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**Perceptions of sexual harassment: spontaneous responses to vignettes varying initiator status, recipient behavior, and recipient response.**

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PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT: SPONTANEOUS RESPONSES TO  
VIGNETTES VARYING INITIATOR STATUS, RECIPIENT BEHAVIOR, AND  
RECIPIENT RESPONSE

A Thesis Presented

by

LEE D. ROSEN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of  
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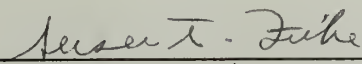
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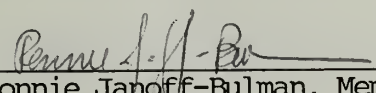
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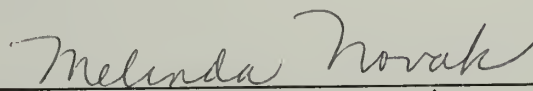
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## **ABSTRACT**

# **PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT: SPONTANEOUS RESPONSES TO VIGNETTES VARYING INITIATOR STATUS, RECIPIENT BEHAVIOR, AND RECIPIENT RESPONSE**

**FEBRUARY, 1990**

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Previous research demonstrates that there is a great deal of variation in people's perceptions of sexual harassment. In most studies, subjects are asked whether they think some behavior or scenario constitutes sexual harassment. This methodology precludes ascertaining the conditions under which people will, without prompting by researchers, spontaneously label some incident sexual harassment.

To shed further light on this issue, two experiments were conducted in which subjects read and responded to vignettes portraying potential sexual harassment. These vignettes were systematically varied on several dimensions: the behavior of the initiator; the status of the initiator (boss vs. coworker); the recipient's prior behavior (friendly vs. ambiguous); the recipient's response to the incident (negative vs. unknown); and the sex of the initiator and recipient. To determine what interpretations would be imposed on the material, open-

ended questions asked subjects for their spontaneous reactions to the vignettes.

The results indicated that subjects were unlikely to spontaneously label the scenarios as sexual harassment or interpret the material with any regard to the potential for sexual harassment. The results also elucidate the boundaries of perceptions of sexual harassment. There were consistent effects for sex of initiator and recipient behavior, suggesting that portraying the initiator as female or the recipient as previously friendly both served to inhibit negative or harassment-related responses. Furthermore, portraying the recipient as responding negatively to the initiator inhibited positive responses or perceptions that the scenarios were romantic. The status of the initiator also had an impact; the boss initiator, compared to the coworker initiator, elicited a greater number of negative perceptions, especially when the recipient responded negatively to the initiator.

Together, these findings indicate that subjects were most likely to react negatively to and perceive harassment in the scenarios that more closely match the stereotype of sexual harassment (i. e., the initiator is a male boss and the female recipient has very clearly shown no romantic interest). It was concluded that people tend to have a relatively narrow, stereotyped concept of sexual harassment and that this concept is not readily available

for processing cases which deviate from the prototypical scenario.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment, only recently legitimized as a social issue, is virtually ubiquitous and therefore constitutes one of the major problems facing women in the workforce<sup>1</sup>. The most reliable frequency data come from a study of 10,644 women of diverse economic backgrounds. Of these women, 42 percent reported having received some unwanted sexual attention in the past year (Merit Systems Protection Board [MSPB], 1981).

Moreover, the consequences of sexual harassment are severe, affecting both institutions and individuals. It has been estimated that sexual harassment cost the federal government \$189 million during a two year period (MSPB, 1981). This figure included the costs of replacing harassed employees, paying medical insurance claims for employees needing professional help, paying sick leave, and absorbing the cost of reduced productivity. More importantly, the personal costs of sexual harassment are staggering. Its victims' negative experiences range from feelings of anger and disgust to depression, loss of productivity, and debilitating stress (Crull, 1982; Jenson & Gutek, 1982). Why is such a situation, ostensibly

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<sup>1</sup>Several researchers have reported that 70 to 90 percent of working women have experienced some form of sexual harassment (Farley, 1978; Safran, 1976), although such high estimates may be due to sample selection problems or to loose criteria.



counter to the best interests of all, allowed to persist? This seems to be an appropriate issue for social psychological study.

Although there are many factors meriting attention, the present research focuses on individuals' perceptions of sexual harassment. This is a crucial area of study for several reasons (see also Terpstra & Baker, 1986, p. 23; Powell, 1986). First, by definition, sexual harassment involves giving unwanted sexual attention. Assuming that sexual harassment is not motivated by conscious malevolence (an idea put forth by some theorists), then perpetrators must not realize either that their behavior is truly unwanted or that it would have a harmful effect. This is certainly in part a perceptual problem. Second, the perceptions of those not directly involved are of great importance. If sexual harassment is not perceived as such by victims' coworkers, it is less likely that victims will receive social support in what may be a confusing and stressful situation. The perceptions of outside others are also relevant when sexual harassment cases are litigated. For example perceptual factors may be crucial in determining whether judges or jurors find in favor of sexual harassment victims. Finally, the victim's own perception of the event will play a large role in determining outcomes.

Examination of perceptions is also useful from a theoretical standpoint insofar as it helps to explain the great disagreement and variation surrounding people's understanding of sexual harassment. In this connection, the legal definition of sexual harassment is particularly illustrative. Thanks in large part to ground-breaking works by Farley (1978) and MacKinnon (1978), sexual harassment was, in 1980, determined to be illegal under Title VII of the federal 1964 Civil Rights Act. Farley's book, Sexual Shakedown: The Sexual Harassment of Women on the Job, was the first major study of sexual harassment and served to define the constellation of issues revolving around it. Mackinnon's Sexual Harassment of Working Women eloquently put forth the argument that sexual harassment constitutes sex discrimination. In response, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 1980) issued guidelines that defined sexual harassment and upheld Mackinnon's claim. The guidelines provide the following definition of sexual harassment:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment 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 by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such an individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

The first two conditions set forth by the EEOC are relatively straightforward, and both involve a clear abuse of power. In cases that meet these criteria, an employer or superior threatens the victim with some job-related sanction in order to coerce sexual relations. Indeed, it is apparently easier to elicit court decisions in favor of victims who have been subject to explicit threats of job related sanctions (Rasnic, 1982). The third condition is, however, associated with more ambiguity. It necessitates knowledge of the victim's subjective state and is thus subject to the slings and arrows of individual perception. As Schneider (1985) suggests, there are no set criteria for determining what constitutes "unreasonable interference" or an "offensive working environment." This again is an issue laden with subjectivity.

Here, then, is the central question the present study attempts to answer: What determines whether or not people will perceive sexual harassment as such? Generally speaking, the theoretical orientation of the present research suggests that the occurrence of sexual harassment is intimately related to sex roles. It is further suggested that the perception of sexual harassment is also connected to sex roles.

Consequently, the first section of this paper discusses the relationship between sex roles and sexual harassment. In the second section, previous research specifically

focusing on perceptions of sexual harassment will be critically examined. In the third section, the methods and results of the first experiment will be presented, followed by the results of the second experiment. Finally, the practical and theoretical implications of the present research will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### SEX ROLES AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The discussion of the relation between sex roles and sexual harassment will focus on three domains. First, we will consider the more general issue of how sex roles dictate appropriate courtship behavior and how this creates a context conducive to sexual harassment. Second, a more specific examination of the female sex role and its connection to workplace behavior will be taken up. Third, we will examine the male sex role, with particular regard to its relation to violence against women.

For the purposes of this paper, Pleck's (1981) definition of the term sex role will be employed. According to Pleck, "sex role refers to the set of behaviors and characteristics widely viewed as (1) typical of men and women (sex role stereotypes), and (2) desirable for men and women (sex role norms) (pp. 10-11)." In other words, sex roles are both descriptive and prescriptive. In this way, sex roles are differentiated from other social roles which, as Pleck points out, are often only descriptive.

Sexual harassment is closely linked to sex roles on two levels. First, sex roles dictate that men and women interact in such a way that harassment is not an unlikely consequence. Second, and closely related, sex roles make the accurate perception of sexual harassment difficult.



It will be suggested below that both occur because sexual harassment may fall within the bounds of sex-role-consistent behavior and is therefore easy for people to perceive as more or less normal interaction.

How do sex roles relate to the occurrence of sexual harassment? Sex roles determine the kind of behavior that is deemed appropriate in sexual interaction. Specifically, males are supposed to be active initiators, whereas females are to be passive recipients. These courtship roles are well illustrated by an image that commonly appears in the popular media. It is one in which the lustful male forcefully takes the recalcitrant female into his arms and kisses her, at which point she gives herself over to him. It has been suggested that this sort of interaction constitutes a subtle enactment of the "rape myth" whereby women are thought to desire coercive sexual behavior on the part of men (Burt, 1980). Anecdotal evidence aside, sex role research and theory corroborate the idea that stereotypes and norms call for male-initiator/female-recipient sexual interaction (Goffman, 1977; Gross, 1978; Henley & Freeman, 1975; Peplau, Rubin & Hill, 1977; Tavris & Offir, 1977).

It is not suggested here that such role-dictated behaviors must of necessity lead to sexual harassment. Instead, they contribute to creating a context in which sexual harassment is a likely occurrence. If, in order

for sexual relations to occur, males must display sexual initiative toward passive females, it seems probable that such behavior will be unwanted at times. Even so, sexual harassment need not arise if the initiators males cease such behavior immediately upon perceiving negative feedback. As will be discussed further below, cessation of sexual attention may not occur, however, if males tend to misperceive females' friendly behavior as connoting sexual interest (Abbey, 1981; 1982). This in turn is exacerbated by the belief that females "say yes when they really mean no." Together, these sex role-related phenomena-- male initiation, male misperception, and token refusal-- create a social context conducive to sexual harassment. In postulating that sex roles contribute to sexual harassment, it must be assumed that they are operative in the workplace, a context in which asexual work roles ought to take precedence. This issue is specifically addressed in the "sex-role spillover" model of sexual harassment.

#### "Sex-Role Spillover" Theory

Recently, Gutek and her colleagues have proposed the sex-role spillover model to account for sexual harassment (Gutek, 1985; Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Konrad & Gutek, 1986; Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Stated simply, the theory posits "the carryover into the workplace of gender-based roles that are usually irrelevant or inappropriate to work

(Gutek, 1985, p. 86)." If, for example, a woman attorney is expected to be more nurturant on the job than her male counterparts, sex-role spillover has occurred. When men are expected to fulfill stereotyped roles, such as assuming leadership positions in mixed-sex groups, this too may arise from sex-role spillover.

How does sex-role spillover translate into sexual harassment? Given that there is an aspect of the female-role that dictates that women should also act as sex objects, sexual harassment may follow directly from male coworkers harboring such expectations. The question remains, what evidence is there that sex-role spillover is directly related to sexual harassment?

