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# Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace

*What factors influence the likelihood that a federal worker will receive unwanted sexual attention? Who is most likely to be accused of sexual harassment? What factors influence federal workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of agency sexual harassment training? Using the raw data file of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's most recent survey on sexual harassment, the authors find that worker characteristics are the principal influence on the likelihood that a worker will receive unwanted sexual attention and whether an agency's sexual harassment training is perceived favorably. Contextual factors demonstrate lesser influence. Their conclusions lead the authors to believe that a reevaluation of training programs is in order. A one-size-fits-all training approach may no longer be tenable, if it ever was.*

## Introduction

Sexual harassment continues to be an ingrained feature of the workplace for many of America's workers despite some three decades of research into its causes and effects, and despite a precedential ruling in 1976 (*Williams v. Saxbe*) classifying sexual harassment in the workplace as a form of sex discrimination and a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Since the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings fixed the nation's attention on this topic some 10 years ago, incidents of sexual harassment in the public workplace have continued apace. The Navy's Tailhook scandal, the Army's Aberdeen Proving Grounds convictions, and the abuse of female cadets at the Citadel raise the specter that sexual harassment may be the price of integrating women into traditionally male bastions, at least in the military context (Newman 1999). Allegations surrounding President Clinton's behavior toward his female subordinates rekindled the nation's interest in the issue.

Within the public sector more broadly, the number of sexual harassment charges filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and with state and local fair employment practices agencies around the country totaled 15,836 in 2000, up from 10,532 in 1992 (EEOC 2001). A multistate study of upper-level public administrators in state agencies reported that 6 percent to 16 per-

cent of administrative-level female public administrators have experienced unwanted sexual advances in connection with their work. The same study reported that up to 24 percent of the women had experienced requests for sexual favors, up to 36 percent offensive physical contact, and up to 57 percent offensive verbal behavior (Kelly 1995, 196).

At the federal level, the incidence of sexual harassment is widespread and pervasive across agencies. The latest

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study by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB 1995) examined the nature and extent of sexual harassment in the federal government. By any measure, its findings are staggering—44 percent of female respondents and 19 percent of male respondents reported some form of *unwanted sexual attention* during the preceding two years. These rates are similar to those reported in the MSPB's 1980 and 1987 studies.<sup>1</sup> The 1995 MSPB study defined such sexual attention broadly and, beyond strictly legal parameters, as occurring in situations ranging from actual or attempted rape or assault to uninvited and unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions.<sup>2</sup> More narrowly, 15 percent of all respondents (25 percent of women and 6 percent of males) in the 1995 MSPB study reported they had "personally been the victim of *sexual harassment* on a job in the Federal Government" (question 39, emphasis added).<sup>3</sup>

We note with some alarm that the incidence of sexual harassment apparently has not decreased over time, despite research into and training on sexual harassment. It would seem that sexual harassment training, which has been implemented across a wide range of public-sector employment settings, remains largely unable to effect positive change. The MSPB study's authors conclude, in part, that "[d]espite very widespread training and information efforts that have successfully raised workforce sensitivity to the issues surrounding sexual harassment, the persistence of this amount of unwanted sexual attention in the Federal workplace suggests that the government's programs to eradicate the problem *need some serious reexamination*" (MSPB 1995, viii, emphasis added).

The purpose of this article is to begin such a reexamination. Using the most recent data from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, we explore a number of questions about sexual harassment in the federal government workplace to shed light on core concerns and to lay a foundation for subsequent research in this area. Our findings identify the types of workers who are most likely to be targets of sexual harassment, the types of workers most likely to be accused of harassment, and factors that influence workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of agency sexual harassment training. We conclude, in part, that a one-size-fits-all training approach may no longer be tenable.

## Research on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Harassment Training

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, research documented the range and scope of sexual harassment (Baldrige and MacLean 1980; Fitzgerald et al. 1988; Reese and Lindenberg 1999; MSPB 1981, 1988, 1995). Research on sexual harassment has been undertaken from multiple foci. A number of studies have examined workers' perceptions

of sexual harassment (Terpstra and Baker 1986; Baker, Terpstra, and Larntz 1990; Cohen and Gutek 1985; Pryor and Day 1985; Pryor 1985; Baugh 1997). This research reveals a number of factors—such as sex, religiosity, and the proportion of women in the work group—that affect the perception of harassing behaviors and that, in turn, may lead to conflict and misunderstanding (Biviano 1997). Moreover, the relationship between sexual harassment and power, aggression (Pryor 1992; Ely 1995; Bargh et al. 1995; Moorman and Fountroy 1992; Pryor and Stoller 1994), and gender (Riger 1992; Kelly and Stambaugh 1992; Guy 1993; Newman 1995; Berdahl, Magley, and Waldo 1996; Baker, Terpstra, and Cutler 1990) have been examined rigorously.

