the Court's attention. In one case, the Court held that objectionable sexual comments were not harassment. In another case, the Court held that psychological injury caused by sexual harassment was not sufficient to justify a claim of harassment. However, the Court did not consider "the victims' subjective experience" (Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc., 1991) as evidence of sexual harassment. (Folkman, 1984) It therefore remains open whether the Supreme Court will address this issue at some point in the future.

Behavioral and Psychological Implications

From a more technical perspective, we can see that inappropriate conduct can vary considerably in its psychological dimensions: gender, race, and other personal characteristics (Fitzgerald, 1991). An individual's experience of harassment is characterized by feelings of humiliation, powerlessness, and behavior that are perceived as degrading and demeaning.

Women constitute the vast majority of workers in this area, thus the frame of reference for harassment typically

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the similarity of psychological processes present in harassment is a subject of some debate. As a practical matter, a single instance of quid pro quo harassment is frequently considered sufficient to meet the standard, whereas hostile environment situations are generally required not only to be unwanted and offensive but also to be repeated (EEOC, 1990).

The question of whose judgment of offensiveness and severity is to be legally dispositive has also occasioned considerable dispute. Traditionally, courts have invoked the perspective of an abstract “reasonable person” when making such determinations; more recently, some have proposed the substitution of what has come to be known as the “reasonable woman” standard. This standard holds that harassment should be judged from the perspective of the victim, who in most cases will be a woman. For example, in 1991 (Ellison v. Brady, 1991), the Sixth Circuit reasoned as follows:

Conduct that many men consider unobjectionable may offend many women. Because women are disproportionately victims of rape and sexual assault, women have a stronger incentive to be concerned with sexual behavior. . . . Men, who are rarely victims of sexual assault, may view sexual conduct in a vacuum without a full appreciation of the social setting or the underlying threat of violence that a woman may perceive.

The Supreme Court was widely expected to clarify this issue in its most recent harassment decision (Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc., 1992/1993); the Court, however, contented itself with clarifying the objective severity standard, noting that objectionable behavior did not have to be so severe as to cause serious psychological injury. With respect to the subjective element, the Court retained the “reasonable person” terminology, but added that it was also necessary to consider “the victim’s subjective perception that the environment is abusive” (Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc., 1992/1993, p. 368), thus acknowledging what stress theorists would refer to as the process of primary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Because of the gender-blind nature of this standard, however, there remains considerable ambiguity and the possibility of conflicting decisions at lower judicial levels; thus, many observers expect the Court to revisit this issue at some point in the future.

Behavioral and Psychological Definitions

From a more traditional psychological perspective, harassment can be most appropriately conceptualized as a latent behavioral construct composed of three dimensions: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Fitzgerald et al., in press; Gelfand et al., in press). Gender harassment is characterized by insulting, misogynistic, and degrading remarks and behavior that are not designed to elicit sexual cooperation but that convey hostility and degrading attitudes about women.¹ Unwanted sexual attention con-

¹Women constitute by far the overwhelming majority of sexual harassment victims and are thus the frame of reference for this program of research. The application of the concepts discussed here to male employees is presently unclear.
sists of unwelcome sexual behavior that is unwanted and unreciprocated by the recipient but that is not tied to any job-related reward or punishment. Sexual coercion refers to implicit or explicit threats or promises of job-related outcomes conditioned on sexual cooperation. Sexual coercion is thus the behavioral equivalent of the legal concept of quid pro quo, whereas unwanted sexual attention and gender harassment constitute the two aspects of a hostile environment.

In a recent paper, Fitzgerald, Swan, and Fisher (in press) highlighted harassment's role as a psychological stressor by defining it psychologically as follows:

unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding her resources, or threatening her wellbeing. Coping (with harassment) is the process of responding to such unwanted sex-related behavior and includes both practical attempts to solve, manage or alter the situation . . . and attempts to manage cognitive and emotional reactions.

Their definitions, which parallel the classic stress and coping formulations of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), thus locate the phenomenon of harassment clearly within the cognitive behavioral stress research paradigm, providing a rich theoretical framework from which it can be explored.

Prevalence and Correlates

It is by now well documented that harassment is an organizational phenomenon of substantial prevalence.² Although truly national figures do not exist, estimates range from 17% of the female labor force, when considering only harassment by supervisors (Saunders, 1992), to more typical figures of 40% (USMS, 1981, 1987) and 50% (Gutek, 1985) when coworker behavior is also included. Such global estimates obscure the differential rates that have been documented for different types of harassment; for example, sexual coercion is estimated to account for only a very small percentage of the problem, despite being the canonical example. In Gutek's (1985) study of the general labor force, unwanted sexual touching was more than twice as common as expectations of sex as "part of the job." Similar ratios of unwanted sexual attention to direct sexual coercion have characterized the federal government studies (USMS, 1981, 1987), Fitzgerald et al.'s (1988) studies of the university environment, and virtually all other incidence and prevalence investigations.

