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Effects of Involvement (Target Versus Observer), Gender, Protectiveness, and Priming on Perceptions of Sexual Harassment

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EFFECTS OF ROLE (TARGET VERSUS OBSERVER), GENDER, PROTECTIVENESS, AND PRIMING ON PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

by

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THESIS/DISSERTATION CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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Abstract

The present study looks at reporting rates of sexual harassment in regard to affect, involvement, gender, protectiveness, and priming. Four hundred and forty-six participants were randomly assigned to read either an event described as occurring to themselves or to a friend before answering questions about friendship and what they read. Participants were more likely to label an event as sexual harassment if they used negative words to describe that event. They were also more likely to label an event as sexual harassment after being primed with the words "sexual harassment," if they were female, and if they were high in protectiveness. Participants were also more likely to identify the harasser as male and target as female. Limitations of the investigation (e.g., lack of reverse scoring, social desirability, and acquiescence) and future directions (e.g., IAT, age, and different scales) are also discussed.

Effects of Involvement (Target Versus Observer), Gender, Protectiveness, and Priming on Perceptions of Sexual Harassment

Almost every life has been affected by sexual harassment in some way, be it as the harasser, target, or bystander (McLaughlin et al., 2017). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported over 95,000 instances of sexual harassment between 2006 and 2010 (Hersch & Moran, 2012). This problem creates a variety of costs for individuals and organizations. For example, experiencing sexual harassment leads to increased anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissatisfaction with work, and decreased happiness (Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Gutek, 1985; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Stockdale & Nadler, 2012). Other psychological outcomes that follow sexual harassment include anger, humiliation, fear, irritability, feelings of vulnerability, and decreased self-esteem (Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Gutek, 1985; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000).

Consequences of experiencing sexual harassment can differ for men and women. For example, men who have experienced sexual harassment have also reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and alcohol consumption than did women (Quick & McFadyen, 2017). This report rate is most likely due to negative stigma and the lack of support men have (Quick & McFadyen, 2017). Contrarily, another study found that teen girls, compared to teen boys, are significantly more bothered by sexual harassment (Sears et al., 2011). Moreover, women who label sexual harassment as such are often viewed as unfeminine and untrustworthy (Marin & Guadagno, 1999).

While we know that gender is important to perceptions of sexual harassment, we don't yet understand the roles of affect, priming, involvement, and protection in perceptions of sexual

harassment. It is important to study these factors along with gender because sexual harassment is underreported and prominent in society (Foster & Fullagar, 2018). Therefore this study will investigate factors that affect the identification of sexual harassment.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Identifying sexual harassment is difficult because there are multiple definitions to compare potentially harassing behavior against. For example, the legal definition of Sexual harassment is “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment” (Quick & McFadyen, 2017). There are two components to the legal definition: objective quid pro quo and subjective hostile-environment behavior. Quid pro quo occurs when sexual favors are requested in exchange for workplace perks (e.g., promotion or raise), and hostile-environment behavior are incidents (e.g., sexual conversations) that some find harassing and others do not (Runts & O’Donnell, 2003).

According to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), three elements must be present for a work place incident to constitute as sexual harassment: experienced behaviors must be unwelcome, behaviors must be explicitly or implicitly sex-based, and behaviors must be so severe or pervasive that they alter the work environment (Pesta et al., 2007). The EEOC definition differs from the legal definition because the EEOC sets a standard for employers. The EEOC and legal definitions are similar in that both state that sexual harassment actions can be explicit (e.g., a boss demanding sexual favors from an employee in exchange

for a promotion) or implicit (e.g., a boss passing over an employee for a promotion after being turned down for drinks after work).

Researchers have looked into various issues with defining sexual harassment in and out of the workplace including identifying specific behaviors, deciding if only the victim must experience negative effects, and whether sexism is considered sexually harassing behavior (Pina et al., 2009). From their research, three categories of sexual harassment have been identified: sexual coercion (job related threats or bribes), unwanted sexual attention (unwelcome sexual touches or advances), and gender harassment (hostile behavior towards gender) (Holland et al., 2016). Because there are several definitions of sexual harassment, how to observe and identify it can be challenging.