#### Sex-Role Spillover and Sexual Harassment

In order for sex-role spillover to apply to sexual harassment, part of the female role must include sex-object. There is, as Gutek and Dunwoody-Miller (1987) note, ample evidence that this is the case. In one of the most comprehensive studies on the contents of sex stereotypes, in which subjects in thirty-two countries were surveyed, it was found that people associate "sexy," "affectionate," and "attractive" with femininity (Williams & Best, 1982). This is not the case for masculine stereotypes. Masculinity is instead associated with instrumentality or agency, with emphasis on competence, activity, and task orientation (Bem, 1974; Deaux, 1985;

Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Williams & Best, 1982).

Notably, there is a clear absence of any sexual component in the masculine stereotype.

More important to the present topic, there is also some evidence, albeit mostly indirect, that sexually related expectations of women do carry over into the workplace. One direct piece of evidence is that many working women report receiving differential treatment relating to undue emphasis on physical appearance on the job (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). In the same study, the authors also reported that women in gender integrated jobs experience less sexual harassment than women in nonintegrated jobs. It is suggested that the greater frequency of harassment for women in nontraditional, "male" jobs occurs because their gender is particularly salient, whereas for women in traditionally female occupations, the job itself is associated with the female sex role. As Gutek (1985) claims, "Whereas women in nontraditional jobs are viewed as women in jobs, women in traditionally female jobs are viewed as women, period (p. 135)." Moreover, subjects' self reports indicated that integrated work settings were, in general, less "sexualized." Though the connection is not made clear, the authors claim that this occurs because integrated work settings are less likely to evoke sex-role spillover. In related research, it was found that men in male-dominated jobs were less likely to label a variety of

potentially harassing behaviors as sexual harassment than men in integrated jobs (Konrad & Gutek, 1986). Again it was assumed that this resulted from differences in sex-role spillover between integrated and nonintegrated jobs (see also Kanter, 1977).

All in all, the evidence relating sex-role spillover to sexual harassment is weak. More evidence is needed both to verify its operation and to articulate more precisely the relation between sex roles and sexual harassment. As regards the latter, there are several relevant findings coming from the literature on rape.

#### Sex Roles, Rape, and Sexual Harassment

Both rape and sexual harassment can be conceptualized as occupying positions on the same continuum. Several theorists argue that rape can be viewed as the endpoint on continuum of sexual victimization related to sex roles and sex role socialization (Check & Malamuth, 1983; Diamond, 1980; Medea & Thompson, 1974). Given that rape and sexual harassment have, at some level, similar roots, research on rape may offer more insight into the nature of sexual harassment.

There are in the rape literature a series of studies relating rape to sex roles. The theoretical approach is summarized well as follows:

The result of these sex role socialization processes, according to the theory, is a rape-supportive culture wherein sexual coercion



is seen as normal and acceptable in-role behavior (Check & Malamuth, 1983, p. 344).

Examining these assumptions, several studies have produced results relevant to the present paper.

One set of findings demonstrates that rape myth acceptance is common among men. In Burt's (1980) study, for example, over half of her male subjects agreed with statements supporting the rape myth, such as "a woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on the first date implies she is willing to have sex." Similarly, Mosher and Anderson (1986) found that 20% of their male subjects reported having used physical force to gain sex from women. The banality of sexual coercion and rape myth acceptance among men suggests that there is something about the male sex role that is conducive to rape.

In this connection, a number of theorists have suggested that rape is a logical extension of sex role socialization (Brownmiller, 1975; Diamond, 1980; Gagnon & Simon, 1973). If this is true, then one would expect that individuals who have thoroughly assimilated traditional sex roles should tend to be more tolerant of rape. Indeed, Burt (1980) found that rape myth acceptance was strongly correlated with subjects' endorsement of sex role stereotypes. In a study in which male subjects were presented with depictions of rape, subjects high in sex role stereotyping showed arousal patterns similar to those of identified rapists, whereas those low in sex role

stereotyping showed inhibited arousal (Check & Malamuth, 1983). In the same study, sex role stereotyping was also highly correlated with self-reported likelihood to rape.

What is it about the male sex role that leads to such findings? The research of Burt (1980) and Mosher and Anderson (1986) suggests that it is the combination of acceptance of interpersonal violence, calloused sexual attitudes, and the devaluation of women that produce tolerant attitudes toward rape. Though not commented on by Burt, her data revealed that among women, acceptance of interpersonal violence correlated .24 with sex role stereotyping, whereas for men the correlation was .54. She concluded, "If sex role stereotyping is the precondition for targeting women as potential sexual victims, acceptance of interpersonal violence may be the attitudinal releaser of assaultive action" (p. 229). Yet, her data indicate that among males the two variables tend to co-occur. This suggests that men are not merely socialized to be initiators in sexual interaction; they are urged to be coercive (see also Gross, 1978, and Taubman, 1986).

In sum, research on rape strongly suggests that there is a connection between sex roles and sexual victimization. Insofar as rape and sexual harassment are manifestations of the same general phenomenon, then conclusions drawn from rape research can be logically

extended to the domain of sexual harassment. If part of male sex role socialization encourages acceptance of rape, then males should have no difficulty accepting sexual harassment. Moreover, if individuals high in sex role stereotyping are relatively tolerant of rape, then it would seem likely that the same individuals would be at least as tolerant of sexual harassment.

### CHAPTER 3

#### REASEARCH ON PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Recently, a number of studies have been conducted examining individuals' perceptions of sexual harassment. The methods, results and limitations of a series of studies, each paradigmatic of this line of research, will now be reviewed.

Generally, two different methodologies have been used to elucidate perceptions of sexual harassment. In the first methodology, subjects are presented with a list of potentially harassing behaviors and are subsequently asked to indicate, usually on a Likert-type scale, the extent to which each behavior constitutes sexual harassment. The amount of information included in the behavior lists tends to differ across studies. For example, Powell (1983) uses items such as, "staring," "flirting," and "sexual propositions" as the target behaviors (see also Popovitch et al., 1986). Other research goes further in providing subjects with limited contextual information. Konrad and Gutek (1986) and Powell (1986) employ items such as the following: "Sexual remarks meant to be complimentary;" and "sexual activity as a requirement of the job." (Such items include information about the initiator's intention, or they allude to job-related coercion.) Another study included the item, "asks me on dates after I refused,"

thus providing information suggestive of the recipient's response (Popovitch et al., 1986).

A second methodology extends the first by placing various behaviors within the context of vignettes. Again, the amount of information contained in the vignettes varies across studies; some provide information about recipients' subjective response (e. g., Terpstra & Baker, 1983), and others merely place the behavior in a physical or social context, giving no information about the initiator's intentions and the recipient's responses (e. g., Collins & Blodgett, 1981; Pryor, 1985). In these studies, the dependent measure was again subjects' responses to a forced-choice question asking whether sexual harassment had occurred in the vignette. Gutek, Morasch, and Cohen (1983) used vignettes in which the sex and status (supervisor vs. coworker) of the initiator and recipient, as well as the behavior (sexual touching vs. suggestive remark) of the initiator, were systematically varied. The subjective response of the recipient was not included. In this case, subjects then responded to a series of forced-choice questions asking them to evaluate the vignette on a number of dimensions, such as the overall positivity of the interaction and the mutuality of feelings between the characters.

The advantages and limitations of these procedures will be discussed below, but first a brief summary of the



general findings is useful. The most reliable finding is one that emerges in every study that varied the status of initiator and recipient. Subjects are more likely to label a behavior or vignette as sexual harassment when the initiator is the boss or employer of the recipient than when the reverse is true or when the two are coworkers (Collins & Blodgett, 1981; Gutek, Morasch & Cohen, 1983; Popovitch et al., 1986). Sex differences also appear to be consistent across studies. It has been found that males are less likely to use the sexual harassment label than females (Popovitch et al., 1986; Powell, 1986). Gutek, Morasch, and Cohen (1983) found that males rated both the incident and relationship portrayed in the vignettes more positively than did females. In the same study, males were more likely than females to say that the initiator's behavior was flattering, corroborating Konrad and Gutek's (1986) finding that males were much more likely than females to say that they themselves would be flattered by sexual overtures at work (67% vs. 17%, respectively). In addition, it has been shown that males are less likely than females to see sexual harassment as a serious problem (Collins & Blodgett, 1981). There are several methodological problems associated with the research just described. First, in studies that use only behaviors, such as "staring" or "flirting," as the target stimuli, lack of context renders interpretation and

explanation of results a risky business. Variation in perceptions may be due to variation in perceived contexts. Different subjects may impose different contexts on the stimuli. For example, one subject may assume that the target behavior is unwanted, whereas another may place it within the context of an ongoing courtship. Consequently, findings such as sex differences may be explained by male insensitivity to the plight of women at work, or they may result from males assuming some mutuality on the part of the actors. The same problem applies to vignette studies that do not provide subjects with much information about the actors' intentions and responses. Gutek, Morasch, and Cohen (1983) used the following vignette:

Jane is walking slowly down the hall at work.  
Mr. Davidson, Jane's boss, walks up from behind.  
As Mr. Davidson passes Jane, he pats her on the  
fanny and says, "Hurry up, you'll never get  
everything done today."

Subjects are given no information about Jane's feelings toward Mr. Davidson or about her assessment of his behavior. Subjects may, therefore, make assumptions about both characters. In addition, this vignette illustrates another problem inherent in studies that do not make clear recipients' responses. By definition, sexual harassment involves the giving of unwanted sexual attention. Without specifying how Jane reacts to Mr. Davidson's behavior, it is not clear that the above vignette really portrays sexual harassment. Therefore, conclusions about subjects'

perceptions of sexual harassment per se must be made with caution. This is not to say that such research is useless. Quite the contrary: the use of extremely ambiguous stimuli has one advantage. Namely, it can be concluded that variations in subjects' responses are due to differences in their interpretations of the stimuli. In other words, subjects are forced to impose their own scenarios or cognitive schemata on the target material. In this way, the stimuli act as a kind of projective test. The problem is that the methods usually employed provide relatively little information about the meaning subjects impose on the text; the measures used tend to gauge only whether subjects see the material as sexual harassment.

This raises another, more serious problem with the methodology employed in research on perceptions of sexual harassment. In all but one of the studies cited above, subjects' perceptions are determined by their responses to a forced-choice question asking them to indicate the extent to which the stimulus constitutes sexual harassment. This question may be extremely directive and may heighten demand characteristics. Consequently, results may grossly overestimate subjects' awareness of or sensitivity to sexual harassment. In fact, the term may not have a place in many subjects' day-to-day perceptual vocabularies. Sexual harassment may be the farthest thing from a subject's mind until he or she comes to the

dependent measure. Alternatively, it is possible that subjects' prototypes of sexual harassment may be so extreme and rigid that they cannot process any interaction with an eye to sexual harassment unless it involves an employer using economic threats to gain sex from an employee. In the one study in which the dependent measures did not mention sexual harassment, subjects seemed not to apply the term to the situation (Gutek, Morasch & Cohen, 1983). Indeed, in their reanalysis of these data, Cohen and Gutek (1985) concluded that "observers place relatively little emphasis on variables that directly assess the sexual and harassing nature of the incident, and place more weight on the personal aspects of the incident and on the interpersonal relationship between those involved (pp. 325-326)." Even in this study, however, subjects were not allowed to generate their own spontaneous reactions to the scenario. Thus, it is still unknown how subjects would respond were it not for the prompting provided by the forced-choice questions.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXPERIMENT 1

The purpose of the present research was to replicate and extend the findings of earlier research by modifying the methodology previously used to study perceptions of sexual harassment. As in some of the studies cited above, the present research employed vignettes as the stimulus materials. In each vignette, the employment status of both initiator and the recipient was made clear, and some information regarding the nature of the actors' relationship was provided. In this way, the potentially harassing behavior was placed in a social context.