Much of this literature shares a common prescriptive conclusion—namely, that training should be a core component of any sexual harassment policy. Sexual harassment training takes many forms. For example, the differences in perception between the sexes are usually addressed in training programs that seek to establish a clear definition of what will and what will not be tolerated in the workplace (Lindenberg and Reese 1996). Variations in emphasis notwithstanding, most sexual harassment training occurs as a one-time event and follows a relatively standard script, reflecting organizational concern for the legal liabilities associated with the occurrence of behavior that violates EEOC guidelines.

Several studies have been conducted on the effects of sexual harassment training programs on awareness, personal prevention, behavioral changes (Barak 1994; Gilbert, Heesacker, and Gannon 1991; Licata and Poovich 1987), and perceptual expertise (Moyer and Nath 1998; Blakely, Blakely, and Moorman 1998). In a recent study, Biviano (1997) evaluated the effectiveness of training programs in developing an understanding of the definition of sexual harassment and the roles of employers, supervisors, and employees in its prevention. In his report, Biviano suggests that a consensus on what constitutes sexual harassment would likely result in improved communication and behavior, in turn leading to fewer incidents of sexual harassment. Indeed, much of the literature on sexual harassment training indicates that training should establish a clear definition of sexual harassment and promote the development of an organizational consensus on what constitutes harassing behaviors. This creation of a common starting point may be the principal benefit of training.

While the arguments for sexual harassment training are reasonable, they are subject to challenge and remain largely unsupported by empirical evidence (Fitzgerald and Shullman 1993; Newman 1995; Pryor and McKinney 1995). Only a handful of published studies have assessed the effects of sexual harassment training empirically (Beauvais 1986; Thomann, Strickland, and Gibbons 1989;

Maurizo and Rogers 1992). However, these pioneering studies permit only limited conclusions because of their design and other limitations (Moyer and Nath 1998).

Despite nagging questions about the efficacy of sexual harassment training, private and public organizations are spending a great deal of time and money on it. For example, Ford Motor Company's recent \$7.75 million settlement with as many as 900 women calls for sensitivity training at Ford plants across the nation, at a cost estimated by the EEOC to be \$10 million (Robinson 1999). Furthermore, at every organizational level, every federal government agency provides sexual harassment training (MSPB 1995, xi). While most agencies know whether such training is popular or unpopular with participants, they generally do not know what kind of training works best, what parts of the training curriculum are effective, why incidence rates vary by agency, or whether any of the training has a negative effect on some employees (MSPB 1995, xi–xii). Training goes on with the presumption that it is doing some good. In recognition of this apparent dilemma, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board recommends the “training content should be revised if it is found to make no appreciable difference in preventing or stopping sexual harassment” (MSPB 1995, xii). Generic programs aimed at an agency's entire workforce may be missing the mark. Although research indicates that sexual harassment training may heighten awareness and clarify definitions, the questions of whether it deters harassment or whether trainees think it is helpful remain largely unanswered.

## Research Questions

In the present study, we focus on a set of basic questions about sexual harassment in the federal government workplace:

1. What factors influence the likelihood that a federal worker will receive unwanted sexual attention? We assess the influence of worker characteristics, agency location, daily work setting, and the nature of agency sexual harassment training.
2. What types of workers—defined by demographic and job characteristics—are most likely to be accused of sexual harassment?
3. What factors influence federal workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of agency sexual harassment training? We assess the influence of both worker characteristics and receipt of unwanted sexual attention in the workplace.

## Methodology and Data

We obtained the raw data file of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's 1994 survey (MSPB 1995).<sup>4</sup> In April 1994, the board sent survey questionnaires to a random sample of almost 13,200 federal employees situated in 22

departments and agencies nationwide. The response rate was 61 percent, with a total of 8,081 questionnaires returned. The survey methodology is detailed in the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board's study, and the appendix contains a brief statistical overview of variables that we incorporate in our analyses. Whereas the board's report is based on frequency analyses and descriptive, bivariate examinations, we present multivariate models that enable us to assess the *relative* importance of a number of independent variables.