The main organizational factors that have been shown to influence frequency rates include a male-dominated workgroup (e.g., skewed gender ratios, male supervisor, and masculine-typed work activities; Baker, 1989; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Gutek, 1985) and an organizational culture tolerant of harass-

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²In epidemiological terms, prevalence refers to the estimated percentage of individuals who will experience a particular phenomenon at some point during their lifetime. In contrast, incidence refers to the estimated percentage within a particular time period. Sexual harassment studies differ in terms of whether they refer to incidence or prevalence, and this should be kept in mind when interpreting frequency statistics.
unreciprocated by reward or punishment. Rises of job-related distress is thus the behavior where unwanted aspects of a hostile press) highlighted psychologically as experienced by the recipient for wellbeing. Coping with unwanted sex-related issues may manage or alter the emotional reactions.

Formulations of harassment clearly affect, providing a rich organizational phenomenon do not exist, in considering only formal figures of 40% or behavior is also important, despite general labor force, as expectations of attention to direct studies (USMS, rarity environment, etc.

Influence of gender ratios, var. 1989; Gruber & tolerant of harassment-stage of individuals who are. In contrast, incidence actual harassment studies should be kept in mind.

ment, as evidenced by lenient management norms (Hulin, 1993; Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993) or by the weakness or absence of sexual harassment policies, procedures, and remedies (Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1992). Although Pryor (1987) has shown that it is possible to identify men who are likely to harass—at least in a laboratory situation—the prevalence of the problem indicates that it cannot be adequately accounted for solely by an individual deviance explanation (cf. Pryor et al., 1993) and that more comprehensive structural and organizational perspectives are required.

With respect to individual-level correlates, most authorities agree that female workers constitute the overwhelming majority of sexual harassment victims, although this assertion is occasionally disputed (see e.g., Vaux, 1993), and the rare suit brought by a male plaintiff receives considerable notoriety in the media. There is some evidence that young, unmarried women are more likely than others to become victims, although, as Koss et al. (1994) pointed out, researchers rarely examine which types of harassment are experienced by which victims. Gender harassment, for example, is not only the most widespread form of harassment, but also likely bears a weaker link to age than do the other categories.

**Individual and Organizational Responses to Sexual Harassment**

Research on coping responses has until recently been almost exclusively focused on determining whether victims reported the harasser to the organization. Despite the prevalence of harassment, it has been relatively rare for formal complaints to be brought; most evidence suggests that only a small percentage of victims ever discuss their experiences with anyone in authority (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gutek, 1985; Livingston, 1982) and that only a small subset of that group file formal complaints with their employers or institutions.

In a secondary analysis of the first USMS data set, Livingston (1982) reported that "only 2.5% of the victims made use of formal actions of any kind in response to the harassment incident" (p. 14). Thirty-three percent of those who did take formal action reported that it "made things worse," a finding replicated by Hesson-McInnis and Fitzgerald (1992).

The fear of individual or organizational retaliation that inhibits many victims from responding (Gutek, 1985) thus appears to have some foundation in fact, at least in some organizations. In the analysis of the most recent government data set (USMS, 1987), Hesson-McInnis and Fitzgerald (1992) coded victim response on a continuum of assertiveness and found that more assertive responding was associated with more negative outcomes of every sort: job related, psychological, and health related. Although the recent publicity afforded this issue by such high-profile events as the Thomas confirmation hearings and the Navy Tailhook Convention scandal has resulted in substantial increases in agency complaints, the effect on organizational response is unknown.

Little is known in any formal way about how managers in organizations respond to allegations of sexual harassment. Gutek and Koss (1993) suggested that ignoring or downplaying the complaint appears common, possibly because
of management inexperience and discomfort when dealing with sexual issues. They also noted the similarity between reporting harassment and whistleblowing (Miceli & Near, 1988; Near & Miceli, 1987) as an explanation for widespread anecdotal reports and some data (e.g., Coles, 1986; Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1992; Livingston, 1982) that victims who report incidents are frequently blamed for causing trouble. “The effects on any workplace caught in the throes of an investigation into an allegation of sexual harassment or divided by a court case of harassment may be more visible to management than the effects of harassment itself” (Gutke & Koss, 1993, p. 36). Formal, organizationally based research on this topic is badly needed.

