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ANTECEDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY CUSTOMERS:
A NEW APPROACH

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Abstract

ANTECEDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY CUSTOMERS: A NEW
APPROACH

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Existing literature concerning sexual harassment has been incomplete in its consideration of employees' experiences of harassment by third parties, such as customers or clients. Recent studies have demonstrated the need for an expansion of current research to include customers as perpetrators of harassment. The author investigates this unique form of harassment from a new approach, determining whether the service pressure climate an organization establishes in order to garner customer loyalty and profitability predicts sexually harassing behaviors from customers. The author similarly investigates whether customer sexual harassment is more likely due to the relative power imbalance between the customer and employee or other factors such as customer accountability or the mitigating presence of sexual harassment policies. The author concludes with a discussion of the importance of the current research findings. Limitations of the current study are presented as well as suggestions for future research and implications for human resource professionals.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	iv
List of Tables	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
A Changing Environment	1
Need for Research.....	3
Chapter II: Literature Review and Hypotheses.....	7
Sexual Harassment from a Legal Perspective	7
Sexual Harassment from a Psychological Perspective.....	11
Customer Sexual Harassment	14
<i>Safeway: A cautionary tale.</i>	18
Customer Power and Sexual Harassment	20
Service Pressure Climate, Customer Power, and Customer Sexual Harassment.....	24
Exploratory Questions.....	29
<i>Customer accountability</i>	29
<i>Sexual harassment policy.</i>	32
Chapter III: Method	35
Procedure	35
Participants.....	36
Measures	39
<i>Customer Power</i>	40
<i>Service pressure climate</i>	41
<i>Service Pressure Climate – O*Net Display Rules</i>	42
<i>Customer accountability.</i>	44
<i>Sexual harassment policy.</i>	45
<i>Customer gender ratio</i>	45
<i>Control Variables.</i>	46
<i>Open-Ended Questions</i>	46
Chapter IV: Results.....	48
Factor Analyses.....	48
Data Screening and Descriptive Statistics.....	48
Test of Hypotheses.....	51
Test of Exploratory Variables	55
Chapter V: Discussion	58

<i>Customer perceived power not significantly related to customer sexual harassment.....</i>	59
<i>Customer perceived power is higher for females than males.....</i>	60
<i>Display Rules and the Central Focus on Customers are positively related to perceived customer power.....</i>	61
<i>Occupational-level Display Rules (O*Net) requirements are positively related to customer sexual harassment.....</i>	62
<i>Manager Customer Orientation for the Quality of the Service Interaction is negatively related to customer sexual harassment.....</i>	62
Limitations	63
Implications.....	64
Appendix A: Recruitment Email	68
Appendix B: Informed Consent	69
Appendix C: Survey Instructions.....	70
Appendix D: SEQ-C Survey Items	71
Appendix E: Customer Power Survey Items	72
Appendix F: Service Pressure Items	73
References	74

List of Figures

Figure 1: Graphical representation of Customer Power as a moderator of the relationship between Service Pressure Climate and Customer Sexual Harassment 34

List of Tables

Table 1: Frequency Table of Demographics..... 38

Table 2: Correlation. 50

Table 3: Sexual Harassment Policy Responses and Comments. 57

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Chapter I: Introduction

A Changing Environment

The United States is facing a dynamic shift from a manufacturing to a service sector working environment. This transition from factories and warehouses to store fronts and box retailers has defined an entire generation in terms of work expectations and career seeking. The former generation expected job security, comprehensive benefits, and an overall investment from their employer in their own well-being. The current generation is made up of high school and college students, recent graduates, and those newly introduced to the world of work. This generation has an entirely different set of expectations of their employers, such as competitive pay schemes and extreme mobility between jobs. Though some may believe the shift to higher mobility is a beneficial one because employees are no longer stuck in “dead end jobs” for decades at a time, the transition has also brought about some challenges and negatives as well.

Employees do not expect the same level of security from their employers and likewise, employers often treat employees as interchangeable, expendable components in their organization-machine. The entire relationship is much less connected and loyalty is not necessarily rewarded as it once was. Since employers view their machine components as expendable, they've adopted “service with a smile” marketing strategies by which employees are expected to serve the customer in a friendly, helpful, and gracious way during each and every interaction. These practices are meant to garner better bottom line profits for the organization. These practices also serve to mechanize the service relationship so that employees are even more exchangeable because they can be easily trained to conform.

Unfortunately, the mechanization of the service relationship and the removal of employee discretion seem to encourage customers to mistreat and abuse employees. No longer is there a sense of accountability on the part of the customer because they feel they are addressing a human being. Customers are smart enough to know that, even if they mistreat an employee, there is little to nothing the employee can do about it. The motto “the customer is always right” has become prevalent in so many workplaces that customers feel especially powerful such that they can treat the service employee in less than favorable ways.

An emerging issue in the news, such as the included Safeway example, includes instances when the customer takes it too far, actually making the employee feel harassed and unsafe in his or her own workplace. There are a variety of laws that mandate that an employee feel safe in his or her workplace; including provisions about safety equipment and ways certain procedures must be followed in order to maximize employee protection. But who, then, is accountable when the customers are the ones creating the unsafe environment? Subsequently, can or should the employer be held accountable for customer misconduct for having put the customer in the power position? Does the responsibility of managing customers’ actions fall on the organization, which relies solely on the business and satisfaction of customers to maintain profits, or on the employee who should throw aside organizational service requirements to stand up for himself or herself? These questions necessitate investigation because they lied at the heart of the service process.

The author intends to contribute to current research by not only illustrating the linkage between service pressure climate and instances of customer sexual harassment, but by explaining this relationship in terms of the customer’s relative power. The author will provide support for the notion that a customer service environment, one that focuses on customer satisfaction at all costs, predicts the customer’s feeling of power which in turn predicts the likelihood for sexual

harassment to occur from customers. The author will also explore other factors that contribute to customer power and customer sexual harassment such as the accountability of the customer as a function of the short-term or one-time service encounter versus the long-term, service relationship. Similarly, the author will explore the prevalence of perceptions of organizational support (i.e. sexual harassment policies in an employee handbook) in relation to customer sexual harassment.

It is the author's intent to test the prevalence of customer sexual harassment in response to service pressure environments in both workplaces which might be typically viewed as higher in general harassment and mistreatment (i.e. restaurant staff, bartenders) as well as those which would not be considered sexualized (i.e. teaching, legal professions). Previous research on customer sexual harassment has targeted specific work environments whereas the author is interested in trends across all service jobs. A comparison between those jobs typically regarded as "service with a smile" environments and those without will provide a baseline for consideration of the implications of service procedures.

The current research is based on a survey of customer service employees in varying job titles and industries. The results provide an understanding of the relationship between these variables as well as encourage human resource, organizational, and legal professionals to take a closer look at the practices which they rely on for profits. In the future, the author hopes that the legal standards surrounding third party harassment will become less muddled so that employees can truly feel safe in their own workplaces.

Need for Research

Over the last few decades, great progress has been made in terms of perceived equality between the sexes. Though women are presented with seemingly identical opportunities, it is often the case that women suffer many additional hurdles in the workplace during their continual pursuit of workplace success. Some of these hurdles include, but are not limited to: gender discrimination, including pay differentials or glass ceilings, unwanted sexual attention, or even sexually coercive behaviors by superiors, coworkers, or customers (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Morganson & Major, 2008).

The existence and familiarity of these sexually discriminatory behaviors, which endure long after the implementation of federal protection from discrimination on the basis of sex, is the most important issue this generation of business professionals will face moving forward. The responsibility of preventing, managing, and correcting sexually discriminatory behavior falls to the individuals who are typically at the forefront of all workplace conflict issues: the human resource managers. The author contends that it is the human resource manager, the heart and glue of each organization, who must play the greatest role in minimizing the prevalence and impact of sexually discriminatory behaviors, both from inside and outside an organization.

Not only must human resource professionals focus on preventing harassment, researchers must also play a role. They must provide strong evidence supporting the predictors and outcomes of sexual harassment, both from those within the organization and those without, in order to facilitate the creation of organizational policies to prevent these detrimental behaviors. Following this line of thought, researchers have identified sexual harassment (SH) as a serious workplace issue which requires a greater amount of attention (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). Over the past few decades, sexual harassment has become the focus of a vast array of research.

Research has characterized sexual harassment as a harmful workplace stressor which has been linked to numerous negative job- and psychological-related outcomes (Fitzgerald et al, 1997; Fitzgerald, Hulin & Drasgow, 1995), such as decreased job satisfaction (Morganson, 2008) and lower levels of organizational commitment and diminished workgroup productivity (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Numerous meta-analyses have tracked the progression of this topic ranging from a comprehensive overview of literature since 1995 (O’Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Arens Bates & Lean, 2009) to several meta-analyses focused on current research related to antecedents, consequences, and organizational climate factors which exacerbate customer aggression and sexual harassment (Yagil, 2008; Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007; Rotundo, Nguyen & Sackett, 2001; Chan, Lam, Chow & Cheung, 2008).

Yagil (2008) provides a comprehensive view of incidence rates of sexual harassment, demonstrating that anywhere between 67% (Hughes & Tadic, 1998) to 100% (Folgero & Fjeldstad, 1995) of female respondents have experienced sexually harassing behaviors at some point throughout their career though not all result in formally reported SH claims. To put this in perspective, in 2009 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 12,696 sexual harassment charges which amounted to \$51.5 million dollars in monetary benefits allocated to victims (see E.E.O.C., 2009). Researchers have demonstrated that the negative consequences of sexual harassment are evident at all socioeconomic and education levels, and across cultures, countries, age groups, and careers (Gelfand, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 1995). Since sexual harassment is prevalent, appears to touch the lives of the majority of women, and is as financially costly to organizations as it is emotionally costly to employees, it is important to address what has been done to study this topic and gaps in the research that necessitate attention.

Though research on sexual harassment has become more vast especially since the allegations aimed at Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in the early 90's (Lacayo, 1991), the bulk of research and discourse has focused almost entirely on instances originating from within the organization, also known as *intraorganizational harassment* (Fitzgerald, 2003). However, recent studies have highlighted significant evidence that sexual harassment does not originate solely from within the organization (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Morganson & Major, 2008; Morganson, 2008). Gettman and Gelfand (2007) demonstrated the significant negative overall impact customer (i.e. third party) sexual harassment has on an employee, above and beyond that which is accounted for by intraorganizational harassment. Similarly, Gettman and Gelfand (2007) illustrated several antecedents or predictors of sexual harassment from customers or clients which are distinct from those predicting intraorganizational harassment, which includes service pressure climate, accountability, and customer power.

To further assist the rapid expansion of this new facet of research, the author will define sexual harassment, by legal and research standards, and detail the various ways researchers have addressed sexual harassment in the past. The author will illuminate the recent progress made by authors who have addressed the expanding issue of customer sexual harassment (CSH). It is the intent of the author to further develop the previously recognized antecedents included in the Customer Sexual Harassment model (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). Specifically, the author will demonstrate that researchers should consider the service pressure climate (i.e. customer focus, display rules) as one of the most important predictors of customer sexual harassment. Relevant organizational, human resource management and future research implications are discussed with an emphasis on the importance of addressing the customer sexual harassment phenomenon in a more progressive way.

Chapter II: Literature Review and Hypotheses

Sexual harassment is an extremely complex phenomenon because of its very personal, emotional, and damaging nature. Thus, it is important to understand it from multiple academic and social perspectives in order to fully comprehend the dangers that it poses for workers at all levels and in all sectors of the working world. The author will first discuss sexual harassment from a legal perspective, examining the way in which legislation has traditionally dealt with the highly complicated, subjective experience of sexual harassment from both those within the organization as well as from third parties. The author highlights the legal framework which has been paralleled by researchers, providing a unique bridge between the legal and the psychological analysis of the experiences and characterization of sexual harassment.

Then, the author will discuss how researchers have systematically studied and operationalized this subjective topic in order to more consistently study what predicts, exacerbates, and occurs when an individual experiences sexual harassment. And finally, the author zeroes in on the unique experience of sexual harassment from customers in the context of several important and arguably unique facets of this type of harassment, including both customer power and service pressure climate. Finally, the author expands current perceptions of customer sexual harassment with a discussion of exploratory research including customer accountability and the mitigating effect of sexual harassment policies.