Identifying Sexual Harassment

Given the diversity with which sexual harassment is defined legally, it is not surprising that people in general are often hesitant to label an interaction as sexual harassment (Jaschik & Fretz, 1991). For example, participants who have been harassed will often label their encounters as inappropriate but not as sexual harassment. It was demonstrated by Jaschik and Fretz that perhaps people will not label an event as such unless they have been primed to do so. Priming occurs when the presence of stimuli facilitates a mental image, impression, or judgment about these stimuli (Molden, 2014). In essence, unless someone or something puts the idea of sexual harassment into an individual’s head, that individual will not readily come to the conclusion that an action was sexual harassment.

Another reason people do not readily identify sexual harassment is time. People tend to not label interactions as sexual harassment or even as inappropriate but, as time passes, they label those same interactions as harassing (Blackstone et al., 2014).

Another factor that hinders identification of sexual harassment is fear of potential repercussions that may follow labeling and reporting it. For example, people view those who report harassment as untrustworthy and difficult to work with (Marin & Guadagno, 1999).

Another reason identified for not labeling sexual harassment is "the severity of the behavior, unawareness about the issue, non-sensitivity to sexual harassment as a wider social problem, existence of a power difference between the harasser and the victim, and high incident rates" (Adikaram, 2016). People may not know if they are experiencing something "serious enough" to warrant a formal complaint. This tends to be true in the service industry (Good & Cooper, 2016).

For example, when customers act in a sexually harassing way, servers are not always sure how to act and will continue to be polite for fear of offending a customer (Good & Cooper, 2016). This harassment will often go unreported because of that fear. Less severe forms of sexual harassment (e.g., gender harassment) were reported more frequently than severe types. This pattern was found regardless of who the perpetrators were and what status they held. It is possible that this report rate happens because targets might feel more shameful after something severe happens and they do not want more people getting involved in an investigation. Another reason for the report rate could be gender harassment is a more common type of harassment. Because it is happening to more people, there are more chances for someone to speak up and make a report (Kalof et al., 2001; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000).

Another reason people might not report sexual harassment is optimism bias which is a tendency to assume that negative events are more likely to happen to their peers than to themselves (Caponecchia, 2010). In the workplace, people think that safety incidents are less likely to happen to themselves which can lead to a lack of concern towards any precautionary measures (Caponecchia, 2010). This bias can also be applied to the risky sexual behaviors of minority youths; sexually active youths who do not use condoms believe they are not likely to become pregnant (Chapin, 2001). There is not much literature on optimism bias and sexual harassment though.

Based on the literature reviewed thus far, three hypotheses were generated for the current investigation. The first hypothesis (self-priming) is individuals will be more likely to identify behavior as sexual harassment if they have previously used strong rather than mildly negative words to describe an incident. This creates self-priming, with individuals' own thought processes producing priming. The second hypothesis (situational-priming) is that participants will not label an event as "sexual harassment" unless they have been primed to do so. This creates situational-priming, with explicit inquiries about sexual harassment producing priming. The third hypothesis (involvement) is that participants will not identify an event happening to themselves as sexual harassment but will identify the same event happening to a friend as sexual harassment.

Targets and Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment

Anyone can be a target of sexual harassment regardless of their race, age, or gender. In the military, 32% of women and 5% of men have reported experiencing "military sexual trauma." Military sexual trauma includes sexual assault and/or sexual harassment (Gibson et al., 2016). The majority of adolescents in high school (both men and women) have reported that they

have either experienced or been perpetrators of sexual peer victimization (Buchanan & McDougall, 2016). Furthermore, high social-status adolescents reported higher rates of victimizing their peers. Also, gender-conforming boys but not girls had higher rates of sexual victimization. A possible explanation could be that because these young men are more attractive and athletic (gender-conforming traits), they receive more attention from women regardless of if it is wanted or consented to (Buchanan & McDougall, 2016). Kalof and her colleagues (2001) found that approximately one-third of students in each racial group (black/African American, white/Caucasian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and other minority groups) experienced sexual harassment indicating that minority status is not an indication of vulnerability towards sexual harassment. They also found that both men and women experience sexual harassment from professors.

Although anyone can be a target of sexual harassment, women are targeted more often than men. For example, far more women than men in the military experienced military sexual trauma (Gibson et al., 2016). Moreover, around half of all working women will experience some type of sexual harassment (Fitzgerald, 1993). Although women in the work force are more frequently victimized by those in higher up positions, they can also be targeted by those in less powerful positions (O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). This type of situation is known as "contrapower harassment" (Benson, 1984; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000) and suggests that harassment can happen to anyone regardless of their position in the workforce.

