PERPETRATOR CHARACTERISTICS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

ABIGAIL COOLIDGE
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Larry Martinez
Assistant Professor School of Hospitality Management
Thesis Supervisor

Breffini Noone
Associate Professor School of Hospitality Management
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.
ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment is a prevalent and pernicious problem in contemporary workplaces that negatively impacts both employees and the organizations for which they work. The restaurant industry is characterized by particularly high levels of sexual harassment. Although sexual harassment is problematic whenever and wherever it occurs, there is evidence to suggest that sexual harassment behaviors can be interpreted as more or less harassing as a function of the identity of the perpetrator. Based on the bystander intervention literature and the Confronting Prejudiced Responses Model, this thesis focuses on how perpetrator characteristics can elicit differential responses (e.g., perceptions of sexual harassment, intentions to intervene, and intentions to report to a supervisor) as a function of the perceived threat associated with the demographic characteristics of the perpetrator in the restaurant industry. In particular, I manipulated the age, race, and gender of a perpetrator of sexual harassment in a hypothetical restaurant scenario. Results indicated that there was a main effect of gender such that male perpetrators were perceived as being more harassing and elicited greater intentions to intervene and report than female perpetrators. No other main effects or interactions were found. These results suggest that the same harassment behaviors are interpreted differently and elicit different intended responses due simply to the characteristics of the perpetrator. Thus, managers and employees should beware of responding to sexual harassment behaviors in biased ways.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment as any “harassment that can include ‘sexual harassment’ or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature” (EEOC, 2016). In regards to the restaurant industry, “sexual harassment occurs when submission to, or rejection of, sexual advances is a term of employment, is used as a basis for making employment decisions, or if the advances create a hostile or offensive work environment” (Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Konrad & Gutenk, 1986). Men and women can both be victims of sexual harassment.

In 2015, there were 6,822 charges regarding sexual harassment filed with the EEOC (Fatima Goss Graves, 2015). Of those 6,822 charges, only 17.1% were filed by males (Fatima Goss Graves, 2015). There are no current studies that have analyzed the economic cost of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry. A study carried out in 1988 found that Fortune 500 companies lost about $6.7 million a year because of sexual harassment due to decreased productivity, high turnover, and higher absenteeism (Gilbert, Guerrier, & Guy, 1998). In the restaurant industry, high turnover and decreased productivity will force employers to frequently employ new employees. With new employees, it is likely that a restaurant’s bottom line will suffer due to increased recruitment and training costs. For example, servers have to be paid the server minimum wage during training instead of the $2.83 paid hourly when training is complete.
Prior studies indicate that sexual harassment between coworkers is the most common form of sexual harassment (Pryor, 1987; Schneider, 1982; Giuffre & Williams, 1994). There is evidence to suggest that sexual harassment is prevalent in the restaurant industry because servers typically see “flirting” as part of their job description (Gilbert et al., 1998). EEOC data reviewed by the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) found that “37 percent of EEOC sexual harassment charges came from women in the restaurant industry” (Fatima Goss Graves, 2015). When it comes to sexual harassment, 60% of women have claimed that sexual harassment happens on a weekly basis (Fatima Goss Graves, 2015). They say that the perpetrators of the harassment are management, co-workers, and customers (Fatima Goss Graves, 2015).

Women in restaurants are sometimes perceived as sex objects, and their uniforms are normally of the more promiscuous type (Gutek & Morasch, 1982). Men can normally wear pants to work with a polo, while women wear shorts and usually a low cut top while wearing a lot of makeup (Fatima Goss Graves, 2015). The common norm in society is that woman are to wear makeup while at work. This would explain why studies have shown that plain looking people earn 20% less on average than good looking people (French, 2002). Women feel that they will earn fewer tips if they do not come to work looking as pretty as possible. It is assumed that the more sexual a woman is the more tips she will receive.

In the past it was often believed that sexual harassment at work was an overstated issue. It was not until recently that people saw the damage done to the organization because of sexual harassment. In the form of actual expenses, organizations have to pay wages for hours not
worked and for medical expenses, psychological and physical (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Organizations are also hurt because their employees lose motivation, become distracted, and ultimately lose their sense of commitment to the employer (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Research has shown that sexual harassment is damaging to organizations and prevalent in restaurants, however, not much has been done in terms of investigating ways of dealing with sexual harassment. While most companies do have policies regarding sexual harassment and how to report it, the ultimate responsibility lies with the employees (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Employees need to be aware of their interactions with their coworkers in the workplace, and how their actions might be perceived. While organizational policies are in place, they can only be effective if employees elect to take responsibility for reporting sexual harassment.