**Individual and Organizational Outcomes of Sexual Harassment**

As noted above, considerable evidence exists documenting the negative impact of harassment on individual workers. Such consequences include job loss (Coles, 1986; Crull, 1982; Gutke, 1985; USMS, 1981, 1987), decreased morale and absenteeism (USMS, 1981, 1987), decreased job satisfaction (Baker, 1989; Gruber, 1992), and damage to interpersonal relationships at work (Culbertson et al., 1992; DiTomaso, 1989; Gutek, 1985). Evidence of lowered productivity and decrements in job performance has also been reported (USMS, 1981, 1987). In addition, research has confirmed that harassment can exert a substantial negative impact on psychological well-being as well as have serious health-related consequences (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Koss, 1990; Koss et al., 1994). Psychological reactions include increased fear (Holgate, 1989; Junger, 1987), decreased self-esteem (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982), lowered self-confidence (Benson & Thomson, 1982), increased anxiety, depression, and greater risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Schneider & Swan, 1994).

With the exception of financial cost—much of it related to negative impact on employees and the costs associated with harassment litigation—there is less agreement on the consequences of harassment for organizations themselves. Wagner (1992) noted that the nonlegal expenses associated with lower productivity, turnover, and poor morale can be considerable. As reported above, a survey of 160 large manufacturing and service organizations estimated the annual cost of harassment to a typical Fortune 500 company to exceed $6 million, excluding litigation. Such figures are almost surely underestimates; using more sophisticated cost-modeling techniques, Faley, Knapp, Kustis, and Dubois (1994) recently estimated that the cost of harassment to the U.S. Army exceeded $500 million in 1988 alone. Less tangible damages are thought to include lowered morale, reduced loyalty, and a damaged corporate reputation—although formal studies have not been conducted.

**A Framework for the Study of Sexual Harassment in Organizations**

Sexual harassment was originally cast as an issue of illegal sex-based discrimination (MacKinnon, 1979), a formulation that forms the legal basis of contemporary efforts to eradicate it. Harassment as an experience of women that appears to have persisted (which is still a hotly debated and emotional issue) — an issue to which we must return from an organizational perspective. Recent discussions have focused on the role of the harasser (Linsky, 1993), and Pryor et al. (1993).

Most recently, harassment as an experience of the most important implications of harassment that is the outcome of harassment that is not defined by, among other factors, the harasser's behavior. Organizations and economic systems are not the only factors that contribute to the organizational behavior that we consider.

According to these definitions, harassment is defined as any unwanted behavior directed at the victim that is intended to cause harm and is defined by, among others, the harasser's behavior. The victims, in addition, are defined as any person with preexisting job characteristics (Hanisch & Hulkin, 1992), dispositions (Judge et al., 1992), and causally related to the harassment. These factors—ego and self-confidence (Benson & Thomson, 1982), increased anxiety, depression, and greater risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Schneider & Swan, 1994).
contemporary efforts to eradicate it. In addition, feminist writers have framed harassment as an example of the sexual victimization or violence against women that appears to be ubiquitous in contemporary society (Koss et al., 1994)—an issue to which we return below. Attempts to understand harassment from an organizational perspective, however, have been relatively scarce. The work of Gutek (1985) represents probably the most extensive effort, and more recent discussions have been provided by Cleveland and Kerst (1993), Hanisch (1993), and Pryor et al. (1993).

Most recently, Hulin (1993) articulated a rationale for conceptualizing harassment as an example of occupational stress that, like other stressors, has important implications for traditional organizational research as well as for research focusing on occupational safety and health. According to this framework, harassment occurs within a social—technological organizational system defined by, among other things, dimensions of organizational culture and climate. Organizations, in turn, are embedded within external social, political, and economic systems that influence events and processes occurring within the organizational boundaries.

According to this framework, harassment typically takes place within situations defined in large part by the organizational work roles of the victim and the harasser (although harassers may occasionally be clients or customers). The victims, in addition to being victims, are also organizational members with preexisting job attitudes influenced by their work tasks and job characteristics (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991) as well as by their own expectations and dispositions (Judge & Hulin, in press). Such job attitudes are relatively stable and causally related to patterned job behaviors (Panisch & Hulin, 1991; Roznowski & Hulin, 1992). Additionally, victims—like other, nonvictimized workers—are simultaneously experiencing other work-related stressors, stressors that combine and interact to influence outcomes. Finally, the work roles of victims and harassers frequently overlap in such a way that the two are required to interact on a continuing basis.