Sexual harassment is more often perpetrated by men than by women (Pryor, 1995). According to the United States Merit Systems Protection Board (USMSPB), 93% of the 44% of women who reported being sexually harassed were harassed by a man. Also, 65% of the 19% of men who reported experiencing sexual harassment were harassed by women (USMSPB, 1995).

Those results show that although men are more frequently the harassers, women can be the perpetrators as well. The USMSPB also reported that co-workers and "other employees" make up 77% of perpetrators while supervisors and those in higher up positions only make up 28% of perpetrators for federal workers (USMSPB, 1995). It is important to note that while most sexual harassment is perpetrated by men, most men do not sexually harass (Pina et al., 2009). This study will systematically examine expectations that men are the harassers and women the harassed. Specifically, I predict women (or those who identify as female) will label an event as sexual harassment more often than men who read the same event. Second, I predict participants will assign male pronouns to the harasser and female pronouns to the person being harassed.

Friendship and Protection

Having close friendships has been linked to a decrease in victimization (Hodges et al., 1999). For example, those who had a reciprocated best friend reported lower levels of victimization compared to those who had no friends (Boulton et al., 1999). Also, the quality of friendship was important as loss of friendship and betrayal were both predictors of being victimized.

Bystanders were more likely to help their friend than they were to help a stranger (Katz et al., 2015). Specifically, participants intended to intervene more when they viewed an intoxicated friend rather than a stranger being escorted to a bedroom. Thus, relationships influence how likely a bystander is to intervene or label an event as sexual harassment.

The prosocial nature (voluntary actions committed with the intention of benefitting and helping others) of friends has been linked to a decrease in victimization (Lamarche et al., 2006; Stoltenberg et al., 2013). One way this happens is through their ability to handle conflicting peer situations. Another explanation could be that those who are more vulnerable to bullying learn

more adaptive ways to interact with their peers which reduces their rick of being targeted (Lamarche et al., 2006). In that same study, a similar effect with the pro-sociality of siblings was found. Children who have positive sibling relationships develop positive expectancies for relationships which leads to more positive peer interactions (Lockwood et al., 2001; Lockwood et al., 2006). Quality of friendship is important when it comes to protection from bullying because supportive friends act as buffers and defenders against bullying and other forms of victimization (Kendrick et al., 2012).

One focus of the current study is how relationships between targets and observers affect labeling an event as sexual harassment. Based on the literature about friendship and protection, a sixth hypothesis in this study is that those who score high on the friendship quality scale will be more likely to label the event as sexual harassment compared to those who score low on this scale.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the interpretation and identification of sexual harassment changes depending on situational (e.g., presence or absence of priming) and dispositional (e.g., participants' gender, differences in protection) factors. This study is important because sexual harassment often goes unidentified. With data gathered from this study, information on how different scenarios are viewed will help others learn to identify sexual harassment and not let it be so pervasive.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from Amazon MTurk. This is a platform used by Amazon that pays MTurkers to take surveys. Participants were given $1 as an incentive for their participation in this study. No restrictions were put on participation except for a required age of 18 or older and participants must be a United States citizen. This survey typically took between 10 and 20 minutes.

The analyzed sample consisted of 225 males and 201 females with a mean age of 35.24 years (*SD* = 9.77). There were 295 White/Caucasian, 62 Black/African American, 29 Asian/Pacific Islander, 6 Native American, 31 Hispanic/Latino, and 3 Other participants.

Participants were randomly assigned into one of two conditions after electronically signing an informed consent form. If any participants opted to not take part in this survey, they were brought to the end of the survey. Besides the 426 participants mentioned previously, an additional 205 participants were removed for not following directions, not completing the survey, or for providing unusable responses to open ended questions (e.g., writing “a b c” or writing about COVID-19 instead of relevant responses to provided prompts). Similarly, 54 more participants were removed for purposes of the sentiment analysis for not following directions when providing three words to describe the scenario. All participants were treated in accordance with the University of North Florida Institutional Review Board and the APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA, 2017).