Sexual Harassment from a Legal Perspective

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, sexual harassment is defined as follows:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or 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 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 [29 C.F.R. § 1604.11 (a).] (Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1999; Browne, 2006).

Workplace sexual harassment is prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

But not all sexual acts in the workplace constitute harassment; for example, dating and "workplace romance" (Pierce & Aguinas, 2003). Thus, a distinction must be made - only *unwelcome* sexual conduct that is made a term or condition of employment constitutes a violation of this legislation. The conduct must explicitly or implicitly affect an individual's employment, unreasonably interfere with an individual's work performance, or create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment [29 C.F.R. § 1604.11 (a)]. The language of the legislation itself creates an immediate gray area because there must be an obvious linkage between sexual harassment and employee's work performance or work outcomes. But what is important to note is that protection from sexual harassment *is* legally mandated and vigorously enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The law specifically recognizes that within the framework of sexual harassment there are two separate categories in which harassing behavior can be identified. The first type is "quid pro quo" harassment which is what individuals may generally think of when they hear the term sexual harassment. This type of harassment, according to Browne (2006), "involves a claim that an employee was required to submit to sexual advances as a condition of either obtaining a benefit, such as being promoted, or avoiding a burden, such as being fired" (p.146). For the general population, this is the type of harassment of which there is the most recognition but it is also the *least* common form manifested (Fitzgerald et al, 1997).

The second type of sexual harassment is “hostile work environment” or just “hostile environment”. According to Browne (2006), hostile work environment “involves a claim that the work environment is permeated with sexuality or ‘discriminatory intimidation, ridicule, and insult’ ” (see *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, 1986 for a review of necessary legal elements) (p.146). This type of sexual harassment is most often manifested in the form of gender harassment or gender discrimination, but may also exist as many other more subtle forms of sexist or sexually motivated behaviors. Hostile environment harassment is often more difficult to outright recognize and thus more difficult to report effectively. In fact, Morganson (2008) noted that research has often taken notice of the discrepancy between the experience and appraisal of what are technically defined as sexually harassing behaviors and the report of these actions as “sexual harassment” (Cortina et al., 1998; Magley et al., 1999). Little is known about the cause of this discrepancy and thus, it is one very important area for future researchers to explore.

Similarly, the legal difficulty in recognizing this type of harassment lies not with the appraisal of the situation but within the very framework of the EEOC guidelines. Typically, the guideline for whether or not an instance constitutes sexual harassment is whether the sexual behavior is *unwelcome* and whether it is severe or pervasive. Historically, this has proven extremely complicated because of differing tolerances for certain behaviors (and hence, the different notion of what counts as harassing behavior) (Stockdale, 1993). For example, men and women may have very different perceptions of what constitutes a sexually harassing behavior due to their differing perceptions of what is friendliness and where the line is crossed (Stockdale, 1993). Similarly, some jobs may be more inherently sexualized or gender stereotyped which might reduce the saliency of harassment because it is commonplace (Gutek, 1985). For many types of discrimination, the court typically adapts a “reasonable person” standard for offensive

behavior, such that it is considered discriminatory if a reasonable person would deem it so. However, in the case of sexual harassment, courts have adopted the “reasonable woman” standard to offset gender differences in reactions and perceptions of sexual harassment (Stockdale, 1993). (See *Rabidue v. Osceola Refining Co.* [805 F.2d 611 (6th Cir. 1986)]).

Sexual harassment is both a legal and psychological construct (Welsh, 1999) and thus, research takes an approach that parallels the legal standards. The main difference is that researchers generally focus on the frequency, likelihood, perceptions, antecedents, and outcomes of sexual harassment, rather than whether or not harassment has occurred and who should be held responsible (i.e. liability issues). One important note is that in cases of third party sexual harassment, unlike other types of sexual harassment, in order to hold an employer liable, the duty is on the employee to show that the employer knew or should have known about the harassment but that they did little or nothing to rectify the situation.

Researchers are also interested in how the sexual harassment affects individuals, perpetrators, and the organization as a whole and whether interventions make it less likely or less detrimental. Researchers are interested in the human impact of sexual harassment whereas the judicial system has typically tried to avoid incorporating these human elements into the legislation. In fact, according to *Harris v. Forklift Systems*, the courts declared that the psychological well being of a plaintiff need not be seriously affected in order for the plaintiff to demonstrate that an injury has been suffered in violation of Title VII. They removed the necessity of proving psychological trauma to facilitate an unbiased, objective regulation.

Similarly, O’Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Arens Bates and Lean (2009) suggest that from an empirical standpoint, specific sex related behaviors are considered sexual harassment regardless of whether they are appraised as such, cause psychological discomfort to targets, or

are illegal. Thus, we see that the goals of the legal system and researchers are different; however, the classification of sexually harassing behaviors is actually quite similar. It is the author's belief that the psychological research is the essential foundation upon which future legislation, human resource policy, and organizational directives must be built. Employee well-being is and should always remain important regardless of the legal costs involved. Legislation can only be effective if it accurately describes and prohibits a behavior in all manifestations without exception.

Sexual Harassment from a Psychological Perspective

Research has thoroughly developed the framework for identifying the antecedents of sexual harassment from those within the organization. They have found support for several predictors of intraorganizational sexual harassment, including job gender context and organizational tolerance for sexual harassment. In fact, Fitzgerald and her colleagues have standardized the measurement of the experiences of sexual harassment in order to create consistency in the measurement of this difficult and emotionally charged construct.

Fitzgerald et al. (1988) originally created the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) in an effort to refine the measurement of sexual harassment across studies. The SEQ is a self-reported behavioral frequency index which is composed of three subscales which parallel the legal guidelines. These subscales include the following: *gender harassment* which is comprised of symbolic behaviors that convey hostile, offensive and misogynistic attitudes based on sex (directly related to the notion of a hostile working environment), *unwanted sexual attention* which includes both verbal and nonverbal incidents such as sexual imposition, touching, or repeated requests for dates (related to the notion of a hostile environment as well as quid pro quo sexual harassment), and *sexual coercion* in which the target's job or rewards are contingent on

sexual cooperation (a manifestation of the quid pro quo or “this for that” sexual harassment) (Fitzgerald, Swan & Magley, 1997; Welsh, 1999).

Utilizing the standardized measure, researchers were able to perform a myriad of studies in order to determine those factors which predict and occur as a result of sexual harassment from peers, supervisors, and subordinates. Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand and Magley (1997) proposed the most widely used, integrated model of antecedents and consequences of sexual harassment. Their main focus was to provide a comprehensive representation of the antecedents and outcomes that had been predicted throughout literature. Their model included only two antecedents, organizational context (i.e. organizational climate) and job gender context. *Organizational climate* was described as a climate of perceived organizational tolerance for sexually harassing behaviors (Hulin et al., 1996). *Job gender context* refers to the perceived gendered nature of the workgroup. This might include the workplace gender ratio (Gutek, Cohen, & Konrad, 1990) and the nature of job duties and tasks (i.e. gender traditional or nontraditional) (Fitzgerald et al, 1997).

Fitzgerald et al. (1997) hypothesized that these two antecedents predicted the likelihood of sexual harassment of women by others within an organization. They tested their hypotheses through the administration of a questionnaire given to women in nontraditional occupations within a single utility company. For the purpose of testing whether organizational climate predicted sexual harassment, Fitzgerald et al. (1997) used the Organizational Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Inventory (OTSHI; Hulin, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 1996). This scale consists of six scenarios depicting gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion and asked participants to report their perceptions of the likelihood of organizational reactions if superiors and coworkers were to engage in these forms of harassment (Fitzgerald et al, 1997).

Fitzgerald et al (1997) found that there was a positive correlation coefficient for the relationship between Organizational Context and Sexual Harassment ($r = .44, p \leq .01$). This suggests that the more women feel their organization is tolerant of sexual harassment (i.e. complaints not taken seriously, risky to complain, perpetrators unlikely to be punished) the more likely they are to experience sexual harassment.

Several other researchers have also demonstrated that an organizational climate which is more tolerant of sexual behaviors and sexual harassment is a strong predictor of the occurrence of sexual harassment in both academic and private sector organizations (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman & Drasgow, 1999). Dekker and Barling (1998) also conducted a study of the variables which affect men's likelihood to sexually harass. They found that when male employees perceived that their organization was unwilling to deal seriously with sexual harassment complaints and to punish those found guilty of harassment (suggesting an organization that is fairly tolerant of harassing behavior); sexual harassment behaviors were more likely to occur (Dekker & Barling, 1998).

Willness et al. (2007) found, across 21 studies ($n = 50,509$), that perceptions of organizational tolerance were positively related to instances of sexual harassment ($r = .332, p \leq .05$). This, too, supports Fitzgerald et. al (1997) in providing further evidence for the importance of organizational climate factors which organizations can readily address and modify.

Consistent with their predictions, Fitzgerald et al (1997) found that there was a negative relationship between job gender context and sexual harassment ($r = -.21, p \leq .05$). This suggests that in a male-dominated workplace, women are more likely to experience sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al, 1997). Other researchers have also demonstrated the effect of a male-dominated workplace on sexual harassment, with those women working in traditionally male

dominated workplaces or those with more male coworkers or superiors being more likely to experience sexual harassment (Gutek, 1985; Sheffey & Tindale, 1992).

Willness, Steel and Lee (2007) performed a meta-analysis of the antecedents and outcomes of sexual harassment across studies. They found, across 13 studies ($n = 48,165$) that job gender context was negatively related to sexual harassment experiences ($r = -.192, p \leq .05$). This provides further evidence that job gender context plays a huge role in predicting the likelihood of sexual harassment within an organization. However, there is little the organization can do, short of an affirmative action plan focused on hiring more women, to redistribute the job gender context to a more balanced level.

Based on the vigorous research of Fitzgerald and her colleagues, as well as the numerous meta-analyses on this topic over the past decade, research has firmly established that job gender context and organizational climate are strong predictors of intraorganizational sexual harassment. Based on this supported framework of intraorganizational harassment, the focus of researchers has shifted to the unique predictors of sexual harassment from outsiders to the organization.

Customer Sexual Harassment

It is quite clear that employers have a legal (though somewhat ambiguous) and moral obligation to protect their employees from unwanted sexual harassment (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Morganson, 2008). Thus, this protection is not limited to protection from fellow workers - it also applies to third parties such as customers or clients. According to Yagil (2008), an employer may be liable for third party harassment when the specific job requirements create the possibility of exposing employees to instances of sexual harassment. Employers are considered negligent if they knew or should have known about the customer sexual harassment but did little or nothing to rectify the situation. Typically, employers fulfill their protection requirement in the

form of either preventative or corrective policies such as a sexual harassment grievance procedure or a clearly defined punishment for the violation of a sexual harassment policy found in an employee handbook or posted on an employee bulletin board (O'Leary-Kelly et al, 2009).

The first recorded sexual harassment case involving customers occurred in 1981 with *EEOC v. Sage Realty Corporation* (Boland, 2005). In this case, a female receptionist who was located in a lobby was subjected to a dress code which required her to wear a revealing uniform. She was sexually harassed by customers and other members of the public. After making complaints to the company, she was fired when she refused to continue to wear the mandatory uniform. This is a clear example of an employer-mandated service policy which had negative consequences for the employee (Boland, 2005). The courts sided with the plaintiff, awarding her back pay and substantial lawyer fees (*EEOC v. Sage Realty Corporation* [507 F.Supp. 599 (1981)]).

Another prominent case is *Lockard v. Pizza Hut, Inc.* in which an employee was fondled and harassed by male customers. After complaining to her boss, she was told to simply deal with the harassment and do her job. Again, the courts sided with the plaintiff, awarding her compensatory damages, legal fees, and other related costs (*Lockard v. Pizza Hut* [507 F.Supp. 599 (1981)]). Each of these cases represents a rare occasion in which an individual pursued the third party sexual harassment complaint through the court system and achieved success. More often, however, these cases are settled outside of court which reduces the courts' ability to have exposure to and to adopt a framework for recognizing and policing these third party issues.