Because of the exploratory nature of the present research, it was desirable that the vignettes produce large variation in subjects' responses. This required that the vignettes be sufficiently ambiguous to elicit subjects' idiosyncratic interpretations. Consequently, in the first study, the actors' subjective states were not made explicit. The characters in the vignettes were, in addition, equal-status coworkers. As was described in the preceding section, previous findings indicate that subjects readily label vignettes as sexual harassment when the interactions involve employer-to-employee initiation. It was therefore initially assumed that maximum variation in subjects' perceptions would be elicited by interactions involving peers.



The present research represented a departure from previous studies in several ways. First, one variable new to the study of perceptions of sexual harassment was added to the vignettes. It involved the prior behavior of the recipient. In one condition, the recipient initially acted in a friendly manner toward the initiator. In the other, the recipient's prior behavior remained completely ambiguous. This manipulation was meant assess whether Abbey's (1981, 1982) finding that males tend to misperceive female friendly behavior would generalize to perceptions of sexual harassment. The second and most important change from past research involved the dependent measures. Instead of using a forced-choice question to assess subjects' use of the sexual harassment label, open-ended questions were used first. Subjects were thereby allowed to generate their own spontaneous responses to the vignette. As a result, it could be determined whether subjects would use the harassment label without prompting. Moreover, subjects' open-ended responses should constitute a broader measure of the interpretations they impose on the vignettes.

In addition, subjects' sex-role attitudes were assessed in order to elucidate the meaning of individual differences found in previous research. If, as was argued earlier, perception of sexual harassment is related to sex roles, then at least some of the variation in subjects'

responses should be explained by sex-role attitudes. It seems plausible that subjects with conservative rather than liberal sex-role attitudes may be less sensitive to, and therefore less likely to perceive, the potentially harassing nature of the interaction portrayed in the vignette. This assumes, of course, that such traditional attitudes reflect thorough assimilation of traditional sex-roles. In this connection, the present research attempted to examine whether subjects' sex-role attitudes would be a better predictor of perceptions of sexual harassment than the subjects' sex.

### Methods

#### Overview

Subjects read one of several sexual harassment vignettes and subsequently answered a series of questions asking about their interpretations of the characters and situation portrayed. Afterwards, subjects completed a scale intended to measure their sex-role attitudes.

The design was experimental; subjects were randomly assigned to different vignette conditions. Eight different vignettes were used, each depicting a slightly different situation. This was a between-subjects variable; each subject read only one vignette. The independent variables involving the vignettes were the prior behavior of the recipient (friendly vs. ambiguous), the behavior of the initiator (physical vs. verbal), and

the gender of the initiator and recipient (male and female vs. female and male, respectively). The individual difference variables were subject sex and sex-role attitudes.

### Subjects

Subjects were one hundred and sixty-seven male and female undergraduates enrolled in psychology courses at the University of Massachusetts. They volunteered to participate in the experiment in partial fulfillment of psychology course requirements.

### Procedure

Male and female subjects were recruited for a study of "how people interpret social situations." Subjects were run in groups of up to twenty-five people. Before receiving the materials, subjects were told to read the vignette carefully and to try to concentrate on their spontaneous, gut reactions to the material. Subjects then received a booklet containing the vignette followed by the interpretation questions and the sex-role attitudes scale. Upon completion of the materials, subjects received written feedback describing the purpose of the study.

### Independent Variables

In addition to recording subjects' sex, subjects' gender-role attitudes were measured using Spence and Helmreich's (1972) Attitudes Toward Women Scale. The scale consists of a series of questions, each asking

subjects to respond on a 4-point scale ("agree strongly" to "disagree strongly"). The questions covered a broad range of issues from attitudes toward women swearing in public to whether the obey clause should be included in marriage vows.

Vignettes Variables. Each vignette described a situation in which a male and a female lawyer, who have been working in the same firm for a few weeks, are alone together in a conference room whereupon some sexual confrontation occurs. Three factors were varied across vignettes: (1) The behavior of the initiator, who either closed the door of the conference room, turned out the lights, and started kissing the recipient or closed the door and expressed the wish to go to bed with the recipient; (2) the recipient's previous behavior, which was portrayed as either friendly (smiles at, exchanges glances with, and casually touches the initiator) or as completely neutral toward the initiator; and (3) gender of initiator and target, in that either the initiator was male and the target was female or the roles were reversed. (See Appendix A for a copy of the vignettes.)

Varying the vignettes served several functions. First, it was important that at least one or two vignettes produce enough variance in subjects' responses to the dependent measures that systematic differences could be identified. For this reason, two levels of initiator



behavior were used. Two levels of target behavior, friendly and neutral, were employed in order to test Abbey's (1981; 1982) ideas about males' interpretations of females' friendly behavior. The roles were reversed for two reasons. First, the sex-role reversal served as a comparison condition for the more typical situation. Second, this manipulation served as a partial test of sex-role spillover theory.

A more direct test of sex-role spillover was made by examining the relation between subjects' sex-role attitudes and their responses to the vignettes. Extrapolating from the theory, subjects with traditional sex-role attitudes should be less likely to perceive sexual harassment in the scenarios than those with liberal sex-role attitudes.

#### Dependent Measures

The dependent measures comprised a series of questions, both open-ended and forced choice, asking subjects about their perceptions of the vignettes. In order to direct subjects' responses as little as possible, the first item simply asked subjects to write as much as they could about their impressions of what they just read. The next questions, still open ended, asked subjects to write about both the initiator's and the target's thoughts, goals, and feeling. Because these were not explicit in the vignettes, these questions were to elicit the



interpretations subjects independently impose on the situation. Then, subjects were asked what each character did to bring about the final encounter and what each character's perceptions of the wishes of the other character are. Both of these were meant to assess whether subjects were interpreting the target's behavior as showing some sexual interest. Subjects were then asked whether and why there was anything wrong with or harmful about the situation portrayed. In a similar vein, the final open-ended questions asked subjects about their normative beliefs regarding the sort of situation depicted. Following the open-ended questions were a series of forced-choice questions, each on a 10-point scale, asking subjects to rate the characters on a number of dimensions. Several related to feminist interpretations, such as the targets' relative power and domination needs as opposed to their sexual or romantic motivations. In addition, subjects rated the extent to which the target was exploited and the extent to which the initiator's behavior was flattering or insulting.

It should be noted that for both the open-ended and forced-choice items, every question that asked about the target was also asked about the initiator and vice versa. Balancing the questions in this manner was meant to prevent subjects from being sensitized to the purpose of

the study. Additionally, the order of the questions was, within categories, counterbalanced.

## Results

### Analyses of Open-Ended Responses

Subjects' open-ended responses were coded into two general categories. The first, indicating positive perceptions of the vignette, included any of the following: statements indicating that the initiator and recipient are mutually attracted to each other or that the recipient is attracted to the initiator; statements indicating that the recipient approves of the initiator's behavior or will respond positively to it; general statements indicating that the initiator's behavior was appropriate; any other positive statements about the initiator; and any other positive statements about the interaction in general. The second category, negative perceptions, included any of the following: statements indicating that the recipient is not attracted to the initiator; statements indicating that the recipient does not approve of or desire the initiator's behavior or will respond negatively to it; general statements indicating that the initiator's behavior is inappropriate; and any other negative statements about the initiator; any other negative statements about the interaction in general.

In addition, any responses expressing the idea that the initiator might be sexually harassing or coercing the

recipient were coded into a separate category. As it turned out, however, systematic analyses using this category as a dependent variable could not be conducted adequately. It is noteworthy that the frequency of the subjects' mentions of sexual harassment was so low that lack of variance made inferential statistics useless. Only 2.6% of the subjects made any allusions at all to sexual harassment.

A subject sex (male vs. female) x Attitudes Toward Women (ATW; liberal vs. moderate vs. conservative) x initiator sex (male vs. female) x initiator behavior (verbal vs. physical) x recipient behavior (friendly vs. ambiguous) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, first using the mean number of positive statements as the dependent variable. The main effect for recipient behavior was significant, such that subjects made more positive statements when the recipient's behavior was friendly ( $\bar{M} = 7.74$ ) rather than ambiguous ( $\bar{M} = 5.43$ ),  $F(1, 159) = 15.56$ ,  $p < .01$ . There was also a significant main effect for sex of initiator, indicating that subjects made more positive statements about the vignettes when the initiator was female ( $\bar{M} = 7.89$ ) rather than male ( $\bar{M} = 5.57$ ),  $F(1, 159) = 16.84$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Additionally, there were several significant interactions. Sex of subject interacted significantly with sex of initiator,  $F(1, 159) = 4.58$ ,  $p < .05$ . The

interaction means are displayed in Table 1. These indicate that for male subjects, the female initiator elicited more positive responses than the male initiator, whereas for female subjects, this difference was attenuated. There was also a significant initiator sex by ATW interaction  $F(2, 159) = 4.45, p < .01$ . Means for this interaction are displayed in Table 2. When the initiator was female, liberal ATW subjects made more positive statements than moderate ATW subjects, who were in turn more positive than conservative ATW subjects. When the initiator was male there was little change in response across subjects who differed in ATW. Finally, there was a marginally significant interaction between subject sex and recipient behavior,  $F(1, 159) = 3.38, p < .07$ . Contrary to expectations, male subjects' responses did not differentiate vignettes portraying a friendly recipient from those portraying an ambiguous recipient, whereas female subjects tended to make more positive statements when the recipient was friendly rather than ambiguous. Means for this interaction are displayed in Table 3. No other main effects or interactions approached significance.

The same five-way ANOVA was conducted on the mean number of negative responses to the vignettes. Results indicated significant main effects for both initiator sex,



$F(1, 159) = 17.14, p < .01$ , and recipient behavior  $F(1, 159) = 8.17, p < .01$ . Similar to the above findings, subjects made more negative statements about the vignettes when the initiator was male ( $m = 9.38$ ) rather than female ( $m = 6.80$ ) and when the recipient was ambiguous ( $m = 9.17$ ) rather than friendly ( $m = 7.29$ ). There was a significant two-way interaction between initiator sex and initiator behavior ( $F = 5.17, p < .03$ ), the means of which are displayed in Table 4. When the initiator was male, physical initiation tended to elicit more negative statements than verbal initiation; when the initiator was female, subjects tended not to distinguish physical from verbal behavior.