Materials

Two scenarios were created to describe a potential instance of sexual harassment in the workplace. Scenario one was from the perspective of the reader (“You” scenario). The You scenario read as follows:

> You are sitting at your desk when suddenly your boss appears behind you. Your boss looks over your shoulder and comments on your work. Suddenly you feel your boss's hand on your lower back. Your back stiffens and you develop a concerned facial expression (e.g., furrowed eyebrows), yet your boss's hand remains low on your back for the remainder of the conversation. Once your boss is done talking to you, your boss returns to the boss's office.

After reading this vignette, participants were asked open-ended questions: (a) "Give a short summary of the event you just read. Who was involved? Where did it take place? What happened," and (b) "What three words would you use to describe the scenario?" They were then asked (c) "Was this sexual harassment?" with a *yes*/*no* answer format, and (d) "What was the gender of the boss?" with answer options of M*ale*, *Female*, *Not mentioned*, and C*annot recall*.

The second scenario was the "Friend" scenario. The Friend scenario read as follows:

> You are sitting at your desk and notice your boss suddenly appears behind one of your coworkers who is your friend. Your boss is looking over your friend's shoulder and appears to be talking to your friend about your friend's work. Suddenly your friend feels the boss's hand on your friend's lower back. You notice how your friend's back stiffens and your friend develops a concerned facial expression (e.g., furrowed eyebrows), yet the boss's hand remains low on your friend's back for the remainder of the conversation. Once your boss is done talking to your friend, your boss returns to the boss's office.

After reading this scenario, participants were asked to answer the same questions as those who read the You scenario. The only difference was participants who read the Friend scenario were

also asked “What was the gender of your friend?” with answer options of M*ale, Female, Not mentioned,* and C*annot recall.*

Procedure

As previously stated, participants had to read and electronically sign an informed consent document if they wished to participate in this study. If they agreed to continue, they were asked the open-ended question (a) “How old are you?” Participants were then asked (b) “What gender do you identify with?” with answer choices of *Male, Female, Nonbinary, Prefer not to say,* and O*ther,* and (c) “What is your ethnicity?” with answer choices of *White or Caucasian, Black or African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Middle Eastern, Hispanic/Latino,* and *Other*. They were then randomly assigned by the computer program to read one of two scenarios described previously. After reading their assigned scenario, they answered questions about friendship and protection.

Friendship and Protection

Participants completed Friendship Qualities Scale (FQS) consisting of 7 questions (Bukowski et al., 1994). Two sub-scales were utilized: (a) Help in the form of Aid (α = .73) and Protection (α = .80) and (b) Security in the form of Reliable Alliance (α = .80). These alphas were obtained from the original Bukowski et al. scale (1994). For purposes of this study, scores from the two sub-scales were combined to produce one index of friendship quality, the Revised Friendship Quality Scale (R-FQS) (α = .88). This scale was utilized to measure how protective participants were of their friend.

The original FQS was designed to measure children's perception of the quality of friendships. An example question from the original scale would be “My friend would stick up for me if

another kid was causing me trouble." In this study, the subjects and objects were switched and the wording was slightly changed so that it would read as "I would stick up for my friend if others were causing my friend trouble." Other example questions from this revised scale include, "If I saw a friend being bothered by others I would step in and help them (Protection)," "If my friend needed help I would provide it (Aid)," and "If my friend wants to tell me something they do not want to tell others I would let them (Reliable Alliance)." Questions were answered using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Scores could range from 7 to 35; higher scores were indicative of greater protectiveness towards friends.

Manipulation Check.

After answering the R-FQS, participants were asked questions about their scenario they had previously read. First was an open-ended question, "Give a short summary of the event you just read. Who was involved? Where did it take place? What happened?" This question acted as a manipulation check to ensure participants paid attention to and accurately describe what it was they had read. An example of a response worthy of being disqualified would be "a b c" or talking about the Corona Virus.

Self-Priming and Situational-Priming.

Second was another open-ended question, "What three words would you use to describe the scenario?" Using the R package AFINN, responses to this open-ended question were coded for the degree of positivity (+5) or negativity (-5) in the words that participants chose. This package assigned scores to each word. Spontaneous use of the words "sexual harassment" in response to this question were also examined. This variable was used to assess how word negativity is re-

lated to identifying sexual harassment. A 0 was assigned if there was no mention of sexual harassment and a 1 was assigned if there was such a mention. This question related to the idea of self-priming.

