THE WHYS AND HOWS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT: WHAT ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD BE DOING

Vicki J. Magley, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology
University of Connecticut
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DOMINANT METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: LARGE-SCALE EMPLOYEE SURVEYS

- Range of employee populations (e.g., university faculty & staff; government employees; military personnel; law enforcement; attorneys; clerical employees; factory workers)
- Both women and men
- High response rates: 65-85%
- Highly reliable & valid measures from the behavioral science literature
HOW DOES BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE DEFINE AND MEASURE SEXUAL HARASSMENT?
SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Psychological/behavioral science definition:
“behavior that derogates, demeans, or humiliates an individual based on that individual’s sex” (Berdahl, 2007)

- Gender Harassment: “disparaging conduct not intended to elicit sexual cooperation; rather, these are verbal, physical, and symbolic behaviors that convey hostile and offensive attitudes about” members of one gender (Konik & Cortina, 2008)
  - Sexist
  - Crude

- Unwanted Sexual Attention
- Sexual Coercion

“put-downs”

“come-ons”
SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXAMPLES: NARRATIVE DATA FROM FEMALE ATTORNEYS

- Unwanted Sexual Attention
  - “An attorney...kissed my neck, put his arms around me, and touched my thighs while we were working on a case together.”

- Gender Harassment (Sexist):
  - “missy,” “little girl,” “lawyerette,” “Little Miss Girl Lawyer”
  - “During a deposition, opposing counsel informed me that I had no case and if I weren’t a woman I would be smart enough to recognize that fact.”
BEHAVIORAL VS LEGAL PERSPECTIVES

**Psychological/behavioral conceptualization**

- Sexual Harassment
- Sexual Coercion
- Unwanted Sexual Attention
- Gender Harassment (Sexist & Crude)

**Legal conceptualization**

- Sex Discrimination (prohibited by Title VII of US Civil Rights Act)
- Equal pay, hiring, firing, etc.
- Sexual Harassment
- Quid Pro Quo (Sexual Coercion)
- Hostile Environment (Unwanted Sexual Attention & Gender Harassment)
SEXUAL HARASSMENT MEASUREMENT

- Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al.)
- Multiple items; behavioral; focus on recent past
- Nothing about “sexual harassment”
- “During the PAST YEAR, has anyone at your workplace...” (Response scale: 1 = “never” to 5 = “many times”)
  - Gender Harassment - Sexist: “referred to people of your gender in insulting or offensive terms”
  - Gender Harassment - Crude: “made offensive remarks about your appearance, body, or sexual activities”
  - Unwanted Sexual Attention: “made unwanted attempts to establish a romantic relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it”
  - Sexual Coercion: “implied faster promotions or better treatment if you were sexually cooperative”
HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT (AND ITS SUBTYPES)?
Percent of Women Facing At Least One Harassing Behavior in Past Year at Work

Mostly Male Settings

Percent of Sample

Women in Law Enforcement
Women in United States Military
Midwest University Women (Staff & Faculty)
Women Working for Fed Courts

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GENDER HARASSMENT: THE MOST COMMON

Women Attorneys
- 92% of victims
- 6% Gender Harassment
- 1.4% GH + Sexual Attention
- 8% GH + Sexual Attn + Sexl Coercion

Military Women
- 89% of victims
- 3% Gender Harassment
- 8% GH + Sexual Attention

“Victim” = had faced at least one harassing behavior
“Sexual coercion and unwanted sexual attention are traumatic for the people involved, and more likely to result in court cases and public reporting. However, in many work settings, these intense experiences are low-frequency events... The more frequent, less intense, and often unchallenged gender harassment, sexist discrimination, sexist organizational climate... [appear] at least as detrimental for women’s well-being. They should not be considered lesser forms of sexism.”

- Sojo et al. (2016)
WHAT ARE THE ANTECEDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO WORK AND WELL-BEING?
ANTECEDENTS & CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

So What?
UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE/CULTURE

Clime
- The observable habits that characterise life in an organisation.

Culture
- The values and beliefs that reflect the deeper foundations of the organisation.
SEXUAL HARASSMENT CLIMATE/CULTURE

- **Culture**
  - Deeply held values, beliefs reflecting foundations of org
  - Expressed, explicitly, in mission

- **Climate**
  - Observable, behavioral “habits” of the org
  - Aligned with mission
  - Based on employees’ observations
    - Risk
    - Seriousness
    - Action
CHANGING CLIMATE: SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING

- **Goals**
  - Educate
  - Alter attitudes
  - Stop SH

- **Reality**
  - Minimal research evaluating efficacy
  - When studied, not terribly effective
    - Knowledge change ... sometimes
    - Attitudinal change ... rarely
    - Behavioral change ... rarely
  - EXCEPT, within climates intolerant of SH and ethical climates, do see increased motivation to learn from training and increased change in knowledge and attitudes
WHAT TO DO ...

What to do?

- Look carefully at mission
  - Is employee well-being also acknowledged?
- Look carefully at employee distribution
  - Are women represented at all levels of org in parity?
- Review and routinely distribute policies
- Think about educational efforts
  - Are they genuine?
  - Are they supportive?
  - Are they guiding positive behavior?
- Keep working at it!
  - Culture change is slow...
  - Self-study helps!
WHAT NOT TO DO …

- Assume you fully understand what’s happening
  - Most SH goes unreported
  - So ... if you have any reports, that’s just the tip of the iceberg
  - Must conduct self-study to fully appreciate employees’ experiences
- Understaff HR
  - Speedy investigations are needed
- Allow for retaliation against whistle-blowers
  - Add policy
  - Feared retaliation #1 reason for under-reporting
  - Feared retaliation significant predictor of employee well-being markers
EFFECTS OF SH, REPORTING, RETALIATION & FEAR

Standardized betas allow examination of which predictors have a greater effect on the “outcome” variables.
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ADDITIONAL WHAT TO DO:
CONSIDER IMPORTANCE OF RESPECT?
THANK YOU ...

vicki.magley@uconn.edu