#### Analyses of Forced-Choice Items

Each subjects responses to the forced-choice questions were aggregated to form a single measure of the overall evaluation of the vignette. This was done by averaging the responses to each item. Another five-way ANOVA was then conducted using an aggregation of the forced-choice responses as the dependent variable. Results indicated only two significant effects. As with both open-ended measures, there was a significant main effect for sex of initiator,  $F(1, 159) = 23.26, p < .01$ , such that subjects' responses were more positive when the initiator was female rather than male. Additionally, there was a significant ATW by initiator sex interaction,  $F(1, 159) = 5.784, p <$



.05. As with positive open-ended responses, this interaction indicates that when the initiator was female, subjects with more liberal ATW tended to view the vignette more positively than subjects with more conservative ATW; when the initiator was male, ATW had little effect.

Finally, a five-way ANOVA examined subjects' responses to the forced-choice question asking them about the extent to which the vignette portrayed sexual harassment. In this analysis, there were no significant effects. There was a marginally significant main effect for behavior of recipient,  $F(1, 159) = 3.36, p < .07$ , indicating that subjects were less likely to label the portrayed incident as sexual harassment when the recipient was initially friendly rather than ambiguous. No other effects approached significance.

TABLE 1

Mean Number of Positive Statements about Vignettes as a  
Function of Subject Sex and Initiator Sex

---

		Initiator Sex	
		Male	Female
Subject Sex	Male	5.17	8.20
	Female	5.86	7.79

---

TABLE 2

Mean Number of Positive Statements about Vignettes as a  
Function of Initiator Sex and Sex-Role Attitudes

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		Sex-Role Attitudes		
		Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Initiator Sex	Male	5.51	5.43	5.75
	Female	9.42	7.67	6.58

---

TABLE 3

Mean Number of Positive Statements about Vignettes as a  
Function of Subject Sex and Recipient Behavior

		Recipient Behavior	
		Friendly	Ambiguous
Subject Sex	Male	6.50	6.07
	Female	8.28	5.02

TABLE 4

Mean Number of Negative Statements about Vignettes as a  
Function of Initiator Sex and Initiator Behavior

		Initiator Behavior	
		Verbal	Physical
Initiator Sex	Male	6.50	6.07
	Female	8.28	5.02



## Discussion

Before proceeding to more detailed discussion of specific results, a brief summary of the important findings may be helpful. First, as was suspected, by allowing subjects to generate their own spontaneous responses, the present study provided information unobtained in previous research; that is, a great majority of subjects did not directly or indirectly refer to sexual harassment to describe the vignettes. Second, varying the recipient's prior behavior had a large impact on subjects' perceptions. Friendly behavior on the part of the recipient served to inhibit negative or harassment-related responses. Third, as in previous research, portraying the initiator as female rather than male caused subjects to view the scenarios more positively, especially for those with relatively liberal sex-role attitudes. Finally, contrary to expectations derived from sex-role spillover theory, liberal subjects seemed not to be more sensitive to potential harassment than conservatives.

More specifically, with respect to subjects' positive responses to the vignettes, several notable findings emerged. Contrary to previous studies, there was no main effect for subject sex. It seems unlikely that this was a consequence of the vignettes, insofar as they did not differ greatly from those used in previous research. It

may have resulted from the use of open-ended responses, although it is unclear why a forced-choice format would be more likely to tease out sex-differences. Possibly, women do have a greater sensitivity to sexual harassment than men, but only when sexual harassment is specifically emphasized or offered as a descriptive label.

In general, subjects viewed the interaction more positively when the initiator was female rather male. This result has been reported in at least one previous study (Gutek, Morasch & Cohen, 1983). What has not been discovered before, however, is that a main effect for initiator sex may be partially explained by its interaction with sex-role attitudes. The present study indicates that the relatively positive perception of female initiators resulted from the subjects with liberal sex-role attitudes, who perceived the interaction much more positively when the initiator was female. More conservative subjects did not make a clear distinction between male and female initiators. It was expected that liberal sex-role attitudes would be positively related to sensitivity to sexual harassment and would thus be associated with negative perceptions of the vignettes. It seems, however, that individuals with liberal sex-role attitudes were more sensitive to the sex-role reversal evident in the female actor's initiation of sexual interaction.

In other words, liberal subjects had a lower threshold for noting sex-role reversal than for detecting sexual harassment. This may be explained by the possibility that the sex-role attitudes measure was merely tapping subjects' general political orientation.

The second study will examine this issue in two ways. First, in addition to measuring sex-role attitudes, subjects general political orientation will be assessed. One can then determine the independent contribution made by each to perceptions of sexual harassment. Second, another measure of subjects sex-role orientation may be more capable of assessing deeper sensitivity to gender issues. Bem's (1974) sex-role identity measure may be useful in this regard, especially in light of more recent research on so-called gender schemata. Bem (1981, 1983) claims that scores on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory reflect the extent to which individuals are gender schematic, that is, the extent to which they tend to process social stimuli with particular regard to gender. If this is true, then sex-role identity assessment should be relevant to perceptions of sexual harassment. This issue is, therefore, examined in the second study.

The main effect for recipient behavior indicated that subjects viewed the interaction more positively when the recipient's behavior was friendly rather than ambiguous. This suggests that subjects did use the friendly behavior

as a clue that the initiator's behavior was, at least, not completely uncalled for. Moreover, the interaction with subject sex indicated that the recipient-behavior main effect was due mostly to female subjects' positive responses to the friendly recipient. Males, on the other hand, did not distinguish between friendly and ambiguous recipients. This finding directly contradicted expectations. Based on Abbey's (1981, 1982) research, it was expected that male subjects would be more likely than female subjects to interpret recipients' friendly behavior as having some sexual content. The data indicate that, if anything, exactly the opposite occurred. It is possible that, because female subjects were more likely to empathize with the recipient, they were more sensitive to differences in the recipient's behavior. The second experiment will attempt to replicate this finding to establish its reliability before any further speculation be put forth regarding its cause.

With respect to the analyses of subjects' negative responses to the vignettes, two main effects emerged similar to those just described. Subjects viewed the interactions more negatively when the initiator was male rather than female and when recipient's behavior was friendly rather than ambiguous. Interpretation of these findings is difficult in light of the fact that the interactions evident in the positive responses did not



occur here. It is unclear why the negative response data did not completely mirror the positive response data. It may be that, in this case, there was simply less variation in negative responses.

There was one significant interaction in the negative response data, the only effect that involved the initiator's behavior. When the initiator was male, verbal initiation was viewed more positively than physical initiation. When the initiator was female, the opposite occurred, though the difference was much smaller. One possible explanation is that subjects perceived the physical male initiator less negatively due to gender-related expectation that males be action-oriented and aggressive in their sexual pursuits (see Gross, 1978; Taubman, 1986). Perhaps the verbal, male initiator was seen as overly passive or socially awkward. Study 2 will address this point as well.

Finally, attention should be drawn to the finding that a vast majority of subjects did not spontaneously generate statements referring to sexual harassment or coercion. This seems to vindicate the idea put forth earlier that the forced-choice sexual harassment question used in previous research may overestimate people's real tendency to apply the sexual harassment label. That being the case, the value of using open-ended dependent measures has been demonstrated. It may be that subjects' prototypes of

sexual harassment are limited to the more stereotyped cases in which employers use job-related threats to force employees into sexual relations. Perhaps the potentially harassing nature of the interaction needs to be made more clear. This can be accomplished by providing information relating to recipients' behavioral and subjective responses. This issue is also taken up in the second study.



## CHAPTER 5

### EXPERIMENT 2

The purpose of the second study was to replicate and extend the findings of Experiment 1. In order to further delimit the boundaries of perceptions of sexual harassment, several new vignette manipulations were introduced. Additionally, new individual difference variables were examined to see if they added any information beyond the effects of sex role attitudes. Finally, the interaction conditions that generated significant findings in Experiment 1 were repeated in order to check the reliability of those effects.

More specifically, Experiment 2 assessed the extent to which Experiment 1 findings generalize to a scenario that is more explicitly harassing in nature. In Experiment 1, as in previous studies of perceptions of sexual harassment, the stimulus behaviors do not, by definition, necessarily constitute sexual harassment. This would seem to be an important point and one that pertains to a somewhat surprising Experiment 1 result. That is, only a small minority of subjects made any spontaneous reference to sexual harassment, direct or indirect, in their open-ended responses, despite relatively high variation in their responses to the sexual harassment forced-choice question. This suggests that for many subjects, sexual harassment may not be a construct readily available for

evaluating interactions of the sort portrayed in the scenarios. To further test this idea, the second study employed a condition in which the "sexual attention" is clearly unwanted. In this case, the interaction will, therefore, more closely match the legal definition of harassment. This will be contrasted with a condition in which the recipient's response remains unknown, as it was in Experiment 1 and most previous research.

The recipient-response conditions were in turn crossed with a manipulation of initiator status. As discussed earlier, previous research has suggested that people are more likely to perceive sexual harassment when the initiator is the recipient's supervisor or employer. Therefore, to further investigate the extent to which harassment is an available construct, a condition was added in which the initiator was the recipient's boss. In the other status condition, as in the first study, the initiator was a coworker.

Another purpose of the second study was to reexamine the individual difference effects that were manifest in Experiment 1. More specifically, the first study implicated sex-role attitudes as a factor related to perceptions of sexual harassment. There was, however, no main effect for this variable, and its interaction with initiator sex generated results contrary to the expectation that subjects with more liberal sex-role

attitudes would be more sensitive to the potentially harassing nature of the portrayed interaction. It was suggested in the previous section that subjects' AIW score may have in part reflected a general liberal orientation. It is possible that sensitivity to sexual harassment requires a more specific concern with gender-related social issues than is essential to general liberalism. Consequently, the second study will include a measure of subjects' general political orientation, which will allow examination of the independent contribution made by sex role attitudes. Additionally, the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) was administered to subjects in hopes that it might also prove to be a predictor of harassment perceptions. In light of Bem's (1981; 1983) recent theorizing on gender schemata, it is plausible that subjects who tend to organize information with particular regard to gender might respond to the vignettes differently from those who do not.

The final purpose of the second study was to directly replicate the interaction effects of Experiment 1. Consequently, initiator sex and recipient behavior (friendly vs. ambiguous) were retained as experimental manipulations for a subset of cells in the experimental design. Initiator behavior was in turn crossed with the new recipient-response manipulation. Recall that Experiment 1 findings suggested that people with liberal

sex role attitudes were more sensitive to the sex-role reversal (i. e., female initiator) than to the potential for harassment. With respect to the second study, it was thought that the recipient- response might moderate the interaction between sex role attitudes and initiator sex. That is, portraying the interaction as more clearly harassing could conceivably focus liberals' attention more on sexual harassment and less on role reversal.

### Predictions

We expected that subjects would more likely perceive harassment and respond more negatively when the recipient's response was negative rather than unknown. Additionally, it was predicted that subjects would respond more negatively when the initiator was the recipient's boss rather than a coworker. Given the paucity of spontaneous harassment-related responses in Experiment 1, we hypothesized that there would be an interaction between recipient's response and initiator status. Subjects would be most likely to see harassment in the scenarios when the recipient responded negatively and the initiator was a boss.