Third was, “Was this sexual harassment?” with a *yes* (1) or *no* (2) answer format. This question related to the idea of situational-priming.

Perceived Perpetrators and Victims.

Fourth was a multiple-choice question: “What was the gender of the boss?” Answer choices included *male, female, not mentioned,* and *cannot recall.* Fifth was another multiple-choice question: “What was the gender of your friend?” Answer choices included *male, female, not mentioned,* and *cannot recall.*

After taking their survey, participants read a debriefing explaining the nature of the study they had just completed and whom to contact if they experienced any distress from the reading.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1a contains the descriptive statistics for all of the categorical variables. While there were more male participants than female participants, a chi-square test for equal proportions was run, showing there was not a significant difference ($\chi^2(1, N = 426) = 1.35, p = 0.245$). There were also more participants in the friend condition than the self condition, but a chi-square test for equal proportions was run showing the difference was not significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 426) = 0.34, p = 0.561$).

Table 1b contains all of the univariate statistics for the continuous variables in the present study. There is no skewness or kurtosis in regard to total scores for friendship quality. However,

the distribution of scores for age was skewed to the right. As assessed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ($p > .001$), there were violations of normality in regard to age. There are several outliers (older participants) when it comes to age, but they were included for purposes of preliminary analyses.

As assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = .720$), there was homogeneity of variances for age and identifying sexual harassment. Because there were violations in the assumption of normality for age, Kendall's tau-b was run to test for a correlation between age and identifying sexual harassment. There was no association between age and identifying sexual harassment, $N = 424$, $\tau b = .01$, $p = .812$.

Table 1a

Descriptive Statistics for Categorical Variables

	Gender		Survey	
	Male	Female	Self	Friend
Frequency	225	201	207	219
Percent	52.8	47.2	48.6	51.4

Table 1b

Univariate Statistics for Continuous Variables

	Mean	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness	Range
Age	35.24	9.77	+1.09	+0.79	52.00
Friendship Score	29.49	4.28	-0.58	+0.17	21.00
Sentiment Value	-1.59	1.49	+6.56	+2.15	8.00

Main Analyses

Hypothesis 1: Affect and Identifying Sexual Harassment

A binomial logistic regression was run to analyze the effects of word negativity on identifying sexual harassment. Results were significant ($\chi^2(525, N = 527) = 664.90$, $p < .001$) indicating support for the first hypothesis. For every one unit of increase in word negativity, the odds of someone identifying the event as sexual harassment increased by .408. There is skewness and kurtosis for scores on the measure of affect, so results should be interpreted with discretion.

Hypothesis 2: Priming and Identifying Sexual Harassment

A 2-sample chi-square test with Yates' continuity correction was run to analyze whether participants were more likely to label the event as sexual harassment after priming. This was when participants were directly asked if what they read was sexual harassment. Results were significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 424) = 14.39$, $p < .001$), indicating possible support for the second hypothesis. Of those who did identify the event as sexual harassment after priming, participants were less likely to label the event as so before priming (12%) and more likely to label the event as so after priming (88%) ($\chi^2(1, N = 280) = 163.56$, $p < .001$). In other words, they did not consider the event as sexual harassment until after they were asked if it was sexual harassment. Of those who did not identify the information as sexual harassment after priming, participants were more likely to have not labeled the event as sexual harassment before priming (99%) and less likely to label the event as sexual harassment before priming (1%) ($\chi^2(1, N = 144) = 140.03$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 3: Role and Identifying Sexual Harassment

A 2-sample chi-square test with Yates' continuity correction was run to analyze whether participants would be more likely to identify their event as sexual harassment when it was de-

scribed as occurring to a friend and less likely when it was described as occurring to themselves. Results were not significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 425) = 0.43, p = 0.510$), indicating that the third hypothesis was not supported.