Despite the legal protections, Morganson (2008) demonstrated that approximately 58% of the women studied, all of whom worked in customer service occupations, experienced customer

sexual harassment through at least one type of offensive behavior. Only 24% of study respondents actually correctly labeled their experiences as “sexual harassment” (Morganson, 2008). Yet 86% of study respondents reported being harassed by customers as compared to the 40-68% of respondents who reported being harassed by those within their organization (Morganson, 2008).

Though the legislation makes great strides to protect employees, especially females, from sexual harassment, it appears that state and federal laws are often unable to administer similar punishment for third party harassers as they would for intraorganizational harassers. Third parties are not subject to sexual harassment training within the workplace, nor do organizational policies typically apply to the customer realm (Morganson, 2008). The atypical position the customer holds places them in an ambiguous position where they are neither required through workplace norms to be civil to employees or to follow the same organizational rules nor are they required to continue interaction with the organization.

Since the legal definition of sexual harassment focuses on repeated or severely offensive behavior, it is important to provide a clarification as to how sexual harassment from the customer differs from sexual harassment perpetrated by those within an organization. Customer sexual harassment is different in several facets, including: the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, the organizational sanctions placed on for the perpetrator, and also the consequences for the employee (recall the EEOC definition whether submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment, submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or 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). Clearly, there is room for interpretation as to how the legal definition applies to customers. For example, little research has been done concerning what the organization can do to control the customer's actions and similarly, how often employees are reprimanded for poor performance which is actually a byproduct of customer sexual harassment.

Similarly, there is a strong argument for the type of customer sexual harassment which is more prevalent or more likely to occur. Previous research on intraorganizational harassment has demonstrated that there are low base rates for quid pro quo sexual harassment because of the extremity of these actions and a lack of formal reporting of such severe incidents because of fear or perhaps embarrassment (Fitzgerald et al, 1997). Typically, hostile work environments are more frequently reported (Fitzgerald et al, 1997). Thus, research can look at customer sexual harassment in two ways: the employee works in an environment in which sexual harassment occurs from customers on a frequent basis (i.e. the likelihood is very high, perhaps in more sexualized work environments but severity may vary) or the employee is exposed to severe or extreme instances of customer sexual harassment on a less frequent basis (i.e. the likelihood is low but the severity is high).

For the purpose of maintaining consistency within the research, the author intends to look at the predictors of the likelihood of sexually harassing behaviors, rather than the magnitude or severity of the behaviors themselves. Thus, no measure will be provided for the severity of the sexually motivated actions or the extent to which these actions had a negative impact upon the employee. Rather, the author will look at the range of behaviors experienced in conjunction with an intense service pressure climate. Though the researcher will not focus on it, the SEQ used by Fitzgerald et al (1997) and adapted by Gettman and Gelfand (2007) for the customer context

does include a variety of sexually motivated behaviors which encompass the varying levels of severity.

Gettman and Gelfand's (2007) model of antecedents and consequences of customer sexual harassment draws on the original model proposed by Fitzgerald et. al (1997), including customer gender context, customer power, accountability, and service pressure climate as predictors of sexual harassment. Similarly, they adjusted the model overall to reflect customer or client, rather than intraorganizational harassers. Only customer gender context and customer power were directly tested, though they did suggest future research focus on client accountability and service pressure climate as well.

Their pivotal research has paved the way for an entirely new focus on customer-employee interactions. More specifically, the author became interested in several facets of their model, including: the perceived customer power, service pressure climate, and accountability of customers as antecedents of customer sexual harassment. The author believes that the relationship between these variables might be explained in a different manner, such that perceived customer power is an outcome of the service pressure climate which is related to customer sexual harassment. Their research highlights the necessity of examining more closely the connections between an organization's customer service policy and the outcomes this has for their employees. This new direction in the research was precipitated by a real world example of these constructs in action.

Safeway: A cautionary tale. In the early 1990's, a California grocery store chain called Safeway implemented a new customer service policy for its front-line employees such as cashiers and clerks. The policy required the following from its employees: 1) employees must

smile and make eye contact with customers for at least three seconds; 2) employees must address customers directly by name if the customer pays by check or credit card; 3) employees must personally walk customers to a requested item location within the store; and 4) employees must offer to carry groceries out to a customer's vehicle if assistance is requested (Ream, 2000). The service policy, seemingly neutral on the surface, was meant to create an atmosphere of superior customer assistance and friendliness. Notably, the policy was not meant to establish friendships or relationships between employees and customers but simply to produce an overall "friendly" feel (Ream, 2000).

Employees were regulated by the use of "mystery shoppers" who were observers concealed as customers and dispersed randomly throughout locations. Employees who did not perform as expected or who received poor marks from the mystery shoppers were expected to attend a "smile school", which would teach them how to adhere to organizational policy. In other cases, employees were simply terminated for their poor performance and lack of adhesion to the friendly service policy (Ream, 2000).

Unfortunately, the impact of the service policy on employees was negative. In the first six months after the policy was implemented, sexual harassment claims involving customers increased significantly. Seemingly, customers had perceived the friendliness and the superior service as flirting or welcoming behavior just as research has demonstrated may occur (Stockdale, 1993). Female employees were asked to carry groceries out to males' vehicles late at night; they were pursued after work by persistent customers looking for attention; and some employees even reported having to hide in the break room at times to avoid customer stalking behavior (Ream, 2000; Deadrick & McAfee, 2001).

The unfortunate effects of the service policy also took a toll on male employees. When the eventual lawsuit was filed, several male employees joined with complaints that female customers assumed they were sexually interested based on their extra friendly service. The company settled the issue out of court and reverted to previous customer service initiatives. The Safeway case is only one of many examples of customer originated sexual harassment which was seemingly precipitated by customer service policies (Ream, 2000).

In the Safeway case, the implications of management's role in protecting employees came into question. The core issue of the lawsuit touched on an extremely confusing and unclear area in sexual harassment law – customer or third party harassment. In the law's negligent standard, management's responsibilities on the issue of third party harassment tend to be fairly vague in terms of limitations or guidelines. The law says that, based on the negligence standard, the employer is liable for customer sexual harassment if the employer knew or should have known about the behavior but did little or nothing to rectify the situation. This is considered a "duty of care" which is meant to be adaptable to many circumstances (Covington, 2009). Yet, the ambiguity surrounding the application of this standard creates a loophole through which many employers may misuse their employees who may not be aware of the legal retribution or protection available (Ream, 2000). Safeway demonstrates the need for further research on customer sexual harassment. If the company had a better understanding of the implications of their service policy, they may have altered or adjusted it and avoided the unnecessary legal and public relations costs. The question remains, however, how these service policies are related to customer sexual harassment – whether the relationship is direct or through some other construct.

Customer Power and Sexual Harassment

In much of the intraorganizational literature, sexual harassment is conceptualized as an outgrowth of power, whether organizational, personal, or social (MacKinnon, 1983; Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982). Indeed, research has demonstrated that victims are more likely to be targeted by harassers who are in a position of power and authority over them (Fitzgerald, Magley, & Drasgow, 1999). Similarly, it has been found that men who are likely to harass are more likely to do so in situations where they are in a position of power (Bargh & Raymond, 1995; Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). But typically, research has focused only on the hierarchical forms of organizational power demonstrated within an organizational structure (i.e. supervisors, coworkers, or subordinates). What is less clear is what happens when the power role is not so clearly defined, such as that of a customer-employee relationship.

One might argue, based on Emerson's (1962) concept of power in terms of the valuation of resources, that the employee is in a position of higher power because of their knowledge and possession of valued resources which the customer seeks (i.e. products or services). In fact, this has been indirectly supported through literature (Fine, Shepherd, and Josephs, 1994) but only in situations where the employee possesses some expertise and/or has some authority to dictate important terms of the business relationship such as that of a lawyer setting his or her own hourly rates and hours of business (Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1994).

However, it is typically unlikely that an employee in a modern service setting is in a position of authority to control certain aspects of business. Typically, knowledge, expertise, and authority come with more professional jobs such as those that require higher education and more years of training. True, the organization as a whole may possess valued resources which the customer seeks but the individual service employee typically does not retain exclusive rights to such resources. The ability for the customer to take his or her business elsewhere creates a

certain tension within the service interaction, such that the employee reacts favorably to appease and retain the customer (Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1994).

Thus, consistent with French and Raven's (1959) concept of power as the ability to reward or punish, we see that the customer is awarded the ability to do both (Morganson, 2008). The customer may reward the employee with a tip, a sale, or a positive customer evaluation. However, the customer may also punish the employee by removing his or her business, negating any tip or sales commission, or by providing negative customer feedback (Morganson, 2008; French & Raven, 1959; Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1994). According to the power dependence theory of social psychology, the more a person values resources controlled by another, the more dependent that person is and the less power he or she has in the relationship (Emerson, 1962). Thus, it can be argued that following the same logic, the customer assumes a position of power over the service employee, which he or she may then feel entitled to abuse such as exploiting or harassing workers (Fine, Shepherd, & Josephs, 1999; Morganson, 2008). This is consistent with Gettman & Gelfand's (2007) findings such that perceived customer power significantly predicted customer sexual harassment ($r = .38, p \leq .01$).

Perceived client power was conceptualized as a dependency relationship, where customers have power because of their control over outcomes important to the organization (i.e. their business) (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). This is consistent with previous research which suggests that sexual harassment is often an outgrowth of power (MacKinnon, 1983; Tangri, Burt & Johnson, 1982). Their conceptualization of customer power is also consistent with French & Raven (1959) notion that power is the ability to reward or punish. Previous research has found that customer coercive and reward power predicted levels of harassment by customers (Fine et al, 1999). Similarly, Gettman and Gelfand (2007) predicted that in situations when perceived

customer power was greater, the employees would more likely to experience customer sexual harassment.

Gettman and Gelfand (2007) found that among their robust sample ($n = 2,519$) of females from a large Mid-Atlantic grocery store, the percentage of male customers was positively related ($r = .14^*$, $p \leq .05$) to the likelihood of customer sexual harassment, consistent with previous research concerning workplace intraorganizational gender context. Gettman and Gelfand (2007) also found that client power was positively related ($r = .38$, $p \leq .01$) to the likelihood for customers to sexually harass. The evidence was conclusive that sexual harassment from customers is likely to occur and explains significant incremental validity in outcomes beyond intraorganizational harassment (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007).

In the current research, we seek to expand Gettman and Gelfand's (2007) findings with the administration of survey to service employees across job titles and industries. Thus, the author posits that customer power will be positively related to the likelihood for customers to sexually harass service employees.

Hypothesis 1: Customer perceived power is positively related to the likelihood for customers to sexually harass service employees.

Organizations sometimes intentionally create a situation in which the customer perceives that he or she has a great deal of power over how the service interaction occurs. This is done in order to facilitate a positive exchange and to foster continued patronage (Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1994). One way that organizations may communicate the customer's relative power is to emphasize that the customer is always right, and emphasizing that the employee must do anything he or she can in order to please the customer, regardless of the extremity of the customer's demands. In fact, it has been demonstrated by numerous studies that providing

“service with a smile” is found to increase customer intentions to return to the store (Tsai, 2001), customer satisfaction and service quality ratings (Barger & Grandey, 2006). Organizations are not blind to the potential profits and continued business gained by offering up their employees as servants for the customer’s needs.

Service Pressure Climate, Customer Power, and Customer Sexual Harassment

Though not all organizations follow the pattern, some major cutthroat organizations are characterized (and often portrayed in the media) for their unrelenting focus on the bottom line and their willingness to sacrifice employees’ well being in order to achieve impressive, unprecedented profits. This business approach has created the “expendable worker” concept which is confronted by the current generation of workers. Attention intensifies on customer focus and customer service as critical to the bottom line (i.e. gaining better profits). Since many businesses have seen great success utilizing this “service with a smile” and “customer is always right” mentality, the notion has rapidly spread to all corners of the service sector.

One strategy employers utilize to create the customer focused service environment is the employee’s emotions themselves. They seek to provide “service with a smile” that is consistent, friendly, and efficient. The organization may incorporate specific “display rules” into the job design, such as requiring smiling and thanking the customer as they leave the establishment, using a friendly vocal tone, or even maintaining a smile if customers act rudely (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001). In fact, it has been shown that these emotional display rules are associated with beneficial customer reactions through an emotional contagion effect (Barger & Grandey, 2006), such that an employee smiling at the customer may prompt the customer to return the smile and in turn, to feel more satisfied with the interaction as a whole. The motivation behind this is best explained in the following quote: “the relentless customer

orientation of many competitive firms makes it imperative for salespeople to act in a calculated manner which maintains the customer's relationship with the firm" (Fine, Shepherd & Josephs, 1999, p.21).