### Methods

Except where indicated otherwise, the general procedures were identical to those used in Experiment 1. The design included three new vignette manipulations, each with two levels: status of initiator; initiator "style";

and recipient's response. It should be noted that in all of the new vignette conditions, the initiator was male. For the purpose of replicating Experiment 1 findings, sex of initiator and recipient behavior were also manipulated for a subset of cells in the design. As in Experiment 1, the vignette manipulations were between-subjects variables, so each subject read only one vignette. As shown in Table 5, the design was a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial plus four replication cells.

### Subjects

One hundred forty-nine undergraduates volunteered to participate in the experiment in partial fulfillment of psychology course requirements. Seven subjects did not complete the demographic questionnaire and left blank a sizable number of items from the other materials; consequently, data from these subjects were excluded from final analyses.

### Independent Variables

Vignette Variables. The basic scenario portrayed in the vignettes was the same as that employed in Experiment 1. It depicted two opposite-sex lawyers working at the same firm, one of whom asks the other into the conference room, whereupon the former makes a pass at the latter. Initiator status was manipulated by starting the vignettes with one of the two following statements: "Kathy has been working for Bob as junior attorney at his law firm...";



or "Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm..."

The initiator-style manipulation, intended to moderate the abruptness of the initiator's behavior, involved a condition in which the initiator led up to making a pass at the recipient by saying, "I really like working with you, Kathy. You make me feel comfortable. I feel like I can be myself around you." In this case, the comparison condition simply excluded these words. Lastly, the recipient's response was manipulated, with the aim of creating a scenario in which it was clear that the initiator's behavior was unwanted, creating an interaction more closely matching the legal definition of sexual harassment. Therefore, one condition depicted the recipient responding negatively to the initiator's behavior by drawing back from the initiator and saying, "Please don't do that. I sorry, but I'm not interested."

This was contrasted to a condition in which the recipient's response was not given. (See Appendix B for a copy of the new vignettes.)

The replication cells included the recipient-behavior (friendly vs. ambiguous) manipulation and the initiator sex manipulation, both of which remained unchanged from Experiment 1.

Individual Difference Variables. Aside from subject gender, the following individual differences were

assessed: gender-role attitudes; gender-role identity or gender schema; and general political orientation. As in Experiment 1, sex-role attitudes were measured by responses to the Attitudes Toward Women Scale. However, in order to reduce the time spent completing questionnaires, this study employed the short form of the ATW scale, which includes only fifteen items from the original measure (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The short form is highly correlated with the original and, in addition to taking less time, provides higher reliability.

Gender-identity or gender-schema was assessed by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974, 1981). The inventory consists of a list of masculine, feminine, and neutral attributes; it asks subjects to indicate, on a seven-point scale, the extent to which each attribute describes themselves.

Political orientation was assessed with the measure used by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies. This consists of one item asking subject how they identify themselves politically on a seven-point scale ranging from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative."

### Dependent Measures

There were two sets of dependent measures. The first assessed subjects' spontaneous responses to the vignette.

For this purpose, the first item from the Experiment 1 open-ended questions was used. This item asked subjects to write as much as they could about their impressions of the vignettes they just read.

The second set of measures comprised ten forced-choice questions based on subjects' open-ended responses in Experiment 1. The items covered two general areas: the romantic/personal nature of the scenario and the harassing/exploitative potential of the interaction. Relating to the first domain, there were several questions asking subjects to rate, on a ten-point scale, the characters' attraction for each other and the likelihood of any future romantic relationship between them. These are as follows:

How romantic is this situation?  
To what extent do Bob and Kathy have a mutual attraction for each other?  
How likely is it that Bob and Kathy will have an ongoing romantic relationship?  
How flattering is Bob's behavior toward Kathy?  
How likely is it that Kathy will accept Bob's initiatives?

The other questions asked subjects to rate how insulting or exploitative the initiator's behavior seemed. These are as follows:

To what extent does Bob respect Kathy?  
How insulting is Bob's behavior toward Kathy?  
To what extent is Bob just using Kathy?  
To what extent does this situation constitute sexual harassment?

## Results

In order to identify the limits of people's ability to use a sexual harassment concept in processing social-sexual interaction, several new conditions were employed. In one condition, the recipient clearly indicated that the initiator's sexual attention was unwanted. This was contrasted to another condition in which the recipient's response not given. The status of the initiator was also manipulated, such that he was either the recipient's boss or a coworker. Finally, in order to mitigate the perceived abruptness of the initiator's behavior, a "smoothness" manipulation was introduced. This entailed employing a condition in which the initiator more gradually led up to making a pass at the recipient.

It was earlier suggested that people's sexual harassment concept seems not to be easily available. They tend instead to process the vignettes using constructs more relevant to normal courtship. More specifically, subjects' spontaneous evaluations appear to revolve around the romantic and personal nature of the scenarios. People do not readily employ constructs relating to harassment, abuse of power, or exploitation. It is not suggested here that people do not have a sexual harassment concept. Nonetheless, it seems plausible that such a concept is applied only to clear or stereotyped incidents.

when the recipient indicated her dislike of the initiator's behavior and when the initiator was the recipient's boss. Such responses may be most common when both conditions are present. It was therefore expected that the recipient-response and initiator- status conditions would also interact, such that subjects would see the scenarios as sexual harassment only when both conditions were present. It was also suspected that the "smooth" initiator would more likely trigger use of the courtship concept and thereby moderate the effects of the other conditions.

#### Composition of Dependent Variables

Three dependent variables were derived from subjects' open-ended responses. These responses were categorized based on the coding scheme used in Experiment 1, and statements fitting into each category were summed to form separate measures. The first dependent variable indicated the extent to which subjects' general evaluation of the vignettes was negative. It included any negative statements about the initiator or the situation in general, statements suggesting that the recipient did not like what was happening, and statements suggesting that the recipient would respond negatively to the initiator's behavior.

For conceptual reasons discussed in the previous section the negative-evaluation measure did not include



statements explicitly referring to sexual harassment. These were summed to create a separate dependent variable and comprised direct references to harassment, statements suggesting that the recipient was being exploited or coerced, and statements suggesting that the initiator's behavior constituted an abuse of power.

The third open-ended measure gauged subjects' general positive evaluation of the vignettes. As in Experiment 1, this variable represented the sum of all positive statements about the initiator or the situation and statements indicating that the recipient was pleased with or would respond positively to the initiator's behavior.

Two additional dependent variables were generated from a factor analysis of the ten forced-choice questions. Because it was assumed that any factors thus derived would be related, an oblique rotation was employed. As expected, the analysis revealed two factors. The first factor consisted of the six items asking how romantic the scenario was and the likelihood that the two actors would have a romantic relationship or encounter. These items all loaded heavily onto the first factor (factor loadings ranged from .76 to .94) and weakly onto the second (all less than .34). The other four questions, loading heavily onto the second factor (.61 to .94) and weakly onto the first (less than .31), gauged the harassing or

exploitative nature of the scenario. As expected, the two factors were correlated ( $r = .54$ )

One other finding emerging from the factor analysis provides some corroboration for the idea that subjects either do not use or do have easy access to a sexual harassment concept. Instead they seem to employ a general courtship concept in processing the vignettes. In this connection, it is notable that the romantic factor accounted for 63 percent of the variance among all the items, whereas the harassment factor accounted for only 12 percent of the variance.

To summarize, five dependent variables were employed. Three were derived from open-ended responses: general negative evaluation, explicit reference to harassment, and general positive evaluation. Two were derived from the forced-choice questions: the extent to which the scenarios were perceived to be romantic and the extent to which they were perceived to be harassing or exploitative.

#### Analyses With ATW

Because attitudes toward women was the individual difference of principal interest, the first analysis examined its effects in combination with the vignette manipulations. A initiator-status (boss vs. peer) X recipient-response (unwanted vs. unknown) X initiator-style (smooth vs. neutral) X ATW (liberal ATW vs. moderate

ATW vs. conservative ATW) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for each of the five dependent variables.

Using general negative evaluation as the dependent variable, there was, as expected, a main effect for recipient's response indicating that when the initiator's behavior was clearly unwanted, subjects generated more negative statements ( $\bar{M} = 1.98$ ) than when the recipient's response was unknown ( $\bar{M} = .98$ ),  $F(1, 141) = 16.27$ ,  $p < .01$ . There was also a main effect for the initiator's prior behavior. Contrary to expectations, subjects generated significantly more negative statements when the initiator was smooth ( $\bar{M} = 1.69$ ) rather than neutral ( $\bar{M} = 1.21$ ),  $F(1, 141) = 3.92$ ,  $p < .05$ . From subjects' comments, it appeared that the "smooth" initiator came across as slick or manipulative. A significant main effect for ATW was revealed such that liberals ( $\bar{M} = 1.84$ ) tended to respond more negatively than moderates ( $\bar{M} = 1.32$ ) who in turn were more negative than conservatives ( $\bar{M} = 1.00$ )  $F(2, 141) = 5.05$ ,  $p < .01$ . Paired comparisons showed that liberals were more negative than the both moderates and conservatives ( $p < .05$ ), but there was little difference between the latter two groups. Recall that there was no main effect for ATW in Experiment 1, seemingly due to liberals' relatively positive responses to the conditions in which the initiator was female.

With harassment-related statements used as the dependent variable, the same ANOVA revealed two significant effects. The analysis again yielded a significant main effect for the recipient's response. When the initiator's behavior was unwanted, subjects' were more likely to generate harassment-related statements ( $\bar{M} = .46$ ) than when the recipient's response was unknown ( $\bar{M} = .05$ )  $F(1, 141) = 12.50, p < .01$ . Consistent with expectations, there was also significant interaction between recipient's response and initiator's status,  $F(1, 141) = 4.00, p < .05$ . Means for this interaction are displayed in Table 6. When the recipient's response was unknown, the status of the initiator made no difference. However, when the recipient responded negatively, subjects were generally more likely to make harassment-related statements, especially when the initiator was a boss rather than a peer. No other effects achieved significance.

ANOVA using general positive evaluation as the dependent variable produced similar findings. There was a main effect for initiator status, indicating that subjects generated more positive statements when the initiator was a peer ( $\bar{M} = .87$ ) rather than a boss ( $\bar{M} = .28$ ),  $F(1, 141) = 4.69, p < .05$ . Additionally, there was a main effect for recipient's response, such that subjects responded more positively when recipient's response was unknown ( $\bar{M}$

= 1.12) rather than negative ( $\underline{M} = .08$ ),  $\underline{F} (1, 141) = 36.22$ ,  $p < .01$ . It should be noted that this effect was further explained by the interaction between recipient's response and initiator status,  $\underline{F} (1, 141) = 3.75$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Table 7). As was the case for harassment-related comments, initiator status made little difference when the recipient's response was unknown. Only when the recipient made known that the initiator's behavior was unwanted did the status effect manifest itself, such that the peer initiator elicited more positive comments than the boss.