There is some evidence to suggest that stereotypes about certain employee characteristics may differentially affect the likelihood of people perceiving identical behaviors as sexual harassment. The research shows that when the perpetrator is someone who holds a position of power, is of a different race, or of a different sexual orientation, the incident is more likely to be viewed as sexual harassment (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). The likelihood of intervening is directly related to how likely the victim feels their situation will be taken seriously. When the perpetrator holds a position of power, victims are scared to report out of fear of losing their job (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). Thus, the focus of this study is to examine how individual characteristics might affect the perceptions of sexual harassment in the restaurant setting between coworkers.

The confronting prejudiced responses (CPR) model can be used to determine whether, and when, people will confront discrimination, such as sexual harassment (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008). There are five steps in the CPR model. For the purposes of this
study, I will manipulate the steps in the context of sexual harassment. The first step is to see if the event is interpreted as sexual harassment (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). The second step is to see if the event is seen as an emergency (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998). The third step is to see if the observer will feel responsible for the situation (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). The fourth step is to see if the bystander knows how they would respond (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). The fifth and final step is to see if the bystander takes action to confront the perpetrator of sexual harassment (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). The CPR model suggests that people are more likely to provide assistance when there is a greater perception that the situation is an emergency. An example would be if the bystander feels that the victim would suffer physical harm, injustice, or feels that the actions of the perpetrator are malevolent to the victim (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008).

The focus of this study will be on seeing how a scenario is responded to, given perpetrator characteristics. History has shown that men will sexually harass woman coworkers so that they can feel a sense of dominance (Blakely, Blakely, & Moorman, 1995). Scenarios that have men perpetrators sexually harassing a woman to feel dominant is a common thought process in America that is displayed in many movies. Since women are just starting to break through the glass ceiling, many people do not believe them to be the perpetrator of sexual harassment because they do not hold as much dominance as men in the workforce.

Age is seen as a big factor in sexual harassment. The older a person is, the more likely they are to hold a position of power in an organization (Blakely et al., 1995). If an older person holds authority over a younger person, the older person will likely be viewed as a perpetrator in a sexual harassment scenario (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). This is likely because people feel sympathy for the younger victim, who is a person commonly new to the workforce. When the perpetrator is young, many people see a scenario as a youthful indiscretion.
In today’s society race plays a major role in almost all parts of an organization. In regards to sexual harassment, studies have shown that race plays a factor if there is also a language barrier (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). Since things can get lost in translation there is a likeliness that more actions will be perceived as sexual harassment (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). This study focuses on black and white people that do not have a language barrier to see if it plays a significant role in defining, confronting, and reporting sexual harassment.

Williams & Giuffre (1994) conducted a series of interviews of restaurant employees concerning their experiences with sexual harassment at work. They found that when the harasser is a coworker the actions were less likely to be seen as sexual harassment. This is because the coworkers are accustomed to hanging out and joking with each other, so these behaviors are more likely to be seen as friendly and not threatening. It is common in the restaurant industry for there to be a race barrier between people who work as servers and people who work in the kitchen. America has many undocumented workers who have immigrated to the United States from Mexico, who work in the kitchen. This creates a language barrier between the wait staff and the kitchen staff, as well as a cultural barrier. Those two things play a part in scenarios being defined as sexual harassment, because words and action can sometimes be misinterpreted. That is a major reason why people need to be very aware of their interactions with their coworkers.

There are four actions that a victim can do after they are sexually harassed (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998). The first is that the victim can formally report the sexual harassment to upper management and the EEOC (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998). The second is that the victim can confront the perpetrator and tell them to stop and that what they are doing is wrong (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998). The third is to confront and report the perpetrator (Adams-Roy & Barling,
The last thing is for the victim to do nothing about the sexual harassment (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998)

Women in low wage jobs, such as serving, are less likely to report sexual harassment because they cannot afford the backlash and possibility of losing their jobs (Fatima Goss Graves, 2015). Victims turn to reporting as a last resort (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995)

There is not a lot of research that has been done about sexual harassment in the restaurant industry. In order to expand on the research that has been done so far, this study will focus on perpetrator characteristics, perceptions of sexual harassment, and coworker intentions to intervene and report. The focus will be on gender, race, and age. Although it is possibly and likely that these characteristics are connected with each other, there is no past research to create specific hypotheses about this. Therefore, I hypothesize the main effects only.

**H1A:** People are more likely to rate the behaviors as sexual harassment if it is a male harasser rather than a female harasser

**H2B:** People are more likely to rate the behaviors as sexual harassment if it is an older harasser rather than a younger harasser

**H2C:** People are more likely to rate the behaviors as sexual harassment if it is a black person rather than a white person

**H2A:** People are more likely to intend to confront the harasser if it is a male harasser rather than a female harasser.