These considerations form the background and context for harassment events. They also influence the ways in which victims cope with harassment, their job attitudes, job stress, well-being, and patterns of work-role behaviors in predictable ways. This implies that the study of sexual harassment in the workplace should take place within the framework of a model of organizational behavior that includes provisions for these factors (and possibly others as well) as well as provisions for variables specifically having to do with harassment itself. A similar argument was recently made by Hanisch (1993), who stressed the importance of studying sexual harassment within a comprehensive framework that includes assessment of a variety of job stressors.

The dangers of studying workplace harassment in isolation from other job-related variables are several. Without well-articulated models of organizational attitudes and behaviors, one risks mismeasuring the importance and process of sexual harassment for influencing patterns of organizational behaviors. Similarly, if none of the quotidian work stressors are represented in the models, then estimates of the effects of one particular stressor (in this case, sexual harassment) will be biased because of model misspecification.
There is also risk of error on the output side of any model of organizational behavior that focuses narrowly on one behavior in isolation. For example, Gutek (1993), as well as Koss et al. (1994), have noted that victims engage in many different behaviors in response to harassment. Thus, to focus on only one or two coping strategies (e.g., reporting or filing complaints) may lead one to overlook equally important compensatory or substitute behaviors. In summary, we argue here that it is necessary for researchers to study sexual harassment as they would study other organizational and environmental insults to account for the interdependence of organizational characteristics, occupational stressors, affective and attitudinal responses, and patterns of organizational behaviors. The model we describe below was designed with this perspective in mind.

**An Integrated Model of Sexual Harassment in Organizations**

Although we do not deny the importance of individual differences (e.g., Pryor, 1987), we propose that sexual harassment in organizations primarily is a function of organizational and job characteristics and, thus, is most appropriately conceptualized and studied in these terms. Like other forms of work-related stress, harassment has been demonstrated to affect individuals’ relations to their organizations as well as their physical and emotional well-being. Our model attempts to predict the incidence of organizational harassment and its outcomes for individual workers as well as to describe some of the processes through which these outcomes occur. The model itself is shown in Figure 1.

According to this model, sexual harassment is a function of two exogenous variables: organizational context and job context. **Organizational context** refers to those aspects of organizational climate (Naylor, Pritchard, & Ilgen, 1980) having to do with tolerance of sexual harassment as well as to the presence, accessibility, and effectiveness of harassment remedies. By **job context**, we refer to the factors that constitute the gendered nature of the individual’s workgroup, for example, the gender ratio in day-to-day work contacts (Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990), sex role (i.e., traditional or non-traditional), and other proximate interactional arrangements.

Sexual harassment in organizations has two general types of outcomes: job-related and psychological. According to the model, these outcomes may be influenced by the organizational context. In addition, psychological outcomes can have direct consequences for individuals through increased distress or affective reactions (e.g., psychological and physical health outcomes). A submodel of job-related outcomes demonstrates that, in addition to experiencing harassment, employees may be at risk for various job-related behaviors, such as absenteeism, presenteeism, job satisfaction, or turnover.

**Submodel of Job-Related Outcomes**

Consistent with our model of job stress, we propose that job-related outcomes and voluntary turnover are the well-documented consequences of involuntary withdrawal from those job-related outcomes. For example, absenteeism, presenteeism, increased physical or psychological health problems, and so forth (Hulin, 1990, 1991). These are behaviors: work withdrawal, or a cluster of behaviors, such as, for example, absenteeism, early retirement, non-interest in work, and so forth. (Hulin, 1990, 1991).

If one considers these outcomes and the more general psychological relationships depicted in Figure 1, an integrated model of the antecedents and general outcomes of sexual harassment in organizations can be constructed.

**Figure 1.** An integrated process model of the antecedents and general outcomes of sexual harassment in organizations.

**Figure 2.** A submodel of job-related outcomes.
model of organizational isolation. For example, that victims engage in acts to focus on only (or perhaps) may lead one to behaviors. In sum, to study sexual harassment, environmental insults, characteristics, occupational patterns of organizations with this per-

Submodel of Job Outcomes

Consistent with our focus on sexual harassment as an example of occupational stress, we propose a submodel of job outcomes reflecting stress-related cognitions and voluntary behaviors, as opposed to the more frequently cited outcomes of involuntary job loss and career interruption. The submodel depicts the well-documented causal relationship between negative job attitudes and those job-related outcomes termed organizational withdrawal by Hanisch and Hulin (1990, 1991). Organizational withdrawal is composed of two classes of behaviors: work withdrawal and job withdrawal. Work withdrawal constitutes a cluster of behaviors that reflect attempts to avoid one's work tasks, for example, absenteeism, tardiness, missing meetings, wandering around looking busy, drug or alcohol use before or after work because of things that happen at work, and so forth. Job withdrawal, on the other hand, is composed of such factors as turnover intentions, eventual turnover, retirement intentions, subsequent retirement, and related intentions and cognitions.