To follow up, a chi-square test for equal proportions was run. Regardless of what scenario was read, participants were significantly more likely to identify what was read as sexual harassment ($\chi^2(1, N = 425) = 42.88, p < .001$). That is, 65.88% identified the event as sexual harassment and 34.12% did not identify it as sexual harassment. When the individual in the scenario was portrayed as a friend, participants were more likely to label a boss's behavior as sexual harassment (64%) than not (36%), $\chi^2(1, N = 206) = 16.33, p < .001$). Participants were also more likely to label a boss's behavior as a sexual harassment (68%) than not (32%) when they were the individual in the scenario, $\chi^2(1, N = 219) = 27.07, p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4: Gender and Identifying Sexual Harassment

A 2-sample chi-square test with Yates' continuity correction was run to analyze whether females were more likely than males to identify sexual harassment. Results were significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 425) = 10.85, p < .001$), indicating possible support for the fourth hypothesis. To examine sex differences in the identification of events as sexual harassment, a follow-up chi-square test of equal proportions was conducted. Of those who identified the event as sexual harassment, 47% were male and 53% were female. That is, participants who identified the event as sexual harassment were no more likely to be male than female ($\chi^2(1, N = 280) = 1.16, p = .282$). Of those who did not identify the event as sexual harassment, 64% were male and 36% were female. That is, participants who did not identify the event as sexual harassment were more likely to be male compared to female ($\chi^2(1, N = 145) = 11.59, p < .001$).

Hypothesis 5: Assigning Pronouns

A chi-square for equal proportions was run to analyze whether participants more often assigned male pronouns to the harasser (boss) and female pronouns to the person being harassed (coworker). Both tests involve only those who had labeled the boss and coworker as *Male* or *Female*. Those who labeled the boss or coworker as *Not mentioned* or *Cannot recall* were excluded from all tests (Boss: $n = 219$, Coworker: $n = 108$).

There were significant differences in the pronouns assigned to the boss. ($\chi^2(1, N = 219) = 164.09$, $p < .001$), with 94% ($n = 205$) of participants identifying the boss as male and 6% ($n = 14$) of participants identifying the boss as female. There were significant differences in the pronouns assigned to the coworker ($\chi^2(1, N = 108) = 31.15$, $p < .001$), with 23% ($n = 25$) of participants identifying the coworker as male and 77% ($n = 83$) of participants identifying the coworker as female. Taken together, the results of these two analyses provide support for the fifth hypothesis that male pronouns would be used for the harasser and female pronouns would be used for the target.

Hypothesis 6: Friendship and Identifying Sexual Harassment

A binomial logistic regression was run to analyze whether those who scored high on friendship quality were more likely to label the event as sexual harassment compared to those who scored low on friendship quality. Results were significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 425) = 7.83$, $p = .005$) indicating possible support for the sixth hypothesis. Consistent with predictions, for every one unit of increase in friendship quality, the odds of someone labeling an event as sexual harassment increased by .067.

Exploratory Analyses

A logistic regression was run to analyze the relationship between friendship quality and identifying sexual harassment by role. Of those who took the survey from the perspective of the target, participants were significantly more likely to identity the event as sexual harassment when friendship scores were higher ($\chi^2(1, N = 206) = 6.63, p = .010$). For every one unit of increase in friendship quality, the odds of someone labeling the event as sexual harassment increased by .087. Of those who took the survey from the perspective of a bystander, participants were not significantly more likely to identify the event as sexual harassment when friendship scores were higher ($\chi^2(1, N = 219) = 1.95, p = .162$). For every one unit of increase in friendship quality, the odds of someone labeling the event as sexual harassment only increased by .048.

Discussion

Summary and Interpretation of the Results

In this investigation, six questions concerning the identification of sexual harassment were addressed. The relationship between the affective nature of the words to describe an event and a tendency to label that event is sexual harassment was addressed as the first research question (i.e., self-priming). It was hypothesized that participants would label an event as sexual harassment if strong negative words were used to describe the event and the results supported this. The stronger the word negativity, the more likely participants were to label an event as sexual harassment. Results are consistent with previous research. Past research has found that the mood someone is in affects how information is encoded. If someone is in a negative mood, they interpret actions negatively (Forgas, 2008). For example, a wave might be perceived as being friendly if someone is in a positive mood but that same wave can be perceived as uncomfortable if someone is in a negative mood.

There was extreme kurtosis and skewness in regard to affect. This is expected though, as most participants used negative words when talking about the event that was read. Skewness and kurtosis are both used to examine the normal distribution of the data. Having data that departs from normality can affect the confidence and reliability of analyses that are run (DeCarlo, 1997).