**H2B:** People are more likely to intend to confront the harasser if it is an older harasser rather than a younger harasser
**H2C:** People are more likely to intend to confront the harasser if it is a black person rather than a white person.

**H3A:** People are more likely to intend to report the harasser if it is a male harasser rather than a female harasser.

**H3B:** People are more likely to intend to report the harasser if it is an older harasser rather than a younger harasser.

**H3C:** People are more likely to intend to report the harasser if it is a black person rather than a white person.
Chapter 2

Methods

I used Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to recruit participants with at least 6 months of experience working in the restaurant industry. We used the recruitment procedure outlined by Smith, Sabat, Martinez, Weaver, and Xu (2015) to selectively recruit participants without providing a financial incentive for lying to meet inclusion criteria. In total, 798 individuals accessed the survey. Of those, 509 indicated that they had the requisite experience. Of these remaining, 420 fully completed the survey and passed attention checks designed to identify careless responding (Meade & Craig, 2012). The mean age of participants was 36.21 (SD = 1.57). 34.80% indicated that they were male, 64.70% indicated that they were female, and 0.50% indicated their gender as “Other.” Seventy-nine percent of participants indicated that they were White, 8% were Black, 5% were Hispanic, 1% were South Asian / Indian, 4% were Asian, and 5% indicated their race as “Other.”. Fifty-six percent of the participants indicated that they were employed full-time, 21% were employed part-time, 4% were retired, 12% were unemployed, and 7% were unemployed, but employed in the last year.
Procedure and Manipulations:

Participants first viewed a scenario online that depicted an interaction between two employees. Specifically, the interaction was designed such that one employee (Sam) engaged in sexual harassment behaviors toward another (Alex). The names Sam and Alex were used because they are gender neutral and thus these individuals could be depicted as male or female, although in this study Alex was always a young white female. The scenario was pilot tested in a separate study and found to be relatively high in egregiousness of sexual harassment:

“One day after clocking-in at work, you go to the storage room to get some napkins for the line. The storage room is in the cellar of the restaurant. In the storage room, you notice your coworker Alex is already grabbing napkins. Before turning away to go back upstairs, you notice your other coworker Sam is also down there. You hear Sam ask. “Alex, do you want to make the time go by a little bit faster? No one will know we’re down here for a while.” Alex replies, “No, I can get it”, to which Sam says, “Well that’s too bad. I thought we could have made working a little more fun today”.

The manipulations were achieved by varying the pictures of Sam, the perpetrator. Specifically, I used a 2 (male/female) x 2 (old/young) x 2 (black/white) experimental design. In total, I used 16 pictures, two for each experimental condition to account for possible idiosyncrasies associated with individual pictures. The photographs were obtained from a face database that is standardized for emotional expression, facial angle, and lighting and provides the races, genders, and ages of all individuals depicted (Minear & Park, 2008). The pictures were also pilot tested in a separate study and found to be of similar levels of attractiveness. The pictures can be found in
the Appendix. After viewing the scenario and the pictures of Sam and Alex, they provided responses for their perceptions of sexual harassment, intentions to intervene, intentions to report to a supervisor, as well as their demographics.

**Measures:**

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales that were created for the purpose this study since no appropriate scales exist currently. In all cases, participants responded on a 1 (not at all agree) to 7 (very strongly agree) rating scale.

Perceived sexual harassment was measured using four items ($\alpha = .86$):

a. The interaction between Sam and Alex was inappropriate
b. The interaction between Sam and Alex was offensive
c. The interaction between Sam and Alex should not be taken seriously
d. The interaction between Sam and Alex could be considered sexual harassment

Confronting sexual harassment was measured using three items ($\alpha = .86$):

a. I would attempt to interrupt this interaction
b. I would ignore this interaction
c. I would confront Sam about this interaction

Reporting sexual harassment was measured using three items ($\alpha = .84$):

a. I would formally report this interaction to my supervisor immediately
b. I would informally tell my supervisor about this interaction
c. I would not tell my supervisor about this interaction
Chapter 3

Results

The means, standard deviations and correlations for the three dependent variables are provided in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confronting</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.532*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>.662*</td>
<td>.587*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * p < .01

I used a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test all hypotheses. Perpetrator gender, race, and age were entered as independent variables and perceived sexual harassment, intentions to intervene, and intentions to report were entered as dependent variables.

The omnibus MANOVA displayed a significant main effect of gender, Pillai’s Trace = 0.10, \( F(3, 410) = 14.80, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10 \), suggesting support for H1a, H2a, and H3a. There were no significant main effects for race or gender, suggesting that all other hypotheses were not supported. The MANOVA also failed to yield significant two- or three-way interactions.