If one considers only those job outcomes contained in this submodel, then the more general model in Figure 1 can be reconceptualized to reflect the relationships depicted in Figure 3. This version of the model reflects the im-

![Figure 2. A submodel of job outcomes.](image-url)
The first hypothesis emerged in the literature on the organizational psychology of job stress and job withdrawal, and may initially strike the reader as being too narrow. More specifically, a program of research is needed that attempts to understand and reframe the concept of job stress, and a particular focus on the direct causal links between harassment and outcomes. (The causal effects of negative job attitudes on health have been established empirically by Hanisch & Hulin, 1991.)

Moderators

The effect of harassment on these endogenous outcome variables is hypothesized to be moderated by the victim’s personal vulnerability (indexed by various demographic characteristics, such as age, educational level, and marital and organizational status; previous victimization history; and such cognitive variables as sensitivity to potentially harassing behaviors) and response strategy (i.e., mode of responding to and coping with the harassing situation). Nonharassment-related occupational stressors are not included in the model itself; however, assessments of such stressors are critical because they serve as the baseline against which the effects of harassment can be evaluated when the model is tested. For simplicity’s sake, the moderating effects of response style and personal vulnerability are not depicted in Figure 3, although these effects are assumed to be present.

The model is empirically testable through covariance structure modeling (Bentler, 1980; Long, 1983), a technique allowing simultaneous examination of multiple (potentially) causal relationships. Although relationships consistent with the model itself could potentially take a number of forms, we expected certain general relationships to obtain. These are outlined below.

Hypothesis 1: The prevalence of sexual harassment in organizations is a function of a male-dominated job context and an organizational context tolerant of sexual harassment.

Hypothesis 2: Sexual harassment in organizations is associated with more negative outcomes of all types for those who experience it.

Hypothesis 3: Externally focused, assertive response strategies (e.g., reporting the offender or filing a complaint) will exacerbate the psychological and health-related impact of harassment as well as its job-related outcomes.
The first hypothesis is a relatively straightforward derivation from the literature on the organizational correlates of sexual harassment, whereas the second seems reasonable to propose, particularly given the generalized effects of job stress and job attitudes on individuals. The third hypothesis—which may initially strike some as counterintuitive—is also based in the (admittedly sparse) empirical literature on coping with sexual harassment (e.g., Livingston, 1982), including a preliminary test of the present model in an existing archival data set (Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1992). In the next section, we outline a program of research designed to produce a rigorous test of the model, with a particular focus on the development of measurement devices for key variables in the model.

Testing the Model: Measurement of Constructs

As Fitzgerald and Hesson-McInnis (1989) have noted, not only has little formal theory emerged in this area, but basic definitional issues remain unresolved: "As with many topics that are both socially important and somewhat controversial, data collection has proceeded rapidly, without benefit of theory, or even the careful formulation of definitions, whether literary or operational" (p. 309). In particular, many key variables—including sexual harassment itself—have generally been only weakly and idiosyncratically operationalized. Here, we briefly describe the development of instruments specifically designed to provide more conceptually and psychometrically sophisticated measures of three key constructs: sexual harassment, organizational climate for sexual harassment, and individual response strategies for coping with harassment.

Sexual Experiences Questionnaire

The study of sexual harassment in organizations has been hampered until recently by the lack of standard operational definition or measurement strategy. Early studies (e.g., Benson & Thomson, 1982; Gutek, 1985; USMS, 1981) typically presented respondents with a brief checklist of behaviors and asked whether they had experienced them within a particular time frame (generally, 2 years). This methodology has recently been criticized (Gruber, 1990; Koss et al., 1994) on a variety of grounds, as Koss et al. (1994) noted:

Such lists can be criticized as ad hoc and atheoretical, as little if any rationale is offered for the particular behaviors chosen and many of them are unacceptably vague. . . . Because there has been little agreement on such issues, the target behaviors often vary from study to study, making cross-sample comparisons virtually impossible. (p. 128)

Noting that a sound measurement strategy is a prerequisite for theoretical work, Fitzgerald and her colleagues (Fitzgerald et al., in press; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gelfand et al., in press) developed the Sexual Experiences Ques-
tionnaire (SEQ), a self-report instrument that assesses the three categories of harassment through a series of behaviorally based items. All items include a standard stem (“Have you ever been in a situation where”) and conclude with an explicitly described, behaviorally based example of offensive workplace behavior (e.g., “a supervisor or coworker attempted to establish a romantic or sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage him?”). The words sexual harassment do not appear until the end of the inventory, when a final item asks “Have you ever been sexually harassed?”