How priming affects the labeling of an event as sexual harassment was addressed as the second research question (i.e., situational-priming). In accordance with what was hypothesized, participants were more likely to label an event that was read as sexual harassment after they were asked if an event was sexual harassment rather than before they were asked if an event was sexual harassment. Results are consistent with previous research done by Jaschik and Fretz (1991). It is worth noting that there was one participant who labeled the event as sexual harassment before priming but later said it was not sexual harassment after priming. This answer change could have been done in error.

The effect of what role someone plays (target or bystander) in an event has on identifying that same event as sexual harassment was examined as the third research question. Contrary to what was hypothesized, participants were no more likely to identify an event as sexual harassment when the event was described as happening to themselves compared to when it was described as happening to a friend. Participants were more likely to identify the event as sexual harassment than not identify it as sexual harassment. Results were not supported by previous research, contradicting optimism bias (Caponecchia, 2010). A possible explanation for these results could be the self-referencing effect. This is when people process information in relation to themselves (Rogers et al., 1977). If people consider an act as sexual harassment when it occurs to

themselves, they would then use themselves as a reference and label it as sexual harassment when it occurs to others.

The relationship between gender and labeling an event as sexual harassment was examined as the fourth research question. Results partially supported this hypothesis, with female participants being more likely than male participants to label an event as sexual harassment. Of those who did labeled the event as sexual harassment, there was no difference between males and females. Of those who did not label the event as sexual harassment, participants were more likely to be male than female. Some research has shown that there is no gender difference when it comes to reporting hostile environment sexual harassment (Foster & Fullagar, 2018). The scenario that participants read could be considered hostile environment sexual harassment and this could explain why there was no gender difference for those who reported.

The assignment of pronouns to the harasser (boss) and the target (friend) in an event were looked at as the fifth research question. Past research has shown that women are more often targets of sexual harassment and that men are more often perpetrators of sexual harassment (Gibson et al., 2016; USMSPB, 1995). The majority of the participants correctly remembered that the genders for the boss and friend were not mentioned, so these participants were excluded from the analyses. Of those who assigned genders, participants were more likely to label the boss as a male and the friend as a female. Those results supported what was hypothesized and were consistent with previous research (Gibson et al., 2016; USMSPB, 1995).

How friendship affects the labeling of sexual harassment was addressed as the sixth research question. This question was based on the notion of good quality friendships acting as protection against victimization and bullying (Kendrick et al., 2012). Results supported the hypothe-

sis that participants would be more likely to label an event as sexual if they had higher friendship quality. Results were consistent with past research done by Kendrick and colleagues (2012).

When follow up analyses were conducted, it was found that friendship quality only mattered when the event was described as happening to the participant. If participants had higher friendship quality, they were more likely to label the event as sexual harassment than not. Friendship quality did not matter when the event was described as happening to a friend. An explanation for these results could be a link between proximity to friends and positive affect. When people are around their friends, they report being in positive moods (Hudson et al., 2020). As mentioned previously, positive moods can lead to people interpreting interactions in a motive way (Forgas, 2008). Being in close proximity to their friend could have put participants in a positive mood and lead to them interpreting the events as a friendly interaction.

Applications and Implications

It is worth noting that, as a whole, participants were more likely to identify the event in the vignette as sexual harassment than not. Based off of these results, people seem to label sexual harassment. This finding begs the question, if people know what sexual harassment is, why is it still so wide-spread? Only 5-30% of those who experience sexual harassment formally report their encounter (McDonald, 2012). One reason why sexual harassment is going unreported is repercussions. As previously stated, women who label an event as sexual harassment can be seen as unfeminine and untrustworthy (Marin & Guadagno, 1999). Around half of those who report their sexually harassing events said that their situations improved slightly and 33% said that their situations worsened after reporting (Pina & Gannon, 2012).

When an individual experiences sexual harassment in the workplace, they can experience several negative consequences that affect both themselves and their organization. Some of these consequences include decreased satisfaction with their supervisors and work, withdrawing from work, mental and physical illness, lowered life satisfaction, and disengagement (Foster & Fullagar, 2018). It is important for organizations to create an environment where employees can feel like they will be protected when reporting sexual harassment. If someone reports an event and subsequently experience more sexual harassment, others will see this and not want to come forward about their own experiences.

Limitations

One limitation would be a lack of variation in the severity of the behaviors described in the vignettes. Both of the scenarios are relatively mild and participants were still more likely to identify the event as sexual harassment than not identify it as sexual harassment. Having variation in severity could have led to more variation in responses.