In fact, multiple authors noted this trend over thirty years ago, suggesting that in the service industry the focus of service providers is to deliver services to the public in a way that appeases the customer and promotes a willingness to repeat business or recommend to others (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). This distinction has been conceptualized in such a way that an organization that stresses a high service pressure climate (i.e. required display rules, customer is always right mentality) is a "customer-oriented" organization, with the alternative being an "internal-oriented" organization that focuses on profits, standardization, and efficiency (Singh, Verbeke & Rhoads, 1996). It is the author's belief that the customer orientation or customer focus of organizations heightens the perceived customer power by making a clear demonstration to both customer and employee that the customer is (and always will be) right.

Service pressure climate, an untested predictor, was operationalized as an organization "where a 'pleasing the customer at any cost' mentality is encouraged, supported, and rewarded" (Gettman and Gelfand, 2007, p.759). Based on this prediction, they posited that employees are vulnerable and have less power which would increase levels of customer sexual harassment. In fact, they also predicted that female employees are even more likely to be misunderstood by customers because of their smiling and friendly service (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; Stockdale, 1993). Thus, Gettman and Gelfand (2007) theorized that in an environment where "the customer is always right" mentality was encouraged to the extreme, it would be more likely for employees to experience customer sexual harassment. They did not test this dimension, but rather suggested that future research should differentiate between a climate that simply focuses on sales or

customer service and one that pressures the employee to serve the customer at all costs (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). They emphasized that, in general, each service organization has some type of practice for dealing with customers since this is the organization's goal. The author expands the expected relationship by defining service pressure climate.

Service pressure climate, for the purpose of the current research, can be defined along two dimensions: the customer focus of the organization (i.e. customer centrality) and the formalized methods for interacting with customers to ensure the desired environment (i.e. display rules, supervisor monitoring for quality). These two dimensions encompass the organization's attitude toward customers as a whole and attempts to utilize employees to create the desired service environment.

This operationalization is consistent with Schneider, White and Paul (1998) who describe customer centrality or *climate for service* as "the employee perceptions of the practices, procedures, and behaviors that get rewarded, supported, and expected with regard to customer service and customer service quality" (p. 151). This might encompass the organization's implementation of rewards for the number of customers an individual can help during a given day, the employer's implementation of training for all employees on how to successfully navigate customer relationships, or even punishment for employees who have a negative interaction with a customer (recall the "smile school" for Safeway employees who did not perform up to par).

An example of how these practices might be enforced through formalized methods includes the implementation of display rules. In an organizational context, "*display rules* are a key component of emotional labor jobs in which the employee is expected to 'produce an emotional state in another person' (e.g. through emotional displays) and management is allowed

‘through training and supervision to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees’ ” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 147; Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). Display rules may be commonly manifested in the form of “service with a smile” and other friendly service policies, such as Safeway’s “friendly service policy”, in order to provide a friendly, engaging experience for the customer.

Thus, organizations which include these display rules as a part of the job requirements (Diefendorff, Richard & Croyle, 2006) are essentially utilizing the emotions of the employee to achieve greater financial gains for the organization (Hochschild, 1983). Organizations are further encouraged to utilize these policies, regardless of negative impact on employees, because they provide results. This management of emotions is called “emotional labor” (Hochschild, 1983). The majority of the research contends that emotional labor, or the managing of emotions for a wage, has been linked to numerous negative employee outcomes, including burnout and task errors (i.e. decreased work efficiency or accuracy) (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Goldberg & Grandey, 2007).

Similarly, the requirement of display rules removes control and autonomy from the employee, who is left feeling powerless to protect himself or herself from customer abuse or harassment (Grandey et al., 2004). Preserving customer relationships does take priority over the victims’ feelings or well-being (Fineman, 2003, p. 173). Service pressure climate, though seemingly beneficial to the organizational bottom line, creates a power imbalance which makes the employee more vulnerable to customer abuse and harassment (Grandey et al., 2004; Grandey, Kern, Frone, 2007; Yagil, 2008).

Hypothesis 2: Service pressure climate, including customer focus and the formalized methods to ensure customer service such as display rules, positively relates to the customer's perceived power.

Recall that in the Safeway case, female employees filed charges with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission suggesting that the Safeway grocery store chain's requirement of display rules (i.e. mandatory smiling and use of customer names, as well as carrying customer groceries to their car and personally walking them to items) created a situation where customers misperceived the friendly behavior as flirtation (Stockdale, 1993) which resulted in significant increases in the harassment of employees (see Ream, 2000; Gettman & Gelfand, 2007) .

Gettman & Gelfand (2007) argued this same point which warranted the inclusion of "service pressure climate" in their original model of antecedents and consequences of customer sexual harassment. They suggested that, due to the centrality of the customer to the organizational bottom line and similarly, the importance of customer business to the success of the employee, it may be even more difficult for female employees specifically to seek refuge or report instances of sexual harassment (Morganson, 2008). In fact, Folgero and Fjeldstad (1995) noted that in some organizations, a refusal to "play along" with customer flirtations and harassment may be seen as counter to organizational goals and may actually be met with negative consequences within the organization, such as disapproval from peers and supervisors and potentially non-consideration for promotions or bonuses in the long term (Yagil, 2008).

Hypotheses 3a: Service pressure climate, including customer focus and the use of formalized methods to ensure customer service such as display rules, is positively related to the likelihood for customers to sexually harass.

Hypothesis 3b: The relationship of service pressure climate on sexual harassment from customers is partially mediated by customer power.

Exploratory Questions

In order to better understand the phenomenon of customer sexual harassment, the author sought other factors which may alter the relationship between service pressure climate, customer power, and customer sexual harassment. This relationship may not be explained through power alone, but rather the interpretation of that power by the individual and the perceived sanctions for misbehavior. Thus, the author also explored the concept of customer accountability and what role this may play in the strength of the relationship. Similarly, the author sought information concerning the existence, perceived effectiveness, and perceived sanctions related to sexual harassment policies and if any organizations' policies specifically addressed or provided training on how to deal with customers' sexually harassing behaviors.

Customer accountability. Gettman and Gelfand (2007) tested two predicted antecedents with the remaining two untested (service pressure climate and customer accountability). Customer accountability, an untested predictor, was conceptualized along two levels, including: 1) the visibility of the customer behavior to those within the organization such as the employer or perhaps other employees and 2) the norms of the organization that are tolerant of intraorganizational sexual harassment (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). Gettman and Gelfand (2007) predicted that customers would perceive "latitude to harass based on internal [organizational] norms for harassment" (p. 759) and as a result, levels of customer sexual harassment would be higher.

They conceptualized accountability according to the traditional framework of organizational tolerance (Fitzgerald et al, 1997) which was tested in intraorganizational sexual harassment literature. However, the author believes that accountability exists on two levels. The author believes that 1) the customer may not feel accountability toward the employee (or the organization) because they perceive that the organization is tolerant of sexually harassing behaviors, as is consistent with previous research on intraorganizational harassment (Fitzgerald et al, 1997; Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman & Drasgow, 1999). Similarly, 2) the customer may not feel accountability toward the employee because they perceive the anonymity of their identity will release them from future repercussions. This throws into sharp relief another important facet of the customer service interaction, which is the difference between a customer and a client (i.e. an encounter and a relationship).

According to Gutek et al. (1999) this is an essential distinction. Typically, clients would embody the concept of a *service relationship*. They would be considered those with whom the service provider has an extended interaction, over several visits or time frames. In fact, Gutek et al. (1999) related this to the concept of self-interest. Self-interest, according to Gutek, is when both parties expect to have future interactions of a similar nature or on similar occasions (Gutek et al, 1999). This might be typified by the interaction between a hair stylist and a client who has done business with them once-a-month for several years.

On the other hand, *service encounters* are those which constitute a one-time, anonymous interaction with no certainty of future contact (Gutek et al, 1999). This might be typified by a hair stylist at a walk-in salon that never has the same customer twice, though that customer may return and have an interaction with a different stylist. This is an important point; encounters do

not necessarily mean zero future contact with the organization (Gutek et al., 1999), but there is less self-interest in maintaining good relations with any one employee.

The goal of the current research is to address customer sexual harassment that occurs typically within a one-time encounter situation. This encounter-relationship distinction might be most easily exemplified within the organization itself. Coworkers and supervisors might constitute a form of relationship because they have vested interest in maintaining positive relationships with those with whom they will continue to have interactions. On the contrary, customers are typically one-time, limited encounters. Literature has shown that employees do indeed report a higher frequency of rudeness and verbal aggression from customers compared to members within the organization (Grandey et al, 2007), suggesting that there may be an important difference between service relationships and encounters, in terms of predicting customer sexual harassment.

The author posits that customer sexual harassment is more likely to occur within a one-time interaction where there is no intention of future contact. This is because there is a certain amount of anonymity associated with limited encounters. Accordingly, customers in an encounter situation may perceive less accountability due to anonymity which may remove inhibitions. This is consistent with Gettman and Gelfand (2007) predictions that accountability plays an important factor in predicting the likelihood for customer sexual harassment to occur. Customers may feel entitled or at least not inhibited and thus may act inappropriately toward the employee. This may be exacerbated because customers are not easily subjected to the same organizational rules, norms, and policies as internal organization members. Similarly, the nature of a service encounter often implies lower status for the employee who is highly regulated and

dependent upon customers. The current research seeks to understand whether accountability moderates the relationship between service pressure and customer sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment policy. Another factor, related to accountability and organizational service climate, is the organization's attempts at mitigating or correcting sexual harassment. Sexual harassment legislation only refers to the determination of employer liability with respect to damages or punishment once harassment has occurred. The legislation does not mandate sexual harassment policies nor regulate customer service initiatives. If protective policies do exist, they are typically preventative (i.e. sexual harassment training) or corrective policies (i.e. probation or docked pay) that the organization imposes on employees (O'Leary-Kelly et al, 2009). Though it is important for an employer to have a policy in place, it is just as important that employers investigate complaints immediately. These protective and corrective policies are not generally actively applied to customers because the customer is not a recognized part of the employment relationship. Thus, no training sessions or probation periods can easily exist for bad behavior.

There is still a strong case for having protective and corrective measures in place. Employers have the ability to protect employees from sexual harassment from coworkers, supervisors, and customers by consistently and vigorously implementing sexual harassment policies. Even if these policies may not visibly punish the perpetrator (in the case of customer sexual harassment); the existence of policy gives the employee an outlet for their experience and alerts the employer to a situation or possible trends.

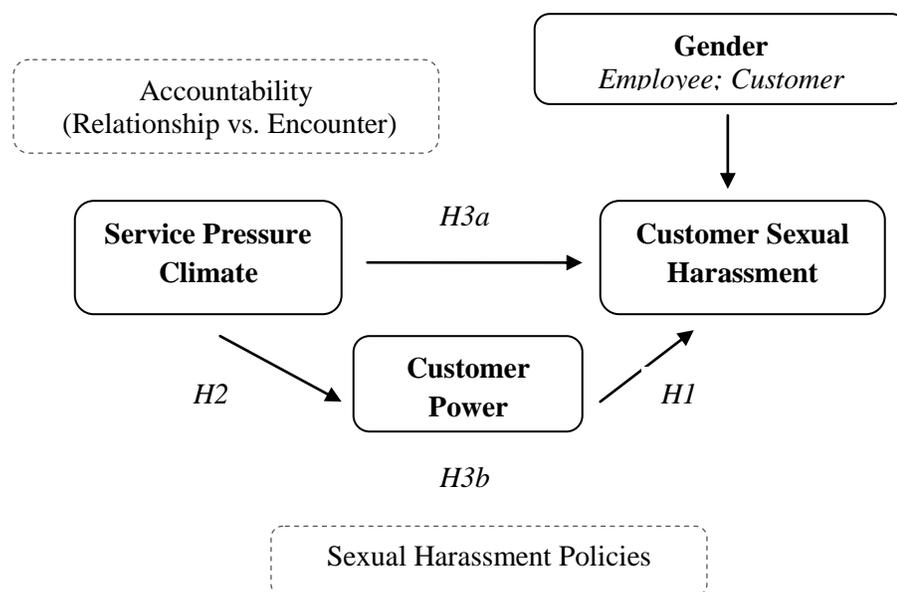
It is not illegal for an employer *not* to have a sexual harassment policy but it is strongly recommended that each employer have a policy in place as the first step to both protecting the

employee and the employer both (Walsh, 2010, p. 280). Similarly, it is important to note that existence of a policy is often not enough to create an affirmative defense for employer liability. The policy must be clearly communicated to the employees, vigorously and consistently enforced, and discussed with employees on a regular basis to ensure adequate understanding of the policy and how it can be utilized (Walsh, 2010, p. 281).