An ANOVA on the aggregated forced-choice variable gauging subjects' perception of the romantic nature of the vignettes revealed, consistent with the above analyses, a significant main effect for recipient's response. When the recipient responded negatively, subjects perceived the scenario as less romantic ( $\underline{M} = 1.29$ ) than when the recipient's response was unknown ( $\underline{M} = 4.26$ ),  $\underline{F} (1, 141) = 92.17$ ,  $p < .01$ . There was a significant main effect for initiator status, suggesting that subjects thought the vignettes to be more romantic when the initiator was a peer ( $\underline{M} = 3.45$ ) rather than a boss ( $\underline{M} = 2.06$ ),  $\underline{F} (1, 141) = 6.03$ ,  $p < .05$ . Similar to results from the harassment and positive response variables, this finding is partially explained by two interactions. Initiator status interacted with initiator behavior  $\underline{F} (1, 141) = 4.26$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Table 8). When the initiator was smooth, status had



little impact; subjects saw the vignettes as moderately unromantic. However, when the initiator was neutral, the status effect was exacerbated in both directions.

Subjects perceived the vignettes to be more romantic when the initiator was a peer and less romantic when the initiator was a boss.

This analysis also revealed a three-way interaction among initiator status, recipient's response, and ATW,  $F(2, 141) = 3.47, p < .05$  (see Table 9). It seems that when the recipient's response was unknown, more liberal subjects made a greater distinction between the peer and boss initiators, seeing the vignettes as less romantic when the initiator was the recipient's boss. When the recipient's response was negative, all subjects tended to perceive the vignettes as relatively unromantic. However, in this case, conservative subjects distinguished between the peer and boss initiators, while more liberal subjects did not. This suggests that conservative subjects are less reactive to the power difference than liberal subjects, except when the recipient responds negatively, in which case the reverse is true.

Finally, the same ANOVA was conducted on the forced-choice variable assessing subjects' perceptions of the harassing nature of the vignettes. The results yielded three significant main effects. Subjects saw the scenarios as more harassing when the initiator was a boss

( $\bar{M} = 6.11$ ) rather than a peer (4.83),  $F(1, 141) = 6.64, p < .01$ . There was a significant main effect for recipient's response, suggesting that subjects were more likely to see the scenario as harassing when the recipient's response was negative ( $\bar{M} = 6.36$ ) rather than unknown ( $\bar{M} = 4.42$ )  $F(1, 141) = 21.25, p < .01$ . There was, in addition, a significant main effect for ATW. Liberal ATW subjects ( $\bar{M} = 5.85$ ) saw the scenarios as more harassing than moderate ATW subjects ( $\bar{M} = 5.15$ ) and conservative ATW ( $\bar{M} = 4.64$ ),  $F(2, 141) = 3.62, p < .05$ . No other effects were significant.

#### Additional ANOVAS

ANOVAS were again performed using the three vignette manipulations as independent variables. In this case, sex of subject was added to the analysis, and ATW was excluded. Employing the forced-choice harassment measure as the dependent variable, a significant subject sex by initiator status by recipient response interaction emerged,  $F(1, 141) = 6.53, p < .01$ . The interaction means are shown in Table 10. The peer initiator elicited the same response from both male and female subjects; they saw the scenarios as more harassing when the recipient's response was negative than when it was unknown. When the initiator was the recipient's boss, however, a sex difference emerged such that males, relative to females, made a greater distinction between the two recipient-

response conditions. It should be noted that this is partly explained by the fact that female subjects, in contrast to males, perceived more harassment when the initiator was the recipient's boss and the recipient's response was negative.

Additional ANOVAs were conducted with subjects' self-reported political orientation as the individual difference variable. Based on a median split of the political-orientation question, subjects were divided into two groups. For convenience, the two groups are here labeled "liberal" and "conservative." No new information regarding the vignette manipulations was gleaned from these analyses. There were, however, two main effects for political orientation. When general negative evaluation was used as the dependent variable, liberal subjects generated more negative statements ( $M = 1.72$ ) than did conservative subjects ( $M = 1.03$ ),  $F(1, 141) = 8.81$ ,  $p < .01$ . A similar finding emerged with regard to subjects' perceptions of the romantic nature of the vignettes. Liberals rated the vignettes as less romantic ( $M = 2.51$ ) than did conservatives ( $M = 3.41$ ),  $F(1, 141) = 5.47$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Another series of ANOVAs was conducted, this time using subjects' responses to the Bem Sex Role Inventory as the individual difference variable. Contrary to expectations,

there were no significant main effects or interactions involving BSRI groupings.

### Replication Analyses

Included in the design of Experiment 2 were several manipulations used in first study. It was hoped that some of the findings of the latter would replicate.

Recall that in the first study ATW predicted subjects' positive responses to the vignettes only when the initiator was female. In this case more liberal subjects responded more positively than did more conservative subjects. To replicate this effect in Experiment 2, several cells were added in which the initiator was female. It was expected that the recipient's response to the initiator (unwanted vs. unknown) might moderate this interaction. Consequently a series of initiator-sex (male vs. female initiator) X ATW (liberal vs. moderate vs. conservative) X recipient-response (unwanted vs. unknown) ANOVAs were conducted.

The results yielded the usual main effects for recipient's response on all of the dependent variables, except for harassment-related statements.<sup>1</sup> However, the expected ATW by initiator-sex interaction did not approach significance in any of the analyses (all  $F$ 's < 1.00). One

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<sup>1</sup>For negative responses,  $F(1, 49) = 8.23, p < .01$ ; for positive responses,  $F(1, 49) = 13.95, p < .01$ ; for forced-choice romantic measure,  $F(1, 49) = 31.17, p < .01$ ; for forced-choice harassment measure,  $F(1, 49) = 4.36, p < .05$ .

other new finding emerged. With harassment-related statements as the dependent variable, there was a significant interaction between recipient's response and initiator sex,  $F(1, 141) = 4.65, p < .05$ . The interaction means, displayed in Table 11, suggested that only when the initiator was male and his behavior was clearly unwanted did subjects make any reference to harassment. It should be noted, however, that relatively small cell sizes cast doubt on the reliability of this finding.

The second study attempted to replicate two other findings, the first of which was the interaction between subject sex and initiator sex. Experiment 1 results indicated that male subjects, relative to females, make a greater distinction between male and female initiators, viewing the latter more positively. In Experiment 1, there was also an interaction between subject sex and recipient's behavior (friendly vs. ambiguous), indicating that whereas females viewed the vignettes more positively when the recipient was friendly rather than ambiguous, males did not distinguish between the two groups. For replication purposes, recipient behavior was also manipulated in the second study for a subset of the cells in the design.

Again using the five dependent variables, a series of subject-sex (male vs. female) X initiator-sex (male vs.



female) X recipient-behavior (friendly vs. ambiguous) ANOVAs were carried out. Once again, the interactions of interest were not replicated, although there were significant main effects for recipient's behavior with regard to subjects' general positive evaluation,  $F(1, 51) = 7.20, p < .05$ , and perceptions of the romantic nature of the vignettes,  $F(1, 51) = p < .01$ . Consistent with the results of the first study, subjects responded more positively and viewed the scenario as more romantic when the recipient was friendly rather than ambiguous. When the forced-choice harassment measure was utilized, there was also a main effect for sex of initiator whereby subjects perceived the scenario as more harassing when the initiator was male rather than female,  $F(1, 51) = 4.59, p < .05$ .

#### Analyses of Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 Merged

Because the vignettes used in the Experiment 2 replication cells were virtually identical to those used in Experiment 1, the data from both were analyzed together. This served two purposes. First, failure to replicate could be due to changes in the stimulus materials, in which case interactions between independent variables and experiment might be informative. Merging the two samples might increase the reliability of any consequent findings. In this analysis only the two open-ended dependent variables were used due to changes in the

forced-choice items between studies. The subject-sex (male vs. female) X initiator-sex (male vs. female) X recipient-behavior (friendly vs. ambiguous) x ATW (liberal vs. moderate vs. conservative) X study (Exp. 1 vs. Exp. 2) ANOVAs were performed for both general positive and general negative evaluations.

With negative evaluation as the dependent variable, there were main effects for initiator sex, recipient behavior and study. Subjects viewed the vignettes more negatively when the initiator was male rather than female,  $F(1, 224) = 11.73, p < .01$ . Responses were also more negative when the recipient was ambiguous rather than friendly,  $F(1, 224) = 7.65, p < .01$ . Subjects also generated more negative responses in Experiment 1 than in Experiment 2,  $F(1, 224) = 47.89, p < .01$ . With respect to this last finding, it should be noted that in the first study, subjects responded to a series of open-ended questions, whereas in the second there was only one open-ended question. There was also a significant interaction between sex and ATW,  $F(2, 224) = 3.14, p < .05$ . Interaction means are displayed in Table 12. It seems that ATW had opposite effects for men and women. Liberal attitudes were positively related to negative responses to the vignettes for men, whereas the reverse was true for women. No other effects approached significance.

As in other analyses, subjects' responses were more negative when the initiator was male rather than female,  $F(1, 224) = 11.07, p < .01$ , and when the recipient was friendly rather than ambiguous,  $F(1, 224) = 32.07, p < .01$ . Furthermore, consistent with the suggestion that the greater number of positive statements generated in the first study was due to its inclusion of more open-ended questions, subjects also generated more negative statements in Experiment 1 than in Experiment 2,  $F(1, 224) = 43.15, p < .01$ . There was a significant ATW by recipient behavior interaction,  $F(2, 224) = 7.08, p < .01$  (see Table 13). Interaction means suggest a consistent main effect for recipient behavior that is modified by ATW. Specifically, the distinction between vignettes in which the recipient is friendly rather than ambiguous seems to be exaggerated for more liberal subjects. Viewed another way, it appears that the friendly recipient elicits more positive responses as subjects become more liberal, whereas for the ambiguous recipient this effect is reversed.

Finally, the analysis revealed a significant interaction between recipient behavior and study,  $F(1, 224) = 8.58, p < .01$ . Interaction means are shown in Table 14. It is likely that because Experiment 2 subjects generated fewer responses, thereby decreasing variation, the distinction made between friendly and ambiguous

recipients appears smaller. However, the general direction of the effect remains the same.