A variety of studies have confirmed that the SEQ yields reliability and stability estimates in the .80s. Recently, Gelfand et al. (in press) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of the SEQ in three samples (one of them cross-cultural), and confirmed the three-factor model as well as demonstrating the measurement equivalence of the SEQ across target populations (working women and students) and cultures (United States and Brazil).

The SEQ has recently been revised to address some of the problems associated with assessment of low-frequency behaviors and to provide better coverage of each of the three subtypes of harassing behavior. This 20-item revision uses a 5-point Likert-type frequency response format and a 24-month time frame and provides balanced and comprehensive coverage of each of the three subtypes.

Organizational Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Inventory

Organizations appear to vary widely in their tolerance for sexual harassment of and by their employees, a tolerance that has been related to significant organizational and human costs. As discussed above, such tolerance—as well as related organizational norms—has been implicated in several studies of sexual harassment (Bond, 1988; Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1992; Pryor et al., 1993) and plays a prominent predictive role in the present model. As with harassment itself, however, such variables have typically been defined inconsistently, theorized weakly, and measured in a cursory manner.

To assess the construct of tolerance more formally, we proposed a new measure of this important aspect of organizational climate (Hulin, 1993; Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, in press), grounded in the theoretical framework proposed by Naylor et al. (1980), who conceptualized climate as shared perceptions of contingencies between behaviors and organizational outcomes (i.e., sanctions or rewards). This scale, the Organizational Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Inventory (OTSHI; Hulin et al., in press), assesses climate by asking participants to report their perceptions of organizational sanctions for specified individuals (coworkers or superiors) engage in specific behaviors reflecting various forms of harassment.

Briefly, the OTSHI consists of a series of 12 vignettes in which organizational status of a male harasser (coworker or superior) is crossed with the three types of harassment (gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion), with two replications (i.e., vignettes) per cell of the $2 \times 3$ design. Participants respond to each vignette on three 5-point scales: the first assesses the degree of risk to a female victim if she were to report the incident, the second by the organization it would be punished.

Hulin (1993) reported using a sample of 335 graduate students. The item for the entire inventory is a 5-item response scale assessing the final theoretical expecta-
tion to be significant. This was true for all. We received significantly less chance that she would report that the perpetrator.

In general, the OTSHI (the traditional quickness) was as less likely to be reported. Both men and women would be dealt with. The status accounted for that of the other method is available from Hulin.

Coping With Harassment

The manner in which I began to receive in 1990; Gutek, 1993; and this model predicts, has been ways (Hesson-McInnis et al., 1990) as the standard procedure for how do exist—primarily a theoretical framework. The studies have focused on not the victim report complaint (e.g., Braverman, 1990) but only one of a number.

Fitzgerald (1990) described the development and content analysis of the SEQ study. This approach, detachment, retributive-seeking institution, and focused responses).
The three categories of incidents include a) offensive workplace behavior (i.e., a romantic or sexual advance), b) offensive workplace behavior (i.e., a romantic or sexual advance), and c) offensive workplace behavior (i.e., a romantic or sexual advance). The items in the inventory, when used, yield reliability and validity of the assessment. The inventory consists of 20 items and a 24-month average of each of the items is used to assess the likelihood that the perpetrator was committing the harassment.

Sexual Harassment Inventory

related to significant social or economic costs associated with sexual harassment—such as shared perceptions of costs (i.e., sanctions for sexual harassment). By asking participants if they were aware of the perpetrators reflecting various issues in which organizational behaviors are assessed (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual harassment, sexual harassment), the 2 × 2 × 2 × 5-point scales: the options were to report the incidents, the second assesses the likelihood that she would be taken seriously by the organization, and the third assesses the degree to which the harasser would be punished.

Hulin (1993) reported preliminary data on the OTSHI, based on a sample of 335 graduate students (195 male and 140 female). Coefficient alpha was .96 for the entire inventory and ranged between .90 and .94 for the individual response scales assessing risk, taken seriously, and organizational action. Preliminary substantive findings indicated that the scales behaved according to theoretical expectations. As would be expected, men perceived the organization to be significantly more tolerant of sexual harassment than did women; this was true for all three types of harassing behavior. The women also perceived significantly greater risk to the victim for complaining, significantly less chance that she would be taken seriously, and significantly less chance that the perpetrator would be punished.

In general, the organization was seen as least tolerant of sexual coercion (the traditional quid pro quo situation) and most tolerant of gender harassment. Typically, perceived risk to the victim was greater, and she was also perceived as less likely to be taken seriously, when the perpetrator was a supervisor. Both men and women also perceived that harassers who were supervisors would be dealt with more leniently by the organization; in fact, perpetrator status accounted for 27% of the variance in OTSHI scores, more than twice that of the other main effects combined. A complete account of this research is available from Hulin (1993).