The employer must respond to reports of harassment in a prompt manner and in a way that reasonably corrects the issue. The circumstances are irrelevant as is the employers' beliefs about the truthfulness of the report; the employer still has a duty to investigate (Walsh, 2010, p. 282). Lindenberg and Reese (1996) note that, though it appears sexual harassment policies are more prominent in the workplace than they once were, many employees are still unclear about how the reporting procedure works. Similarly, it appears that the formal reports of sexual harassment are still low in comparison to self-report of sexual harassment (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). Similarly, many employees feel as though sexual harassment policies are there in order to protect the organization rather than the victims (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). There was also a great deal of uncertainty as to the actual effect the policy had on the formal reporting of sexual harassment as well as the outcomes for those who use the formal process (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). In 1998, *Farragher v. City of Boca Raton* [524 U.S. 775 (1998)] changed the legal procedure by giving employer a defense against harassment liability if the employer can demonstrate (in hostile environment claims) that: "(a) the employer exercised reasonable care to prevent and correct promptly any sexually harassing behavior, and (b) that the plaintiff employee unreasonably failed to take advantage of any preventive or corrective opportunities provided by the employer or to avoid harm otherwise (Covington, 2009, p.243).

Thus, it seems there are mixed reactions to the usefulness and existence of formal sexual harassment policies (Lindenberg & Reese, 1996). The current research hopes to gauge employees' perceptions of the existence, usefulness, and effectiveness of sexual harassment policies, as well as whether the policy applies to sexual harassment from customers. The author also hopes to learn what sanctions an employee believes can be placed on customers for misbehavior. For some who are harassed by customers, it might not even occur to use formal reporting procedures for these events because there can be no repercussions for the customer-perpetrator. This is an unknown area in the research literature and thus, is approached in an exploratory manner.

Figure 1. Graphical representation of Customer Power as a moderator of the relationship between Service Pressure Climate and Customer Sexual Harassment



Chapter III: Method

Procedure

The current research seeks to explore the relationship between service employees and their experiences of sexual harassment from customers. The author's substantial experience with college students suggests that this section of the population has a fairly high tendency to hold entry-level service jobs in a variety of industry sectors. Thus, the author sought to recruit a sample of undergraduate college students to complete the current survey as a baseline for future research measures.

A convenience sample of 202 male and female college students who are currently employed or recently employed within the last year, who worked more than 10 hours per week, and who have direct interactions with customers as part of their job were recruited to participate in the current study. Students were recruited from two undergraduate liberal arts classes at a large university in the northeastern United States. Participants were rewarded with extra credit by their professors for successful completion of the survey.

Participants were recruited by the researcher during class time and were forwarded the survey link via email (Recruitment email found in Appendix A). The recruitment email provided specific instructions as to how to complete the survey. Participation was completely voluntary. Only those students who were currently or recently employed, worked more than 10 hours per week, and who had direct contact with customers were included in the final data set. Individuals who did not meet the three criteria were provided an alternate assignment as deemed appropriate by the professor in order to receive extra credit.

The survey took between twenty and thirty minutes to complete. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that their professors would not have access to any of their answers. All participants had the option to allow their data to be released for research purposes or to be removed from the data set once their extra credit was awarded. The content of the survey (i.e. sexual harassment) was not explicitly described to recruits in verbal or written communication because the researcher did not want to bias their responses with the potentially emotionally charged subject matter (Fitzgerald et al, 1995). Therefore, students were told that the survey would gauge “negative customer interactions in order to learn more about interpersonal stressors”. To further avoid any potential response biases, the organization of the survey was done so that the customer sexual harassment items (SEQ-C) were listed toward the end and were gradually introduced by more neutral questions about general customer incivility (Kern & Grandey, 2007). All participation was voluntary and participants were able to leave the survey at any time or alternatively to simply provide “not applicable” for any questions they did not feel comfortable providing a response.

Participants

Approximately 137 students completed the survey overall, a 67.82% response rate. Of those 137, there were 107 (52.97% of the original population; 78.10% of the sample) participants who consented to the use of their responses for research purposes of whom 47 were male and 60 were female. Among those included in the final data set, 43 were currently employed and 64 were not currently employed but had been employed in the last year. Approximately 21 participants had worked 40 or more hours per week, 21 had worked between 30 and 39 hours per week, 48 had worked between 20 and 29 hours per week, and 17 had worked between 10 and 19 hours per week. All participants were between 18 and 29 years of age. Amongst the sample,

46.7% were between 18 and 20 years of age while 53.3% were between 21 and 29 years of age. Participants represented employees from 11 different states, including: California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. All respondents were undergraduate students with at least a high school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED). One respondent had previously completed an associate's degree and one respondent had previously completed a bachelor's degree. All other respondents reported some college but no degree (i.e. had not yet graduated or received their degree).

Respondents were primarily employed in the following categories (ranked in order of highest to lowest percentage): Food Services (i.e. hostess, server, bartender, cashier for food, coffee barista = 36.4%); Sales (i.e. retail, call center, marketing = 23.4%); Physical Services (i.e. housecleaning, landscaping = 11.2%); Hospitality Services (i.e. hotel clerk, travel industry, front desk clerk = 8.4%); Education (i.e. child care, teaching = 6.5%); Health Care (i.e. nurse, home aide, physical therapist = 5.6%); Professional/Information Services (i.e. financial, legal, computer support = 2.8%); and Personal Services (i.e. hair/beauty, spa = 1.0%). All other respondents (4.7%) selected multiple job categories or had indicated working more than one job during this time which fell within several of the previous categories.

Table 1: Frequency Table of Demographics

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	47	43.9
Female	60	56.1
Age		
18-20	50	46.7
21-29	57	53.3
Educational Background		
High school degree or equivalent	30	28.0
Some college but no degree	75	70.0
Associate degree	1	1.0
Bachelor degree	1	1.0
Employment Status		
Currently employed	43	40.2
Not currently but employed in last year	64	59.8
Job Category		
Education	7	6.5
Food Services	39	36.4
Health Care	6	5.6
Hospitality Services	9	8.4
Personal Services	1	1.0
Physical Services	12	11.2
Professional/Information Services	3	2.8
Sales	25	23.4
Other (multiple categories selected)	5	4.7
Weekly Hours		
40+	21	19.6
30-39	21	19.6
20-29	48	44.9
10-19	17	15.9
State of Employment		
California	1	1.0
Colorado	1	1.0
Connecticut	2	1.9
District of Columbia	1	1.0
Illinois	1	1.0
Maryland	1	1.0
New Jersey	8	7.5
New York	8	7.5
North Carolina	1	1.0
Pennsylvania	77	72.0
Virginia	2	1.9
Missing	4	3.7

Measures

“Great survey, these are the important questions that need to be asked...BUT NO ONE EVER DOES!” – Female Respondent, 18-20, Food Services Worker

The survey consisted primarily of previously validated measures for each of the following constructs: customer sexual harassment, customer perceived power, service pressure climate, accountability, customer gender ratio, and sexual harassment policy.

Customer Sexual Harassment. Customer sexual harassment was measured using twelve questions from the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire – Client/Customer (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007; alpha= .92). The items as they were listed in the current survey are included in Appendix D. Scale dimensions included questions such as: “in the last year on this job, how often have you experienced customers 1) *putting you down or being condescending to you because of your sex (i.e. man or woman); 2) making repeated requests for dates, drinks, etc. despite being told no*”. The current item set parallels the three pronged dimension of sexual harassment from the original Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) scale (created by Fitzgerald et. al, 1988), which was directly modified by Gettman and Gelfand (2007) for customers and clients. These dimensions include *gender harassment or sexist hostility* (i.e. example 1), *unwanted sexual attention* (i.e. example 2). The third dimension included in Gettman and Gelfand (2007) was *sexual coercion*. Because of low frequency of these behaviors, items for sexual coercion were not included in the final survey though the implications of this decision are discussed.

As a frame of comparison, several incivility items were also included (Kern & Grandey, 2007). These included questions such as “In the last year on this job, how often have you experienced customers 1) *putting you down or being condescending to you; 2) making demeaning or derogatory remarks about you*”. These were included because they are not

specific to sex or gender. However, for the composite for customer sexual harassment, the incivility items were not used because they did not load with the rest of the items based on a factor analysis. Rather, they were utilized in order to gradually introduce negative customer treatment to survey respondents in a more general, gender neutral way.

Responses to the 12 customer sexual harassment questions were coded on a five-point scale consisting of: 1 (never), 2 (rarely, once or twice), 3 (occasionally, happens once in a while), 4 (often, happens regularly), 5 (always, happens every time I work) with the option for “not applicable” also available if the respondent did not prefer to answer or did not feel the question was directly relevant to their experiences. Reliability in the current study was very strong ($\alpha=.948$). Alpha reliabilities were also high for each individual component of the scale: 1) unwanted sexual attention ($\alpha=.837$) and 2) sexist hostility/gender harassment ($\alpha=.940$).

Customer Power. Customer power was measured using four questions developed from Galinsky, Gruenfeld and Magee (2003) and Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000). The items as they were listed in the current survey are included in Appendix E. Scale dimensions included questions such as: “*customers have power over me and others in my work role*” and “*customers can influence my financial rewards*”.

Responses to all four questions were coded on a five-point scale consisting of: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree) with the option for “not applicable” also available if the respondent did not prefer to answer or did not feel the question was directly relevant to their experiences. Alpha Reliability in the current study was moderately strong ($\alpha=.693$).

Service pressure climate. Service pressure climate was measured in multiple ways in order to better understand the broad construct, at both the individual and the occupational/job level. Differences in the service pressure climate for each worker were measured as self reports of the two dimensions, including the customer focus of the organization (i.e. customer centrality; focus on quality) and the formalized methods utilized in order to ensure the desired environment (i.e. display rules). In terms of the formalized methods, the author operationalized this as the degree to which management is concerned with the quality of the service (i.e. *manager orientation for service*). Concerning the customer focus, the author broke this down into two separate categories: 1) the degree to which the individual believes his or her job necessitates “service with a smile” and other displays of positive enthusiasm during customer interactions (*display rules*) and 2) the degree to which the customer is the central focus of the business (*customer centrality*) (all service pressure climate items are included in Appendix F).

The degree to which management is concerned with the quality of the work consisted of five items adapted for the customer environment from Schneider, White and Paul (1998) “Climate for Service” scale (Customer Orientation Scale, p. 154, $\alpha = .89$; Managerial Practices Scale, p. 154, $\alpha = .86$; Customer Feedback Scale, p. 154, $\alpha = .82$). An example of items asked is “*my manager is very committed to improving the quality of our service to customers*”. Responses were coded on a five-point scale consisting of: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (somewhat disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (somewhat agree), 5 (strongly agree). The alpha reliability in the current study was moderately strong for quality ($\alpha = .775$).

The degree to which the individual believes his or her job necessitates “service with a smile” and other displays of positive enthusiasm during customer interactions (i.e. display rules) consisted of five items. Grandey (2003) and Diefendorff, Croyle and Gosserand (2003) created

these items to measure the employee's perception of the organizationally mandated display rules. Items asked the following: "*In my job, 'service with a smile' is a job requirement*" and "*part of my job is to make the customer feel good*". Responses were coded on a five-point scale consisting of: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (somewhat disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (somewhat agree), 5 (strongly agree). The alpha reliability in the current study was strong ($\alpha=.866$).