TABLE 5  
Design of Experiment 2

Initiator Behavior				
Recipient Response	Neutral		Smooth	
	Initiator Status		Initiator Status	
	Coworker	Boss	Coworker	Boss
Negative	1	2	5	6
Unknown	3	4	7	8

Initiator Female-Coworker

Recipient Response	
Negative	Unknown
9	10

Initiator Friendly-Coworker

Initiator Sex	
Male	Female
11	12



TABLE 6

Mean Number of Harassment-Related Statements as a Function  
of Recipient Response and Initiator Status

---

Recipient's Response		
	Unknown	Negative
Peer	.05	.30
Initiator Status		
Boss	.05	.64

---

TABLE 7

Mean Number of Positive Statements as a Function of  
Recipient's Response and Initiator Status

---

		Recipient's Response	
		Negative	Unknown
Initiator Status	Peer	.09	1.29
	Boss	.07	.58

---

TABLE 8

Mean Responses to Forced-Choice Romantic Measure as a  
Function of Initiator Behavior and Initiator Status

		Initiator Behavior	
		Smooth	Neutral
Initiator Status	Peer	2.44	4.06
	Boss	2.51	1.67

TABLE 9

Mean Responses to Forced-Choice Romantic Variable  
as a Function of Recipient's Response, Initiator Status  
and Sex-Role Attitudes

---

Recipient's Response		
Liberal ATW		
	Unknown	Negative
Peer	4.37	1.14
Initiator status		
Boss	2.37	.90
Moderate ATW		
Peer	4.60	1.30
Boss	3.24	1.67
Conservative ATW		
Peer	4.56	2.36
Boss	4.56	.65

---

TABLE 10  
Mean Response to Forced-Choice Harassment Measure as a  
Function of Recipient Response, Initiator Status,  
and Subject Sex

---

Recipient's Response		
Male Subjects		
	Unknown	Negative
Peer	3.84	5.25
Initiator Status		
Boss	3.71	7.32
Female Subjects		
Peer	4.34	6.33
Boss	5.80	6.38

---



TABLE 11

Mean Number of Harassment-Related Statements as a  
Function of Recipient's Response and Initiator Sex

		Recipient's Response	
		Unknown	Negative
Initiator Sex	Male	.00	.22
	Female	.04	.00

TABLE 12

Mean Number of Positive Statements as a Function of  
Sex-Role Attitudes and Subject Sex

---

Sex-Role Attitudes			
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Male	4.46	3.05	2.93
Subject Sex			
Female	3.08	3.63	4.39

---

TABLE 13

Mean Number of Positive Statements as a Function of  
Sex-Role Attitudes and Recipient Behavior

---

Sex-Role Attitudes			
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Friendly	5.61	4.18	3.73
Recipient Behavior			
Ambiguous	1.38	2.41	2.52

---

TABLE 14

Mean Number of Positive Statements as a Function of  
Recipient's Behavior and Study

	Recipient's Behavior	
	Friendly	Ambiguous
Study		
Exp. 1	5.28	1.54
Exp. 2	2.61	.71

## Discussion

As in Experiment 1, the second study materials elicited relatively few spontaneous mentions of sexual harassment or related concepts. Moreover, the factor analysis of the forced-choice items indicated that a great majority of the variance in responses was accounted for by the romantic/personal items rather than the harassment-related items. As will be discussed in detail below, these results suggest that harassment is not readily available for use in processing scenarios such as those used in the present study.

There were, however, several new findings that shed some light on the question of when people will begin to notice the potential for harassment. As predicted, when the recipient indicated that the initiator's behavior was unwanted, subjects viewed the vignettes more negatively. This was true for every dependent variable used in the analyses. Also consistent with expectations, subjects' perceptions were more negative when the initiator was the recipient's boss rather than a coworker. This not surprising, insofar as it is a consistent finding in previous research.

The hypothesized and obtained interaction between these two variables provides further information. It appeared that subjects generated virtually no harassment-related statements when the recipient's response was unknown,



regardless of the status of the initiator. Only when the recipient's response was negative did subjects distinguish between boss and coworker initiators, making more harassment-related comments in response to the boss relative to the coworker. With regard to subjects' positive comments, a similar interaction occurred; only when the recipient's response was unknown did subjects rate the vignettes more positively when the initiator was a coworker rather than a boss. When the recipient responded negatively, there were almost no positive statements elicited, and thus subjects made no distinction between the two initiator-status conditions.

These data suggest, at least with regard to subjects' spontaneous reactions, that recipient's response determined the presence or absence of certain spontaneous comments, whereas initiator status determined the number and extremity of these responses. As will be elaborated below, these seem to be situational variables that play a crucial role in inhibiting or eliciting people's reactions to scenarios such as those used in the present study.

Furthermore, this finding was further modified by individual differences in several analyses. On the forced-choice romantic measure, only subjects with more liberal sex-role attitudes responded to the vignettes in the manner just described; that is, they consistently rated the negative-recipient vignettes as unromantic and

made no distinction between coworker and boss initiators. Likewise, when the recipient's response was unknown, the more liberal subjects rated the coworker-initiator vignettes as more romantic than the boss-initiator vignettes. On the other hand, subjects with conservative sex-role attitudes displayed a different pattern; they rated the coworker and boss conditions as equally romantic when the recipient's response was unknown. In response to the negative recipient, conservative subjects did make the coworker-boss distinction.

Subject sex also interacted with recipient's response and initiator status. Here, the most notable finding was that female subjects, relative to males, were more likely to perceive harassment when the recipient's response was unknown and the initiator was a boss. Perhaps this suggests a greater sensitivity on the part of females to the power dynamics of the situation.

With regard to individual differences, it was found that both ATW and general political orientation predicted subjects' responses on several dependent variables. Generally, subjects with liberal ATW and subjects who identified themselves as politically liberal perceived the vignettes more negatively than conservative subjects. Why this is the case is open to question. It may be the case that more liberal subjects have had more exposure to sexual harassment as a social problem or to feminist

issues in general, thus creating more sensitivity to sexual exploitation.

In addition to the predicted effects, there were some surprises as well. Recall that the initiator-behavior manipulation was intended to moderate the abruptness of the encounter. Unexpectedly, the results indicated that the "smooth" initiator elicited more negative comments than the neutral initiator. Subjects apparently viewed the smooth initiator as manipulative, trying to use a "line," as it were, to lure the recipient. In fact, with the smooth initiator, subjects did not distinguish between two status conditions, seeing them as equally unromantic; it was only when the initiator was neutral that subjects rated the initiator-boss condition as less romantic than the initiator-coworker condition.

#### Replication Data

The replication analyses yielded mixed results. Two main effects found in the first study were replicated. In both experiments, subjects responded more positively and rated the vignettes as more romantic when the recipient was friendly rather than ambiguous. Also repeated was the finding the male initiator elicited more negative responses than the female initiator. These will be discussed further below.

Contrary to predictions, none of the Experiment 1 interactions were replicated, the reasons for which will

be suggested below. There was, however, one new finding: the interaction between initiator sex and recipient's response. It seems that subjects generated harassment-related statements only when the recipient responded negatively and the initiator was male.

## CHAPTER 6

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

#### Summary

Recall that Experiment 1 results indicate that subjects were more positive toward scenarios portraying female, rather than male, initiators and friendly, rather than ambiguous, recipient behavior prior to the incident. In addition, sex role attitudes were related to subjects' perceptions only when the initiator was female, in which case more liberal subjects viewed the vignettes more positively. Finally, it appeared that male subjects, in comparison to females, made a greater distinction between male and female initiators, responding to the latter even more positively than did female subjects.

In brief, Experiment 2 suggests that when the recipient responds negatively to the initiator's behavior, subjects view the vignettes more negatively and are more likely to see the scenario as potentially harassing. Likewise, portraying the initiator as a boss rather than a coworker also tends to elicit more negative responses. Moreover, when the initiator is a boss and the recipient's response is negative, subjects display their disapproval with relative consistency. In addition to the vignette manipulations, individual differences also had an impact on the results. There was a positive relation between liberalism, both generally and with respect to sex role



attitudes, and negative responses to the vignettes. Furthermore, sex role attitudes and subject sex both influenced the effects of initiator status and recipient's response.

The replication data did not support the interaction findings from the first study, although the main effects for recipient's friendliness and initiator sex were repeated. In addition, it was found that subjects in Experiment 2 did not perceive harassment in the scenarios when the initiator was female, regardless of recipient's response. When the initiator was male, however, at least some subjects generated harassment-related comments, but only when the recipient responded negatively.

Finally, when data from both Experiment 1 and the replication cells in Experiment 2 were merged, it was found that the initiator-sex and recipient-behavior main effects were reconfirmed. Due to the fact that only one open-ended question was used in Experiment 2, subjects generated fewer spontaneous statements in the second study than in the first. One other new finding that emerged from the merged data was that subjects with more liberal sex role attitudes made a greater distinction between recipients whose prior behavior was friendly and ambiguous, responding more positively to the former.

### Reconciling the Two Studies

Before going on to more general conclusions, the discrepancies between the two studies should be addressed. First, note that the main effects remained consistent across experiments, suggesting that, at least, the procedures were not radically different. Nonetheless, the lack of replication for the interactions is more troubling. Sex role attitudes, for example, seemed to have quite different effects in the two studies. In the first study, liberal attitudes appeared to predict only sensitivity to role reversal (i. e., the portrayal of female initiator), whereas in the second study, ATW related to subjects' responses in the manner originally predicted. That is, liberals were more likely than conservatives to perceive the scenarios negatively or as potentially harassing.

Why the difference? There are several possibilities. First, divergent results may have been due to the fact that the second study employed the short form of the ATW scale, whereas the first used the original. This seems unlikely, however, since there was no significant interaction between sex role attitudes and study in the merged data. Also, reanalysis of Experiment 1 data using only the short form items as the ATW measure had no impact on the results. More likely, the difference in findings was due to the change in vignettes. The second study used

new vignette manipulations, namely initiator status and recipient response, specifically designed to trigger negative and harassment-related responses. It seems that when the scenarios show more potential harassment, people with liberal attitudes are more likely to respond negatively, as evidenced by the ATW interactions in Experiment 2. Similarly, both the Experiment 1 data and the merged data indicated that when the vignettes seem less threatening, as when the initiator is female or when the recipient was previously friendly liberal subjects tended to respond more positively. Therefore, the tendency for liberals to be more reactive, both positively and negatively, to the vignettes' contents can be advanced as an explanation for the divergent findings.

Another finding that failed to replicate was the subject sex by recipient behavior interaction. Experiment 1 data suggested that male subjects, relative to females, made a greater distinction between male and female initiators, responding more positively to the latter. In the second study, no such result emerged, again leaving a discrepancy to be resolved. One possible answer lies in the fact that, for the replication cells, the female initiator conditions included a negative-recipient condition. As is apparent from other results, the negative recipient condition represents a powerful elicitor of negative responses. Therefore, male subjects'

positive responses to the female initiator may well have been mitigated by the inclusion of the negative-recipient condition. If that were indeed the case, one might have expected a three-way interaction between subject sex, initiator sex, and recipient response, which did not occur. Unfortunately, it is difficult to discern whether the lack of this effect was due only to insufficient cell size. It may simply be that the original interaction is an unreliable one. In this connection, the most reliable data we have comes from the merging of the two studies, where the interaction between subject sex and initiator sex did not approach significance. It seems safest to conclude, therefore, that the effect in question is unreliable.

One final inconsistency remains to be explained, namely, the failure to replicate the subject-sex by recipient-behavior interaction. Recall that in Experiment 1, analyses revealed that female subjects distinguished more between friendly and ambiguous recipients' prior behavior than males did. Why did this not occur in the second study? Again, the answer may lie in the merged data. Here, although the original interaction did not appear, a similar effect arose. Analyses of the merged data showed a interaction between sex role attitudes and recipient behavior, such that subjects with more liberal attitudes, compared to conservative subjects, made a

greater distinction between friendly and ambiguous prior behavior by recipients. Interchanging liberal subjects with female subjects, the effect is exactly parallel to the first study's finding. This is especially noteworthy because sex and sex role attitudes are correlated, which raises the possibility that the Experiment 1 sex difference may have been simply a hidden sex role attitudes effect.