Coping With Harassment Questionnaire

The manner in which individuals respond to and cope with harassment has begun to receive increased attention in the research literature (Fitzgerald, 1990; Gutek, 1993; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Terpstra & Baker, 1989) and, as our model predicts, has been shown to influence victim outcomes in a variety of ways (Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1992). Until recently, however, no standard procedure for assessing coping has been proposed, and the methods that do exist—primarily simple checklists of commonsense behaviors—lack both a theoretical framework and known psychometric properties. In addition, most studies have focused on a single class of response variables, that is, whether or not the victim reported the harasser to the organization or filed a formal complaint (e.g., Brooks & Perot, 1991)—admittedly, an important variable but only one of a number of possible responses to harassment.

Fitzgerald (1990) recently reported a series of studies designed to examine harassment coping strategies in a systematic manner. The first of these described the development of a conceptual framework to classify strategies, based on content analysis of actual behaviors reported by participants in the original SEQ study. This analysis identified 10 specific strategies (endurance, denial, detachment, retribution, illusionary control, avoidance, appeasement, assertion, seeking institutional remedies, and seeking social support) that could be classified into two general response categories (internally focused vs. externally focused responses). Although some coping strategies appear to be unique to
harassment (e.g., appeasement, which involves attempts to evade the harassment but without confrontation or assertion), the similarity to strategies used in more general coping systems (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1988) is striking.

Following further development and validation of this framework, the final study in this series (Fitzgerald, 1990) described the development of a self-report inventory designed to assess the 10 strategies in an objective manner: the Coping With Harassment Questionnaire, or CHQ. Briefly, the CHQ is a 50-item inventory yielding scores for each of the 10 coping strategies described above. Despite the brevity of the five-item subscales, alpha internal consistencies ranged from .69 to .96 and averaged .84 in the development sample. Initial validity information—derived from an experimental analogue study, factor analytic results, and theoretically expected correlations with other variables (e.g., assertiveness, locus of control, and severity of harassment)—suggested that the scales behaved in theoretically meaningful ways.

Confirmatory factor analysis verified two distinct but related dimensions, with active problem-solving strategies constituting one factor and internal, cognitively oriented strategies the other. Such parallels to more general stress and coping measures (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1988) provide further evidence of the validity of the CHQ. However, the strength of the CHQ is that it allows for the assessment of a variety of strategies, thus recognizing that responding to harassment is not a simple dichotomous process and that victims may use a considerable number of behaviors, either simultaneously or sequentially. An abbreviated version of the CHQ is currently being pilot tested with the goal of constructing a briefer scale more suited to the realities of organizational research.

Testing the Model: Preliminary Results

Hesson-McInnis and Fitzgerald (1992) tested part of the model in an existing archival data set, reporting support for the influence of job context and organizational climate on the prevalence of sexual harassment as well as for the negative effects of harassment on job- and health-related outcomes. This study was limited, however, by its reliance on an existing data set with relatively poor measurement qualities. Although a complete test of the model is still not available, preliminary results, based on the instruments described above, have recently been reported (Fitzgerald, Hulin, & Drasgow, 1994). In this series of studies, Zickar (1994) confirmed the hypothesized role of climate as an antecedent of sexual harassment, whereas Schneider and Swan (1994) demonstrated the negative effects of harassment on job satisfaction, anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Finally, Gelfand and Drasgow (1994) tested a reduced version of the model through LISREL analysis and reported an excellent fit to the data, using a traditional measure of occupational stress as a baseline for comparison. These results confirm that the model provides a promising framework for conducting harassment research in organizations, a topic to which we now turn.

Research Delicacy

Researching sexual harassment poses a challenge to researchers, who find it far easier to study victimization than psychological and emotional outcomes (e.g., alcohol and drug use, personal and emotional distress).

Victimization research is further complicated by the practicalities of controlling for confounding variables, and usually possesses elements that may at least partially account for the need for research on the topic. The integration of research evidence is thus a challenge of no small magnitude.

In addition to scientific scrutiny, legal issues must be confronted. Not only do researchers need to be fully cognizant of the data they fear may incriminate them, but they must also be sensitive to studies that may prove admissible in court. Researchers, in general may view research on sexual harassment as unethical. A comprehensive discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this chapter; however, researchers are encouraged to seek advice from knowledgeable colleagues and ethicists.