The degree to which the customer is the central focus (i.e. customer centrality) consisted of four items created by the researcher which were roughly based on Schneider, White and Paul (1998) "Climate for Service" scales. Items asked the following: "*my manager seems to believe in the motto: 'the customer is always right'*" and "*at my business, it seems that customers' needs always come before employees' needs*". Responses were coded on a five-point scale consisting of: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (somewhat disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (somewhat agree), 5 (strongly agree). The alpha reliability in the current study was moderately strong ($\alpha=.710$).

*Service Pressure Climate – O*Net Display Rules.* Individuals were asked to provide their job title, primary work duties, and to self-rate the importance and frequency of *dealing with external customers, performing for or working directly with the public and caring or assisting customers or patients*. These items were incorporated in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the self-reported individual level and the expertly-coded occupational level job requirements. Items were parallel to several dimensions from the Occupational Information Network (O*Net).

O*Net is a continuously updated online database of occupational information available to the public. The goal of O*Net is to standardize the measurement of the knowledge, skills, and

abilities required from a person in a particular job title as well as the work context, activities and tasks which must be performed in order to successfully navigate the job. The content is broken down into six different sections with approximately 277 total descriptors across all sections (National Center for O*NET Development).

The O*Net website defines the three variables included in this survey under the Work Activities section, which is a subset of the worker requirements section. “Dealing with external customers” was defined as the extent to which it is “important [for an individual] to work with external customers or the public in this job”. The website defines “performing for or working directly with the public” as the extent to which an individual must “[perform] for people or [deal] directly with the public. This includes serving customers in restaurants and stores, and receiving clients or guests”. The website defines “caring or assisting customers or patients” as “providing personal assistance, medical attention, emotional support, or other personal care to others such as coworkers, customers, or patients” (National Center for O*NET Development). Responses were coded on a five-point scale consisting of: 1 (almost never), 2 (slightly), 3 (moderately), 4 (very), 5 (extremely) when asked about the frequency of customer relation behaviors and 1 (not at all), 2 (slightly), 3 (moderately), 4 (very), 5 (extremely) when asked about the importance of customer relation behaviors. Each dimension was expertly coded on a rating scale of importance from one to one hundred for each unique job (National Center for O*NET Development). Alpha reliability for the self reported O*Net items was moderately strong ($\alpha=.710$).

The author also had an independent coder interpret the job title and primary work duties to search for job titles on the O*Net website. The independent coder recorded the values for each of the following eight dimensions related to customer service work. The eight dimensions are: 1) cooperation - job requires being pleasant with others on the job and displaying a good-natured,

cooperative attitude, 2) assisting and caring for others, 3) concern for others - job requires being sensitive to others' needs and feelings and being understanding and helpful on the job, 4) self control - job requires maintaining composure, keeping emotions in check, controlling anger, and avoiding aggressive behavior even in very difficult situations, 5) service orientation – actively looking for ways to help people, 6) performing for or working directly with the public, 7) deal with unpleasant or angry people - how frequently the worker has to deal with unpleasant, angry, or discourteous individuals as part of the job requirements, 8) dealing with external customers - how important it is to work with external customers or the public in this job (National Center for O*NET Development).

Cooperation, assisting and caring for others, concern for others, and self control represent the display rules aspect of the service pressure relationship (Diefendorff, Richards, & Croyle, 2006). Service orientation, performing for or working direction with the public, dealing with unpleasant or angry people and dealing with external customers represent the customer centrality/customer relations aspect of the service pressure relationship.

Values for each dimension were independently coded by two individuals, with an inter-rater reliability of .90. The reliability for the independently coded O*Net items for Self Awareness (*display rules*) was $\alpha=.727$ (i.e. *cooperation; assisting and caring for others; concern for others; and self control*). The alpha reliability for the independently coded O*Net items for Customer Relations was $\alpha=.798$ (i.e. *service orientation; performing for or working directly with the public; dealing with unpleasant or angry; and dealing with external customers*).

Customer accountability. Customer accountability was measured, consistent with research, as the relationship vs. the encounter (Guttek, 1995) which gauged the customer's familiarity with the employee and thus their likelihood for negative interactions.

The customer-employee relationship was measured using a four item scale which gauged the customer's regularity and familiarity in the workplace. Examples of items included are: "at work, I interact with customers that I consider 'regulars'" and "my customers know me by name". The scale is based on an unpublished master's thesis concerning whether customers should evaluate employees as part of the service relationship process (Diamond, 2007). Reliability in the current study was strong ($\alpha=.823$).

Sexual harassment policy. Respondents were also asked to provide information as to their awareness of existing sexual harassment policies at their workplace. All respondents answered three questions including the following: whether a sexual harassment policy exists (i.e. in a handbook or posted on a bulletin board), whether the organization provides training or procedure on how to deal with sexual harassment from *coworkers* (i.e. sensitivity training, coping mechanisms, how to use a formal complaint procedures), and whether the organization provides training or a procedure on how to deal with sexual harassment from *customers* (i.e. sensitivity training, coping mechanisms, and how to use formal complaint procedures). Responses were provided on a simple three point scale with options for either yes, no, or unsure. Those who chose yes were asked to provide additional information about their responses (i.e. where the policy is found or any additional information that might help explain their answer).

Customer gender ratio. The customer gender ratio was measured in order to provide an idea of the customer context. They were asked to estimate the percentage of female and male customers they deal with on a regular basis (i.e. customer gender context). Gettman and Gelfand (2007) found that a higher percentage of male customers predicted the likelihood for customer sexual harassment to occur ($r = .14, p \leq .05$). The gender ratio of the customers was measured by asking the respondent to indicate, in general, what percentage of customers were male or female.

Control Variables. Participants were asked their gender, age, educational level, employment status, job category, weekly hours worked, and state where primarily employed. Gender was divided into several options including male, female, other, and prefer not to specify. Respondents were asked to provide their age in categories, including: 17 or younger, 18 - 20, 21 - 29, 30 - 39, 40 - 49, 50 - 59, 60 or older. Education level was also measured in categories, including the following: less than high school degree, high school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED), some college but no degree, associate degree, bachelor degree, graduate degree, other (please specify). Employment status was measured with the following: employed, full time; employed, part time; not employed, looking for work; not employed, NOT looking for work; full time student; retired; disabled, not able to work. Job category was measured through the following categories: education (i.e. child care, teaching), food services (i.e. hostess, server, bartender, cashier for food, coffee barista), health services (i.e. nurse, home aide, physical therapist), hospitality services (i.e. hotel clerk, travel industry, front desk clerk), personal services (i.e. hair/beauty, spa), physical services (i.e. housecleaning, landscaping), professional/information services (i.e. financial, legal, computer support), sales (i.e. retail, call center, marketing), other (please specify). Weekly hours was broken down into categories as well, including: 40 hours or more, 30 to 39 hours, 20 to 29 hours, 10 to 19 hours, and less than 10 hours per week. State where primarily worked was a pull down list including all 50 states as well as Washington D.C. and the islands. Respondents were also directly asked in a yes or no question whether they had direct contact with the public (customers, clients, patients) as part of their job.

Open-Ended Questions. Participants were also asked two additional open-ended questions to give them an opportunity to 1) share any experiences or stories they may have had concerning

customer's misbehavior or sexual harassment and 2) to give them an opportunity to comment on how the survey was administered or how they felt it might be improved.

Chapter IV: Results

Factor Analyses

Each of the measures was factor analyzed using principle components analysis with varimax rotation prior to creating composite variables for each factor. Seven incivility items were included (Grandey & Kern, 2007) in the original survey but were removed for composite variable creation. The SEQ-C loaded cleanly on one factor. The customer power items loaded on one factor cleanly and needed no adjustment or removals. The initial factor analysis of the service pressure items yielded three separate factors. Thus, service pressure climate was represented by three factors (display rules, customer centrality, and manager orientation for service) and also by the composite O*Net dimensions which each represented a different facet of the service pressure climate. All other composite variables were created based on the preliminary and secondary factor analysis of the item sets.

Data Screening and Descriptive Statistics

There were 137 responses collected, an approximate 67.82% response rate. Of the 137 respondents, there were 9 respondents who either did not give consent at all or did not give consent for their responses to be used for research purposes. There were also 2 respondents who only filled out the first three questions but left all remaining questions blank. All of these respondents were removed from the final data set. Thus, the adjusted data set for consent contained 126 participants.

The author then double checked participant responses on the three qualifying criteria: 1) currently or recently employed within the last year, 2) working greater than 10 hours per week, and 3) having at least some customer contact as part of their job. Each of these questions was

measured with a single question requiring participants to specify their status along each dimension. There were 3 individuals who had not been employed in the past year, 9 participants who worked less than ten hours per week, and 7 respondents who reported having no customer contact during the course of their assigned job duties. All individuals who did not meet the criteria were removed from the data set in order to follow the original guidelines of the survey and to reduce potential data errors for those who had infrequent or nonexistent customer contact. Following the criteria removal, there were 107 remaining respondents. Because this was a student convenience sample, the author expected there to be a great deal of variance in those who met the criteria as well as those who gave consent for responses to be used for research purposes.

Bivariate correlations with alpha reliabilities were run for all main variables of interest and are presented in table 2.

Table 2 – Correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	1.56		--								
2. Customer Sexual Harassment	1.29	.56	.06	.95							
3. Customer Power	3.03	.84	.22*	.04	.70						
4. Service Pressure: Display Rules	4.12	.80	.32**	-.07	.25**	.87					
5. Service Pressure: Customer Centrality	3.72	.89	.17	-.04	.33**	.56**	.71				
6. Service Pressure: Mgr. Orient. – Quality	4.23	.70	.14	-.28**	.03	.43**	.27**	.76			
7. O*Net :Display Rules	71.6	7.16	.27**	.15	-.15	.10	-.12	-.13	.73		
8. O*Net: Customer Centrality	65.3	12.15	.22*	.03	-.01	.19*	-.09	.20*	.36**	.80	
9. Accountability: Encounters/Relationships	3.54	.87	.01	-.10	.11	.06	.08	.08	.22*	-.08	.82

Note. N=107, * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. $M = 1$, $F = 2$. Alpha reliabilities can be found along the diagonal. No major difference between males and females means.

Test of Hypotheses

Perceived customer power as related to customer sexual harassment. Hypothesis 1 predicted that customer power would be positively related to customer sexual harassment, such that higher levels of perceived customer power would be positively related to higher levels of sexual harassment from customers. To test this hypothesis, customer power and customer sexual harassment were transformed into composite variables representing the means across the scale items (following a factor analysis and reliability check). Upon performing a descriptive analysis on the mean and standard deviation, the author noted that customer sexual harassment, which was measured on a scale of 1 to 5 had a mean score of 1.29 with a standard deviation of .56 across participants. The frequency table of means suggested that approximately 75% of the scores fell below 1.38. On the original response scale, a 1 corresponded to a response of “never” and a response of 2 corresponded to a response of “rarely (once or twice)”. Thus, preliminary analysis of the customer sexual harassment data suggested that the vast majority of individuals answered “Never” or “Rarely”. The hypothesis test between customer sexual harassment and perceived customer power yielded a correlation coefficient of nearly zero ($r = .040, p \leq .684$). Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Because of the extremely low base rate, the author sought to explore the customer sexual harassment variable further in order to better understand what was driving the results. Even when customer sexual harassment was selected for those with a customer sexual harassment score of 1.01 or higher (i.e. yes it has happened) as compared to those with a mean customer sexual harassment score of 1.00 or lower (i.e. no it has never happened), the results remained nonsignificant. Interestingly, 85% of those selected who had experienced customer sexual

harassment still reported behaviors of 2.0 or below (i.e. rarely). Only about 8 people reported mean customer sexual harassment scores of 2.0 greater.

In the overall sample, telling offensive jokes or stories ($M=1.78$) and repeated requests for dates after being told no ($M = 1.76$) were the most common behaviors and attempting to touch or kiss ($M = 1.25$) and touching in an uncomfortable way ($M = 1.29$) were the least common behaviors.

The author separated the data by gender in order to better understand the relationship and to gauge whether there were differences between males and females. Females had a mean customer sexual harassment value of 1.32 with a standard deviation of .56 and males had a mean customer sexual harassment value of 1.25 with a standard deviation of .57 ($r = .107, p \leq .422$ for cust. power x cust. SH for females; $r = -.081, p \leq .594$ for cust. power x cust. SH for males).