Another possible limitation is a mono-operation bias in regard to quality of friend. Only one type of scale was used to gauge the quality of friend participants were. It would be better if there were multiple ways it was being tested, as only having one operation could underrepresent the construct of friendship and be a threat to construct validity (Shadish et al., 2002). Another limitation in regard to this scale was the modifications made to the scale that was used. The Friendship Qualities Scale (Bukowski et al., 1994) was originally designed to measure the friendship quality of adolescents rather than how good of a friend a person might be. To accommodate the purpose of the present study (i.e., assessing friendship competence), subtle

changes in wording had to be made to the original items in the affirmation scale. These changes in wording might have undermined the validity of the scale.

Average responses for each R-FQS questions were above the mean, possibly because of social desirability. Participants might have felt pressured to present themselves as a good person and not answered truthfully. There was also no reverse scoring (e.g., I would help vs. I would *not* help), making it difficult to screen for participants not answering the questions properly. The absence of negatively worded items opens the door to acquiescence as a response set which, in turn, undermines the validity of any measure. Acquiescence is when participants agree to questions regardless of what is being asked and careless responding is when participants pay little to no attention to the questions being asked (Kam & Meyer, 2015). With a lack of negatively worded questions, it is hard to know if participants truly read the questions or if they agreed to all of the questions without paying attention.

Simulation is another limitation in the present study. Participants are reporting on how they think they would label an event without actually experiencing it. They might also be responding in socially desirable ways and were responding in ways they thought would make the look good (Morling, 2012). Participants might provide different responses if they had experienced an event like what was read instead of only reading about it. Observational research can provide information that simulations cannot, because people do not always report how they actually feel (Morling, 2012).

Future Directions

Future studies should vary the provocativeness of the vignettes that are being read. Participants had variation in the target of the event, but the event stayed the same. In follow up studies,

vignettes should vary on the participants' roles in the event and how severe the encounters are. An example would be having one event where bosses tells an employee/participant that they like their shirt and another where bosses tells an employee/participant that they would like them better without their shirt on. Both events are similar in the fact that the clothing of the target is being commented on but they are different in how provocative the conversation goes.

Future research should also use a different scale when looking at friendship. The scale that was used in this study was originally designed with the purpose of measuring how good of a friend a school aged child thought their friend was. Finding a scale, or creating one, with the purpose of measuring how good of a friend someone thought they were would most likely work better in the future. Additionally, multiple scales should be used as well in testing friendship in order to avoid mono method bias.

To account for the self-report nature of the study, other avenues can be explored in the future. One example would be Implicit Attitude Test (IAT). This test is used to look at unconscious associations between how "good" or "bad" a topic is perceived to be while bypassing social desirability. IAT can also reveal attitudes that participants are not consciously aware of (Cunningham et al., 2001). Another option would be using confederates to act out events in front of participants. This would allow researchers to see how participants would act in the heat of the moment.

Age is a variable that should be looked at in the future. Past research has shown that younger people are less likely to label sexual harassment than those who are older (Blackstone et al., 2014). Women between the ages of 45 and 54 are the most likely to report events of sexual

harassment (Gibson et al., 2016). Follow up studies should systematically sample age ranges to see how identification changes over time for both men and women.

As previously mentioned, women who label an encounter as sexual harassment are viewed as untrustworthy (Marin & Guadagno, 1999). Survivors might also fear that their encounter might not be serious enough to report to supervisors (Good & Cooper, 2016). Future research should also look at company policies on sexual harassment and how they affect reporting sexual harassment.

Culture should be examined in the future as well. Past research has found cultural differences with sexual harassment in how it is identified and dealt with (Wasti & Cortina, 2002). This experiment should be replicated in different cultures to see how they differ.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment is present in today's society, but underreported. This study focused on factors that contribute to identifying sexual harassment because if often goes unreported. Participants were more likely to identify sexual harassment if they were female, they had used strongly negative words to describe the event, they were quality friends, and if they were directly asked if the event that transpired was sexual harassment.

Findings supported most of the hypotheses. The only hypothesis not supported was participants being more likely to identify sexual harassment if the event occurred to their friend compared to themselves. Overall, participants were more likely to identify sexual harassment than not identify it.

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