The organization of this chapter is straightforward. We will first consider issues of a more general nature, such as the conceptualization of sexual harassment and the legal implications of the 1993 Civil Rights Act. Following this discussion, we will examine the empirical evidence regarding the negative effects of sexual harassment on individuals and organizations. These issues are addressed in the following sections.
Researching Sexual Harassment in Organizations: Delicate Dilemmas and Practical Problems

Researching sexual harassment in organizations presents a considerable challenge to organizational researchers more accustomed to measuring job satisfaction than psychological trauma. The outcomes documented in the sexual harassment literature (e.g., anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder) do not fit easily into traditional job-related research frameworks, and even researchers more used to examining occupational stress and health outcomes (e.g., alcohol and drug abuse) may be uncomfortable with the highly personal and emotionally charged issues inherent in the present topic.

Victimization researchers, for their part, are generally unfamiliar with the practicalities of conducting research in organizations. Accustomed to focusing on clinical outcomes of individual victims, trained in a clinical tradition, and usually possessed of a feminist philosophy, such researchers may be frustrated by the need to take organizational practicalities and sensibilities into account. The integration of such distinctly different research traditions, necessary to the theoretical and practical success of projects of this type, represents a challenge of no small magnitude.

In addition to such considerations, a variety of other factors must generally be confronted. Not only are organizations reluctant to allow the collection of data they fear may exacerbate their legal vulnerability, but unions may also object to studies that appear to document employee misbehavior, and workers in general may view the personal nature of such investigations as intrusive or offensive. A complete discussion of such issues is well beyond the scope of this chapter; however, it is possible to offer some general observations and suggestions.

The organizational reluctance to collect data documenting the existence of a problem carrying legal liability may well represent the single most formidable obstacle to conducting research on sexual harassment in organizations. Such concerns—already substantial—were exacerbated by the passage of the 1991 Civil Rights Act, which specified for the first time that victims of illegal work-based harassment are entitled to financial compensation. Although questions concerning the exact nature and conditions of employer liability remain unclear (e.g., Kauffman v. Allied Signal, 1992; Meritor v. Vinson, 1986), organizations are understandably reluctant to take any action that may—at first glance—appear to increase their liability exposure.

Such concerns are not easily alleviated. At the same time, a variety of benefits accrue to organizations that cooperate with such research. Most obviously, the research can serve as a comprehensive organizational needs assessment—not only identifying the general extent of harassment, but also highlighting areas of the organization in which problems are most likely to occur, as well as the specific nature of the problems. Such participation allows for more precisely targeted interventions, and the demonstration of interest by management that such research signals itself functions as a positive intervention (Fitzgerald, 1992). Finally, organizations can be reminded of court rulings that remedial action can insulate them from liability (Kauffman v.
Allied Signal, 1992); thus, actions to improve the work environment (e.g., training) that are based on research findings may well constitute a strength rather than a liability.

The success of research such as we propose depends, of course, on organizational access and management support as well as on employee cooperation. To the degree that employees (both men and women) are convinced that employee confidentiality is completely protected, that data are released only in group form and are suitably disguised, and, particularly, that no actions either against or in support of any individual will arise from the survey, cooperation is considerably more likely. Standard techniques for soliciting worker support—such as the formation and use of focus groups, heterogeneous organizational task forces, and the like—are even more critical than usual to the success of this research.

Finally, the issue of intrusiveness and perceived invasion of privacy, which is difficult to avoid when conducting harassment research, can be addressed through a variety of methods. Data collection instruments can be ordered so that traditional job-related variables appear first and the more clinical outcome instruments and harassment assessments appear at the end, and outcome measures should be selected to ensure that they garner the maximum amount of relevant information from minimally intrusive questions. Although they are not generally used in traditional organizational research, various procedures for protecting participants' sense of privacy have been developed by clinical researchers and may contribute to employees' comfort when responding to sensitive, sex-related material.

In summary, the study of sexual harassment in organizations presents both organizations and researchers with opportunities as well as with a variety of practical problems and delicate dilemmas. To the degree that the insights and experience of organizational and clinical researchers can be integrated and brought to bear on these problems, they stand a much greater chance of successful resolution.

References


work environment (e.g., allies of course, on organizational and employee cooperation. are convinced that em- tacts are released only in that no actions either the survey, cooperation soliciting worker sup- heterogeneous organis- ter than usual to the nizational privacy, which arch, can be addressed ents can be ordered so more clinical outcome the end, and outcome the maximum amount stions. Although they search, various proce- ve been developed by nort when responding organizations presents as well as with a variety gree that the insights ers can be integrated much greater chance of Coles, F. S. (1986). Forced to quit: Sexual harassment complaints and agency response. Sex Roles, 14, 81–95.
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