In order to determine whether the means on customer sexual harassment were significantly different, an independent-samples t-test was conducted for males and females. There was no significant difference in scores for males ($M = 1.25, SD = 0.57$) and females ($M = 1.32, SD = 0.56; t(103) = -.614, p = .54$, two-tailed). Thus, despite the fact that females mean experiences of customer sexual harassment were slightly higher than men there was no significant difference between the mean score of males and females on customer sexual harassment. However, there was still not a significant relationship between customer power and customer sexual harassment for males ($r = -.081, p \leq .594$) or females ($r = .107, p \leq .422$).

In order to determine whether the means on customer power were significantly different, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean customer power scores for males and females. There was a significant difference in scores for males ($M = 2.82, SD = 0.77$)

and females ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.85$; $t(105) = -2.358$, $p = .02$, two-tailed). Despite the fact that females did not report higher means on customer sexual harassment, they did, in fact, report higher means on perceived customer power than males.

Service pressure climate as related to customer power. Hypothesis 2 predicted that service pressure climate, including customer focus and the formalized methods used to ensure customer service such as display rules, would be positively related to customer power, such that an organization that has a higher pressure service climate would be positively related to higher levels of perceived customer power. To test this hypothesis, customer power and the three facets of service pressure (i.e. display rules, customer centrality and manager customer orientation for quality) were transformed into composite variables representing the means across the scale items (following a factor analysis and reliability check). The author performed a bivariate correlation on the facets with mixed results. Display rules ($r = .253$, $p \leq .009$) and customer centrality ($r = .325$, $p \leq .001$) were significantly related to perceived customer power, however; manager customer orientation for quality ($r = .027$, $p \leq .786$) was not significantly related. Thus, hypothesis two was partially supported.

In order to determine whether the means on display rules were significantly different, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean display rule scores for males and females. There was a significant difference in scores for males ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.82$) and females ($M = 4.350$, $SD = 0.71$; $t(105) = -3.49$, $p = .001$, two-tailed). Thus, females did report significantly higher means on display rules than males.

In order to determine whether the means on customer centrality were significantly different, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean customer centrality scores for males and females. There was no significant difference in scores for males ($M = 3.54$,

$SD = 0.88$ and females ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.88$; $t(105) = -1.78$, $p = .078$, two-tailed). Similarly, in order to determine whether the means on manager orientation for quality were significantly different, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean manager orientation for quality scores for males and females. There was no significant difference in scores for males ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.73$ and females ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.66$; $t(103) = -1.42$, $p = .160$, two-tailed).

Service pressure climate as a predictor of customer sexual harassment. Hypotheses 3a predicted that service pressure climate, including customer focus and the formalized methods to ensure customer service such as display rules, would predict the likelihood for customers to sexually harass, such that an organization that has a higher pressure service climate would be positively related to higher levels of customer sexual harassment. To test this hypothesis, the author performed a bivariate correlation on the three service pressure dimensions and customer sexual harassment. Manager customer orientation for quality was significantly related to customer sexual harassment ($r = -.284$, $p \leq .004$) whereas display rules ($r = -.071$, $p \leq .469$) and customer centrality ($r = -.036$, $p \leq .717$) were not significantly correlated. The relationship between manager customer orientation and customer sexual harassment was the opposite of the predicted direction, thus, hypothesis 3a was not supported.

The author also tested the relationship between the occupational level O*Net Display Rule items (i.e. cooperation, assisting and caring for others, concern for others, and self control) in order to see if perhaps there is a relationship between these service pressure practices and customer sexual harassment at the occupational level rather than the individual level. There was support for this notion ($r = .28$, $p \leq .03$) suggesting that there is partial support for the third hypothesis though not in the predicted way.

Customer power as a partial mediator of service pressure climate and customer sexual harassment. Hypothesis 3b predicted that the relationship between service pressure climate and customer sexual harassment would be partially mediated by perceived customer power. Because the relationship between service pressure climate and customer sexual harassment was not supported in the current study, a partial mediation was unable to be established. Thus, hypothesis 3b was unsupported. Regression analysis re-affirmed the previous findings for each hypothesis with no significant changes.

Test of Exploratory Variables

The author performed a partial correlation on the main variables (i.e. customer sexual harassment, customer power, display rules, customer centrality, management orientation for service) while controlling for accountability (i.e. service relationship versus encounter measure). Despite predictions, accountability had no significant effect on the relationships between variables. The author selected for those above the mean level for accountability (i.e. those with greater than average accountability) and still there was no significant relationship between accountability and customer sexual harassment or customer power. However, there were stronger relationships between customer power ($r = .424, p < .002$) and display rules ($r = .34, p < .014$) suggesting that perhaps accountability does in fact play a role.

The author also performed a content analysis on the sexual harassment policy questions. In response to whether the company had a sexual harassment policy, 56.6% were unsure whether their company had a policy, 13.2% responded that their company did not have a policy, and 30.2% responded that their company did, in fact, have a sexual harassment policy. When asked whether they were given any training on how to deal with sexual harassment from supervisors or coworkers, 37.7% were unsure whether this type of training was provided at their organization,

48.1% responded that their company did not provide any kind of training, and 14.2% responded that they had been provided sexual harassment training. When asked whether they were given any specific training for how to manage sexual harassment occurrences from customers, 37.7% were unsure whether this type of training was provided at their organization, 52.8% responded that their company did not provide any kind of training, and 9.4% responded that their company did, in fact, provide specific training for coping with sexual harassment from customers. Of those who responded yes to any of the above questions, the following table represents their responses (given as a percent of those who said yes).

Table 3: *Sexual Harassment Policy Responses and Comments*

Variable	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)
Sexual Harassment Policy	30.2	13.2	56.6
Found in Handbook	50		
Found on Bulletin Board	9.4		
Zero Tolerance Policy	12.5		
No Idea Where/What Says	12.5		
Management Handles/Decides	25		
Org. Member SH Procedure	14.2	48.1	37.7
Went Over Handbook	26.7		
Went Over How to Report	20		
Told to Report to Manager	26.7		
Orientation	13.3		
Online Course	6.7		
Customer SH Procedure	9.4	52.8	37.7
Told to Report to Manager	70		
Went Over Handbook	20		
Can't Remember	10		

Chapter V: Discussion

In the current study, customer sexual harassment has been explored from the perspective of a service employee with mixed results. It has been suggested (Morganson, 2008) that customer sexual harassment is a fairly common occurrence yet the current study suggests that approximately 75% of respondents never or rarely ever experienced customer sexual harassment during their working hours. Despite the surprisingly high percentage, the comments made by individuals combats this unexpectedly high number by suggesting that many more have experienced sexual harassment than the data suggests. For example, a female age 21-29 who worked in food services provided the following comment about her customer sexual harassment experiences:

“In terms of experienced sexual harassment, I have been asked on dates by several male (and one female) customers over the last year. I get unwanted comments about my looks, which annoys me greatly. **It makes me feel like people do not actually see me for who I am**, and my fiancé gets tired of hearing about this [stuff]. Also, I have had problems with employees from surrounding places of business asking me on dates, and I have called their managers to report them after repeatedly turning them down.”

This study was meant to determine whether an organization’s high pressure service climate which requires display rules and places the customer as the central focus of the business practices is related to the employee’s experiences of sexually harassing behaviors from customers because of the perceived power this gives customers. To this end, partial relationships were found for both the relationships between service pressure and customer power and also for customer power and customer sexual harassment though not in the magnitude or direction

predicted. However, no direct link between service pressure and customer sexual harassment could be established. What follows is a discussion of the potential factors at play with suggestions for future researchers.

Customer perceived power not significantly related to customer sexual harassment.

Despite Gettman and Gelfand's (2007) previous significant findings, no relationship was established in the current sample and measures. The author considered differences between the current study and theirs in order to pinpoint potential differences. One main difference is the sample. Their sample focused entirely on working professionals (i.e. not students). They measured customer sexual harassment with the same measures (SEQ-C), however; they included measures about sexual coercion which were not incorporated in the current study because of the low base rate of these behaviors as well as the intended sample.

However, contrary to the author's original thought, it could be argued that perhaps students do, in fact, experience more severe forms of sexual harassment and perhaps more frequently than less severe forms. The author had originally thought that inclusion of more severe sexual harassment items would elicit an unpredictable emotional response in such a youthful, inexperienced (at work) audience. However, perhaps gender-negative jokes or requests for dates are not really a "big deal" for college students because students are often exposed to these behaviors frequently in the informal, non-work setting in which they intermingle.

Similarly, college students might live in more sexually charged contexts (in general) which might reduce the likelihood that they would perceive the less severe unwanted attention negatively (i.e. as sexual harassment) rather than as flirting or playful behavior (Stockdale, 1993). This is consistent with previous research which has suggested that differences in the

perception of behaviors affects individuals likelihood to report sexual harassment and to perceive (or misperceive) it as flirtation (Stockdale, 1993). More serious forms of sexual harassment such as suggestive touching or groping might be more likely to register as a red flag or to be identified as sexually harassing behaviors rather than flirtation or flattering. Future researchers should replicate the current study, while including measures for sexual coercion, to see if mean levels of sexual harassment are higher for college students with sexual coercion items included and whether there are different instance rates between the less severe and more severe behaviors.

Customer perceived power is higher for females than males. The author found, through an independent-samples t-test, that the mean level for female customer perceived power was significantly higher than the mean level for males. This finding is curious, suggesting that contrary to previous literature, there may be no direct, significant relationship in the current research supporting a link between customer power and customer sexual harassment. Yet females may be more likely, on average, to perceive customers as having greater power over them in their job as compared to their male counterparts. This higher perceived power may be directly or indirectly linked to negative job related outcomes seen in other literature (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007) such as burnout, emotional exhaustion, turnover intentions, or absenteeism, which have not been tested here.

One potential reason for this finding is because of the gender differences in perceived power. Females may feel as though they have less power (in general) than males or that they do not perceive as much respect from their peers and subordinates. Thus, males may not notice or be impacted by power differences from customers because they are not as sensitive to power imbalances in general. Future researchers should investigate this finding more closely to

determine whether there are other factors causing females to be more likely to perceive higher customer power than males.

Display Rules and the Central Focus on Customers are positively related to perceived customer power. The author found that, consistent with predictions, service pressure climate was positively related to perceived customer power ($r = .253, p \leq .009$ for display rules, $r = .325, p \leq .001$ for customer centrality). The general finding is consistent with French and Raven's (1959) categorization of power as the ability to reward or punish. As the service pressure of the organization increases (i.e. as customers become the central focus and management requires display rules in order to better serve the customer) the customer's ability to punish the employee for poor service or to reward the employee for exceptional service increases dramatically.

This finding seems consistent with the overall goal of service pressure climates, which is to empower and highlight the customer so that they feel as though they are the most important facet of the business. The "customer is always right mentality" is the common motto which embodies this focus on customer satisfaction at all costs. Interestingly, there was a stronger correlation for display rules than customer centrality, suggesting that perhaps an organization's attempts to control and manage the service environment might better predict whether the employee perceives the customer to have higher power than the organization's overall focus on a "customer is always right mentality". This, too, seems consistent with common sense which would suggest that the measures in place to control are more strongly related to the outcome than the ideals which formulate and encompass the measures. Future research should investigate this relationship to determine the factors that cause females to perceive higher customer power and how this is potentially compounded with the service pressure environment in which they must work.

*Occupational-level Display Rules (O*Net) requirements are positively related to customer sexual harassment.* Despite the non-significant findings between self-reported measures of service pressure climate and customer sexual harassment (manager customer orientation for quality, $r = -.284, p \leq .004$; display rules, $r = -.071, p \leq .469$; customer centrality, $r = -.036, p \leq .717$) there was a significant correlation between the occupational level display rules (i.e. O*Net – Self Awareness measures: cooperation, assisting and caring for others, concern for others, and self control) for females ($r = .28, p \leq .03$). This finding was especially interesting because it supported the notion there is a relationship between sexual harassment when the occupation-level requirements include display rules. The author found this quite curious since the self-reported measure was extremely weak and in the negative direction rather than the predicted positive one.