#### Practical and Theoretical Considerations

What does the present research reveal about perceptions of sexual harassment? Generally speaking, it seems that people do not readily employ sexual harassment as a construct for processing interactions of the sort portrayed by the vignettes. While it would be illegitimate to conclude from the data that people are insensitive to sexual harassment, the very low frequency of harassment-related responses in both studies implies that it may be difficult for people to see sexual harassment as such, at least in ambiguous cases. In this connection, the use of spontaneous, open-ended responses to scenarios seems rather informative. Previous research, in simply asking subjects whether some interaction constitutes sexual harassment, may inadvertently provide somewhat misleading data. Such research, by prompting subjects', may overestimate people's sensitivity to sexual harassment. Although this does not necessarily render



comparisons between conditions or individual differences invalid, future researchers may do well to keep in mind that the spontaneously generated constructs may not match those provided by the experimenter.

More specifically, the results of the present studies shed further light on the boundaries of perception of sexual harassment. There were consistent effects for sex of initiator and recipient behavior, suggesting that portraying the initiator as female or the recipient as previously friendly both serve to inhibit negative or harassment-related responses. Furthermore, portraying the recipient as responding negatively seems to inhibit positive responses or perceptions that the scenarios are romantic. The status of the initiator also has an impact; the boss initiator appears to exaggerate negative responses, especially when the recipient responded negatively.

To extrapolate from these findings: in evaluating scenarios, people appear to be drawing upon a stereotype of sexual harassment. This stereotype consists of a scenario in which a male initiator, who is the recipient's boss, attempts to seduce a female subordinate, who is clearly opposed to the idea and has given no "signals" (i. e., friendly behavior) to encourage the initiator. Although not addressed in the present research, this stereotype probably includes some kind of job-related

coercion on the part of the initiator (e. g., "if want to keep your job you'll sleep with me"). Of course, the relative importance of each component of this stereotype requires further study. The present research suggests that the recipient's behavior, both leading up to and in response to the initiator's behavior, plays a particularly crucial role in determining whether the potential for harassment is seen, whereas the other variables may then moderate perceptions.

Of what relevance, then, are individual differences? Based on the present findings, sex role attitudes appear to have an impact on perceptions. Practically speaking, however, the effects are unclear. It might be said that people with more liberal attitudes are more likely to perceive sexual harassment as such. However, the present data also suggest that liberals might be less likely to do so when, for example, the recipient has been "friendly" to the initiator. The real impact of sex role attitudes may, as a result, be mixed.

In general, it is plausible that when presented with potential harassment, the likelihood of people labeling it as such depends on how closely it matches the stereotype. If people do really employ a sexual-harassment stereotype, it would seem crucial to determine how flexible it is. The present study suggests that people are relatively inflexible in their perceptions. However, our research

does not adequately address this question, for it did not employ any stimuli that consistently elicited spontaneous uses of the harassment label. Perhaps including an economic-blackmail condition would have sufficed in this regard.

With respect to the legal definition of sexual harassment, how adept are people employing the term? Recall that the legal definition comprises three different conditions. The first two involve clear abuse of power by a superior, whereas the third refers to cases in which unwanted sexual attention interferes with work or is "intimidating, hostile, or offensive." Extrapolating from the present study, people are probably fairly adept at recognizing the first two types of harassment. Indeed, most of the sexual harassment cases that are eventually litigated fall into this category (Rasnic, 1982), and those that are decided in favor of the victim are usually particularly egregious, often involving physical abuse. There are nonetheless probably many incidences that take a much more subtle form, and it is here that the present research gives some cause for concern. For example, Gutek (1985) claims that over half of all incidences of sexual harassment are initiated by coworkers rather than supervisors or employers. In such cases, how likely is it that outside observers will lend support to or, in the case of jurors, render judgment in favor of the victim,

especially if she displayed some prior friendliness toward the initiator? Of course, questions of ecological validity necessitate caution in drawing conclusions from the present data. Notwithstanding, the results do suggest that, in such cases, people may be biased toward perceiving the incident in romantic or personal terms rather than as sexual harassment. Moreover, this may prevent judges or jurors from deciding a case in favor of the victim.

This brings us to the question of how future researchers should proceed. There has been an abundance of research focussing on perceptions of sexual harassment, yet there remains a paucity of coherent theory on the topic. It is suggested here that this lack may be ameliorated somewhat by recent advances in social cognition research. Specifically, work on schematic processing may be useful in this context (see Fiske & Taylor, 1984, for a review). A schema is a cognitive structure used to organize complex information, and comprises attributes and relations among attributes of some concept. In this case, when people are confronted with a case of potential harassment, they may or may not access a sexual harassment schema and process the events they witness with reference to it. Related to the processing of the vignettes used in the present study, we believe there are two relevant schemata: a courtship

schema and a sexual harassment schema. When applying the courtship schema, people focus on the romantic or personal nature of the interaction in question, whereas the sexual harassment schema raises issues of coercion or exploitation. For example, a person using the courtship schema to process some interaction may ask, how charming is the initiator or had the recipient been flirtatious. On the other hand, the sexual harassment schema may focus attention on the power dynamics of the situation.

Drawing on the results of the present research, it seems likely that people's sexual harassment schema is relatively limited and accessed only when the interaction matches the most narrowly stereotypic version of the schema. In this regard, future research might focus on several questions. First, what are the precise contents of most people's sexual harassment schema? It may be necessary to take a step back and simply ask people what associations are conjured up when they hear the term sexual harassment. Additionally, what conditions are necessary to trigger use of a sexual harassment schema? Aside from further exploration of the effects of the participants' behavior and status, it might be useful to investigate other factors that serve the function of priming one schema or the other (i. e., sexual harassment or courtship). For example, evoking empathy for the recipient may make the harassment schema more accessible.



Finally, what are the consequences of processing with one schema or the other? Researchers might explore how evaluations of the actors and situation change with use of different schemata.

Empirical work of the kind presented here represents, we believe, a further step toward understanding the perception of sexual harassment. When combined with other research, not only psychological but sociological and economic as well, one can begin to grasp why sexual harassment is such a tenacious problem.

## APPENDIX A

### EXPERIMENT 1 VIGNETTES

#### Male Initiator/Friendly Recipient/Physical

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They got along fairly well, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged glances. When speaking, one would sometimes touch the other's shoulder or arm. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile, and Kathy smiled back. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door, turned out the lights, and kissed Kathy on the mouth.

#### Male Initiator/Ambiguous Recipient/Physical

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were familiar with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she

consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door, turned out the lights, and kissed Kathy on the mouth.

#### Male Initiator/Friendly Recipient/Verbal

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They got along fairly well, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged glances. When speaking, one would sometimes touch the other's shoulder or arm. One morning Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile, and Kathy smiled back. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and told Kathy that he thought she was very sexy and would like to go to bed with her.

#### Male Initiator/Ambiguous Recipient/Verbal

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were familiar with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other in the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would

talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and told Kathy that he thought she was very sexy and would like to go to bed with her.

#### Female Initiator/Friendly Recipient/Physical

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They got along fairly well, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged glances. When speaking, one would sometimes touch the other's shoulder or arm. One morning, Kathy passed Bob in the corridor and gave him a big smile, and Bob smiled back. Later that day, Kathy asked Bob if he would talk to her in private in the conference room, and he consented. When they got there, Kathy closed the door, turned out the lights, and kissed Bob on the mouth.

#### Female Initiator/Ambiguous Recipient/Physical

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were familiar with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Bob, Kathy would often touch his shoulder.

One morning, Kathy passed Bob in the corridor and gave him a big smile. Later that day, Kathy asked Bob if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and he consented. When they got there, Kathy closed the door, turned out the lights, and kissed Kathy on the mouth.

#### Female Initiator/Friendly Recipient/Verbal

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They got along fairly well, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged glances. When speaking, one would sometimes touch the other's shoulder or arm. One morning Kathy passed Bob in the corridor and gave him a big smile, and Bob smiled back. Later that day, Kathy asked Bob if he would talk to her in private in the conference room, and he consented. When they got there, Kathy closed the door and told Bob that she thought he was very sexy and would like to go to bed with him.

#### Female Initiator/Ambiguous Recipient/Verbal

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were familiar with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other in the office, they often exchanged a few words. When



speaking to Bob, Kathy would often touch his shoulder.

One morning, Kathy passed Bob in the corridor and gave him a big smile. Later that day, Kathy asked Bob if he would talk to her in private in the conference room, and he consented. When they got there, Kathy closed the door and told Bob that she thought he was very sexy and would like to go to bed with him.

## APPENDIX B

### EXPERIMENT 2 VIGNETTES

#### Coworker Initiator/Smooth/Recipient's Response Unknown

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and said, "I really like working with you, Kathy. You make me feel comfortable. I feel like I can be myself around you." Then Bob slowly leaned forward and kissed Kathy on the mouth.

#### Boss Initiator/Smooth/Response Unknown

Kathy has been working for Bob as a junior attorney at his law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with Bob's other employees after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her

a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and said, "I really like working with you, Kathy. You make me feel comfortable. I feel like I can be myself around you." Then Bob slowly leaned forward and kissed Kathy.

Coworker Initiator/Smooth/Response Negative

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and said, "I really like working with you, Kathy. You make me feel comfortable. I feel like I can be myself around you." Then Bob slowly leaned forward and kissed Kathy. Kathy drew back and said, "Please don't do that. I'm sorry, but I'm not interested." Bob responded by kissing her again.

#### Boss Initiator/Smooth/Response Negative

Kathy has been working for Bob as a junior attorney at his law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with Bob's other employees after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and said, "I really like working with you, Kathy. You make me feel comfortable. I feel like I can be myself around you." Then Bob slowly leaned forward and kissed Kathy. Kathy drew back and said, "Please don't do that. I'm sorry, but I'm not interested." Bob responded by kissing her again.

#### Coworker Initiator/Neutral/Response Unknown

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her

a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and kissed Kathy on the mouth.

Boss Initiator/Neutral/Response Unknown

Kathy has been working for Bob as a junior attorney at his law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with Bob's other employees after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and kissed Kathy on the mouth.

Coworker Initiator/Neutral/Response Negative

Bob and Kathy, who are both attorneys, have been working at the same law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with other coworkers after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her



a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and kissed Kathy on the mouth. Kathy drew back and said, "Please don't do that. I'm sorry, but I'm not interested." Bob responded by kissing her again.

Boss Initiator/Neutral/Response Negative

Kathy has been working for Bob as a junior attorney at his law firm for a few weeks. They were acquainted with each other, sometimes going out for drinks with Bob's other employees after work. When they saw each other at the office, they often exchanged a few words. When speaking to Kathy, Bob would often touch her shoulder. One morning, Bob passed Kathy in the corridor and gave her a big smile. Later that day, Bob asked Kathy if she would talk to him in private in the conference room, and she consented. When they got there, Bob closed the door and kissed Kathy on the mouth. Kathy drew back and said, "Please don't do that. I'm sorry, but I'm not interested." Bob responded by kissing her again.

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