Examination of the individual ANOVAs support the MANOVA results. Specifically, participants were more likely to perceive the interaction as sexual harassment when the
perpetrator was male \( (M = 5.36, SD = 1.32) \) than when they were female \( (M = 4.50, SD = 1.35) \), \( F(1, 412) = 43.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10 \). Similarly, participants were more likely to intend to intervene when the perpetrator was male \( (M = 4.30, SD = 1.69) \) than when they were female \( (M = 3.86, SD = 1.50) \), \( F(1, 412) = 8.09, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02 \). Finally, participants were more likely to report to a supervisor when the perpetrator was male \( (M = 4.09, SD = 1.74) \) than when they were female \( (M = 3.58, SD = 1.61) \), \( F(1, 412) = 9.57, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02 \). These results further support H1a, H2a, and H3a. These results are depicted graphically in Figure 1. No other main effects or interactions were found among the individual ANOVA analyses. Thus, all other hypotheses were not supported.

Figure 1- Hypotheses Testing

Figure 2 illustrates how likely a bystander is to classify an incident as sexual harassment, given the perpetrator characteristics.
Figure 2 – Harassment

Figure 3, illustrates how likely a bystander is to confront an incident, given the perpetrator characteristics.
Figure 4, illustrates how likely a bystander is to report an incident, given the perpetrator characteristics.
Chapter 4

Discussion

The study demonstrates that there is a significant difference between scenarios that have a male and female harasser. A scenario that has a male perpetrator is more likely to be viewed as a sexual harassment case. There were no significant data found to suggest that race and age hold any correlation in terms of defining, confronting, and reporting sexual harassment.

A possible explanation as to why race was not significant is that both coworkers held the same position. In another study, it was found that race was a significant problem if the minority race was in a lower organizational position than the server, like a cook (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). This means that race is still a factor with regards to sexual harassment, but that more research needs to be done. In regards to age, the insignificant effect may be attributable to the misconception that most restaurant servers are young. Older people in the restaurant industry are typically managers and owners. Older persons are likely to be viewed as perpetrators when they hold a position of power over the victim, such as a manager (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). In this case, since both were coworkers and no one held a position of power it is likely that people hold a correlation between age and position of power.

The results from the study show support for the CPR model. It suggests that sexual harassment behaviors can be perceived as more or less dangerous as a function of the gender of the perpetrator. The study shows a male perpetration is likely to elicit a stronger perception of more dangerous than a female perpetrator. Nevertheless, this was not the case for race of age.
An organization can use this information to create a broad sexual harassment training plan. Listing examples of minor and major cases of sexual harassment in the employee handbook will help employees understand and recognize what sexual harassment is. If there is a broader definition, employees will be more likely to define an action as sexual harassment because they will have employer assurance that if reported, the case will be treated in the same respect as any other sexual harassment case.

A manager can use this information to monitor his or her employees. If a manager sees an action that resembles sexual harassment, he or she should step in immediately, and document the situation. If there is documentation about actions that could have been precursors, management can use that to defend their case if sexual harassment occurs. They can also use that information for disciplining and to possibly add to the employee handbook.

Organizations and management should both look at sexual harassment objectively. That is making sure that they are not taking age, race, or gender into account, for either the victim or the perpetrator. In order for employees to feel like they have a safe work environment, it is critical that the organization and management establish a clear no harassment policy, and heavily enforce it. By showing enforcement of the policy, it will be a deterrent for possible perpetrators.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, it employed a hypothetical situation. Since participants did not truly experience this scenario, there is no telling what their emotional response in the heat of the moment would be. Another limitation is that employees likely have a relationship with their coworker that was not captured in this study. For future research, there should be examination in real organizations with real people. The photos of the older
perpetrators in this study were manipulated using software, and they were not real old people.

This might have made the scenario someone unbelievable for some of the respondents.
Appendix A

Photographic Stimuli
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Academic Vita of Abigail Coolidge
Abigailcoolidge@gmail.com

Education
Major(s): Hospitality Management
Minor(s): Labor Employment Relations
Honors: Hospitality Management

Thesis Title: Perpetrator Characteristics of Sexual Harassment
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Larry Martinez

Work Experience
Date: 5/15-8/15
Title: Market Associate Intern
Description: I worked with hotels on marketing and revenue management, as well as signing up hotels on the site.
Institution/Company: Expedia, Inc. Dallas, TX.
Supervisor’s Name: Lindsey Illes

Grants Received: Research grant, Study Abroad Grant

Professional Memberships: President, Penn State Hotel Restaurant Society, Berks Campus
Presentations: Undergraduate Research and Health and Human Development
Community Service Involvement: Thon, Relay for Life
International Education: Study Abroad, Bond University, Gold Coast, AU.
Scholarships: Serv Safe