It could be argued that perhaps individuals who perceive themselves as having display rules are actually less likely to be sexually harassed or to report being sexually harassed because, as the current research has shown, there is a relationship between display rules and manager customer orientation for quality ($r = .429, p \leq .000$). Thus, perhaps what has not been explained or accounted for is that display rules, rather than posing a constriction upon employees, might actually be a signal of management's involvement and presence in the workplace and their continual devotion to improving the customer service process (and thus they monitor and protect the employees). Future researchers should examine this finding more closely in the context of display rules, manager involvement, and negative outcomes. Perhaps manager involvement is the missing factor which explains the relationship.

Manager Customer Orientation for the Quality of the Service Interaction is negatively related to customer sexual harassment. The author found that the manager customer orientation

for the quality of the service interaction (i.e. is the manager committed to improving the quality of the interactions and does the manager recognize and value quality in employees) was negatively related to customer sexual harassment. This finding is opposite of the predicted direction but can be explained via the social exchange theory which would suggest that if the manager is committed to the quality of service the customers receive, the customers will essentially feel the results of that commitment and will then, in return, be more likely to treat employees well (i.e. less likely to treat employees poorly or harass them).

Limitations

One of the biggest difficulties faced by researchers is the significantly low base rate for sexually harassing behaviors. Despite numerous attempts to quantify the true incidence rates for sexual harassment, reports still range between extremely low (as seen in the current study) to extremely high (as seen in Morganson, 2008) with little consensus. This is likely the case for a multitude of reasons, including the blurry interpretation of the legal standards, the intense and personal nature of the actions and responses to such actions, and even the climate in which the data is collected. Thus, one of the biggest limitations of this study is simply the inability to accurately and effectively capture the rate at which customer sexual harassment occurs. Previously validated measures available for use focus primarily on the frequency with which the harassment occurs with the assumption that there is variation among all groups.

But as seen in the current study based on a group of college students, there was little variation in the data to suggest that these behaviors occur often or perhaps little support that students appraise the behaviors as sexual harassment rather than flirting or other romantic gestures (Stockdale, 1993). Further scrutiny is necessary, expanding the current research to a

variety of job types and job levels, in order to gain a more accurate perspective on the incidence rates and individual perceptions of these behaviors.

Another limitation of the current study is the focus on both men and women in the sample. This was done primarily for convenience and availability reasons. However, throughout data analysis it became clear that the author's attempt to recruit a large sample size which included nearly half men was ineffective and inconsistent with previous sexual harassment research which has focused almost completely on females. Thus, a major limitation was simply the small sample of women included in the study which was not large enough to make inferences or generalizations.

Implications

Research has thoroughly demonstrated that being harassed is stressful and has negative outcomes for the employee. Thus, despite some of the non-significant findings in the current study, it is important to keep in mind the bigger picture. Customer sexual harassment has been an under-researched area in literature. The current study seeks to rectify this by spurring interest in the unique predictors which may be managed or in some way adjusted in order to lessen the likelihood that employees experience harassment from customers, or anyone for that matter.

When asked to share personal stories and additional comments about their experiences with customer sexual harassment, many of the respondents in this study described stories in which customers were acting inappropriately where they either did not perceive the behavior as sexual harassment because they did not believe that could happen to them or they did not know the broad array of behaviors that fall within the sexual harassment categorization. There were also many stories where managers, rather than acting to protect the employee or remove the

workplace stressor, would laugh at inappropriate comments from customers or would even encourage the comments by adding additional ones. This type of behavior is absolutely unacceptable and only helps to enforce the environment for sexually harassing behaviors by encouraging customers to replicate or escalate their comments.

Even the males who provided comments suggested that though they had not experienced sexual harassment personally, they had been the recipient of inappropriate jokes (from customers) about their coworkers. One male respondent, an 18-25 year old male, was told by a customer that “that girl [his coworker] needed to get out of the gym and get in the kitchen”. This made him feel extremely uncomfortable because he knew it was demeaning toward his female coworker, but he also felt confusion because he knew that his main priority was to ensure the customer’s continued business rather than to protect his coworker’s feelings.

Thus, the current research sheds a great deal of light on the prevalence and severity of sexually harassing behaviors from customers, even in a college-aged sample. Of the 17 additional comments/stories, all 17 included at least one form of customer sexual harassment and some included several different forms. This suggests that, though the numbers did not reflect the prevalence, customer sexual harassment is a serious issue at all career levels, even in entry-level jobs such as those held by college students.

It is very clear that human resource professionals must continue to be vigilant in their creation, application, revision, and administration of sexual harassment policies and that these policies **MUST** include provisions for protections and procedures against customer sexual harassment. The law includes provisions that employers can be held accountable for harassment perpetrated by third parties. Human resource professionals must extend current sexual

harassment policies in order to reflect this important facet of the service environment.

Employees, as seen with the current research, are being subjected to harassment in a variety of different forms which can be avoided with stricter monitoring and more effective business policies which encourage, rather than exploit, employees.

In fact, comments from survey respondents demonstrate that it is especially important for human resource professionals to clarify and train employees on sexual harassment. For example, a female respondent, age 21-29 stated: "I think a method of determining what the participant's definition of "Sexual Harassment" might be useful especially since people come from all different walks of life". Her comment sheds light on the common problem in sexual harassment research, the differing perceptions of what constitutes harassment and how this can be quantified and corrected. This only provides more reason why future researchers should continue to demonstrate extreme scrutiny in their study of this topic and why human resource and business professionals must be clear with their communication on such an emotionally charged and uniquely experienced issue.

Overall, the findings in this study suggest a link between the service practices an organization implements and the experiences of both the customer and the employee. It is not yet clear as to the direction and magnitude of this relationship, nor is it clear whether the service pressure environment predicts the employee's experiences of customer sexual harassment. What is clear, however, is that customers play a major power role in the service relationship. What was once thought of as solely a relationship between employees and their employers now has an additional dimension: the customer. In some cases, employees may even feel as though they have an additional boss who commands their tasks and has the ability to affect the quality of their working hours. This trend toward greater customer focus and hence, more customer power is

alarming to say the least. Employees have long been regarded as the underdog in work relationships because of their employer's immense power over them further blurring the lines of the service relationship. In fact, even recently there has been coverage in the news about the employer's responsibility to protect employees from customers. Future researchers have a long road ahead of them in which they must develop better measures for sexual harassment and customer power, and they must find a way to better understand the highly intense service pressure climate which has become so prevalent in the modern 24/7 economy.

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Recruitment Email

November 20, 2011

This is an invitation to be involved in a psychology research project for undergraduate college students of the Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Alicia Grandey (aag6@psu.edu), developed this research project to help us extend what is known about customer-based job requirements and stress, and to develop our research skills. We hope to obtain 50 or more people who are willing to tell us about their experiences.

In order to conduct this project, we need your help! Please consider completing this on-line survey to share with us your job requirements and experience with customer interactions. Results will be averaged across respondents and used for class presentations. Here are some answers to your potential questions:

Who is eligible to participate? We are hoping to recruit employed persons who have contact with customers (e.g., consumers, clients, patients, students) to complete an on-line survey. You are eligible if you meet these criteria for eligibility:

1. You are over 18
2. You are currently employed at least 20 hours per week on average
3. Part of your job is to interact with customers/the public at least occasionally

Are my responses anonymous? We take your privacy seriously. You are not asked to provide your name or your organization's name. You are only asked to provide demographic information such as age, race, gender, and occupation title, for descriptive purposes. You can choose not to answer any such questions if they make you uncomfortable. Your responses to the survey will be combined with all the other responses, by Dr. Grandey and a trained research associate, prior to any public presentation of the results. In other words, no one will know the specific survey responses that are yours.

I'm eligible and interested. What do I do now? Follow the following steps:

1. Go to the link here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/QWMCF6J>
2. Read the informed consent and click 'accept'. You may then complete the survey.
3. At the end of the survey, please forward the invitation email (and the survey link) to friends, coworkers, or family members who you think may be eligible and interested in helping us out.

In order to be eligible for class extra credit, you must complete the survey before class begins on December 1, 2011. All late submissions will not be eligible for extra credit.

Thanks for your consideration of this request!

Questions? Contact Dr. Alicia Grandey (aag6@psu.edu, (814) 863-1867)

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Implied Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Service Requirements and Work Stress**Principal Investigator:** Alicia A. Grandey, PhD; Department of Psychology
111 Moore Building
University Park, PA 16802
814- 863-1867; aag6@psu.edu**Co-Investigator:** Sarah Hepler
305 Young Hall
University Park, PA 16802
724-822-9729; sfh5023@psu.edu

- 1. Purpose of the Study:** This study is being used by undergraduate students at Penn State to learn about the requirements and interpersonal stress of customer-focused work. We are conducting research to answer questions about mistreatment of employees by customers in general.
- 2. Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire containing sets of items about your job requirements, interpersonal treatment from customers, and work reactions. You also will have the opportunity to declare your consent to use your data for the research project and for research purposes separately in the following survey.
- 3. Duration/Time:** This online survey should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. We ask that you complete this survey by **December 1, 2011** so that the data can be part of the research project.
- 4. Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses. Your responses will be combined with over all other survey responses. Your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology used. We cannot make any guarantees regarding the interception of data sent via Internet by any third parties.
- 5. Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Dr. Alicia Grandey at aag6@psu.edu or 814-867-6114 with questions or concerns about this study.
- 6. Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Completion of the survey implies that you have read the information in this form and consent to take part in the research. Please print off this form to keep for your records.

Appendix C: Survey Instructions

Instructions for Completing Survey

For the remainder of the survey, you will be asked questions concerning your current (or recent job within the past year).

Please note, the majority of the questions ask you to identify characteristics of dealing with ‘customers’. The term ‘customers’ includes those outside the organization (i.e. patients, clients, consumers, or students). This does NOT include other third parties such as independent contractors or vendors. We are interested in YOUR workplace interactions with those who are seeking services or goods who come from outside the organization.

There is an N/A column for some of the scales. Please choose the N/A option if you feel the question does not apply to you or if you do not feel comfortable answering the question. Please recall your responses are voluntary so you need only select N/A for any you wish not to answer. If you have any questions or concerns, there will be a comment box on the last page to provide feedback to the researchers. Thank you again for your participation!

Appendix D: SEQ-C Survey Items

Current Survey Sexual Experiences Questionnaire –Customer Items

In the last year on this job, how often have you experienced CUSTOMERS acting in the following ways:

- making repeated requests for dates, drinks, etc., despite being told no?
- attempting to establish a romantic relationship?
- attempting to stroke, fondle, or kiss you?
- touching you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable?
- putting you down or was condescending to you because of your sex?
- treating you differently than other employees because of your sex?
- making offensive sexist remarks?
- attempting to draw you into discussion of sexual matters?
- telling you offensive sexual stories or jokes?
- making offensive gestures or a sexual nature?
- making offensive remarks about appearance, body, or sexual activities?
- displaying, using, or distributing sexist or suggestive materials (i.e. webpage, fliers)?

Appendix E: Customer Power Survey Items

Customer Power Items

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

Customers can direct my tasks.

Customers can influence my financial rewards.

Customers have power over me and others in my work role.

In work interactions, customers have more power than I do.

Appendix F: Service Pressure Items

Service Pressure Items

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

Display Rules

Part of my job is to make the customer feel good.

My workplace expects me to express positive emotions to customers as part of my job.

This organization would say that part of the product to customers is friendly, cheerful service.

In my job, I am expected to show excitement and enthusiasm in my interactions with customers.

In my job, 'service with a smile' is a job requirement.

Customer Centrality

My manager seems to believe in the motto: "the customer is always right".

My manager seems to believe that satisfying the customer is his/her highest priority.

At my business, it seems that customers' needs always come before employees' needs.

Manager Customer Orientation - Quality

Management in my business has a plan to improve the quality of our work and service.

My manager is very committed to improving the quality of our service to customers.

My manager recognizes and values high quality service delivery and behaviors.

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Schreyer Honors College

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Thesis Supervisor: Alicia Grandey

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Professional Memberships: Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA), Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Society for Labor and Employment Relations (SLER), Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Beta Kappa, Psi Chi National Honors Society for Psychology

Presentations: Psi Chi Research Conference

Community Service Involvement: Relay for Life, TOPSoccer