From a social science perspective, the major limitation of the report is its failure to account for the concept of statistical control. To illustrate, women are more likely than men to be victims of sexual harassment in the federal workplace. No doubt, this descriptive fact is tremendously important. But we also know that the gender of federal workers is correlated with such factors as pay grade and job type. What accounts for female workers' greater likelihood of receiving unwanted sexual attention? Is it primarily a function of being a woman in the federal workforce, regardless of other characteristics? Alternatively, women's elevated risk may be largely a by-product of their tendency to be located in lower-status and lower-paying jobs. Failing to account for multiple factors simultaneously (that is, failing to control for other variables), bivariate analyses cannot provide the answer. To better understand why some types of workers are more likely to be sexually harassed, we need to migrate to multivariate models.

## Dependent Variables

We created a dichotomous variable, *Sexually Harassed* (based on question 20 of the 1994 MSPB survey), to indicate whether the respondent had received “uninvited and unwanted sexual attention” during the last 24 months from someone where he or she worked in the federal government.<sup>5</sup> This question's treatment of “uninvited and unwanted sexual attention” refers to the range of behaviors delineated previously. Thirty-three percent of respondents reported some form of “uninvited and unwanted sexual attention” in the previous 24 months.

We also created a dichotomous variable, *Accused Harasser* (based on question 40 of the 1994 MSPB survey), to indicate whether “anyone in the last 24 months said that the respondent had sexually harassed them.” Only 1.2 percent of respondents indicated that someone had accused them of harassment.

Finally, we created a four-point ordinal variable, *Effectiveness of Sexual Harassment Training* (based on question 15 of the 1994 MSPB survey) to gauge respondents' perceptions of the extent to which they feel their agency's sexual harassment training helps to reduce or prevent sexual harassment in their organization. The answers ranged from “no extent” (coded 0) to “a great extent” (coded 3).

In our examinations of influences on the dichotomous variables, we estimated binary logit models. In our examinations of influences on the ordinal variable, we estimated ordered logit models.<sup>6</sup>

## Independent Variables

**Worker Characteristics.** Our specifications take into account a variety of worker characteristics: sex, education, age, marital status, pay grade, and job type.<sup>7</sup> *Female* is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for women. For education, age, marital status, pay grade, and job type, respectively, we coded a series of dichotomous (dummy) variables based on the respondent categories in the MSPB survey:

- Education—*Less than High School*, *High School* (high school diploma or GED), *High School Plus* (high school diploma plus some technical training or apprenticeship), *Some College*, *College* (B.A., B.S., or some other bachelor's degree), *College Plus* (some graduate school), and *Advanced Degree* (graduate or professional degree)
- Age—*16–24 Years Old*, *25–34 Years Old*, *35–44 Years Old*, *45–54 Years Old*, and *55 Plus Years Old*
- Marital status—*Married*, *Single*, *Divorced*, and *Widowed*
- Pay grade—*Pay Grade 1–4*, *Pay Grade 5–10*, *Pay Grade 11–12*, *Pay Grade 13–15*, and *Pay Grade 15 Plus*
- Job type—*Trainee*, *Blue Collar* (blue-collar or service job), *Clerical* (office, clerical, or technician), *Professional* (professional or scientific), *Administrative* (administrative or management), and *Other Job*.

**Agency Location.** We created a series of dichotomous variables to account for the agency in which the respondent works: *Agriculture*, *Commerce*, *Air Force*, *Army*, *Navy*, *Other DOD* (Department of Defense), *Education*, *Energy*, *EPA* (Environmental Protection Agency), *GSA* (General Services Administration), *HHS* (Health and Human Services), *HUD* (Housing and Urban Development), *Interior*, *Justice*, *Labor*, *NASA* (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), *OPM* (Office of Personnel Management), *SBA* (Small Business Administration), *State*, *Transportation*, *Treasury*, *VA* (Veteran Affairs), and *Other Agency*.

**Work Situation.** We created a series of dichotomous variables to capture some aspects of a respondent's immediate work environment. Specifically, we created a dichotomous variable for male supervisor (*Male Supervisor*) and a series of dichotomous variables to gauge the ratio of men to women in the respondent's daily work setting (*All Men*, *More Men*, *Equal Men*, *More Women*, and *All Women*).

**Agency Training.** Finally, we created a series of dichotomous variables to gauge which workers received sexual harassment awareness training in the respondent's agency: *Supervisor Training* (only supervisors and managers receive training), *Employee Training* (only nonsupervisory employees receive training), *Full Training* (all employees receive training), and *No Training*.<sup>8</sup>

## Results

### Binary Logit Models of Sexual Harassment

Table 1 presents the results of a baseline, multivariate logit model of sexual harassment (see model 1.A).<sup>9</sup> This model assesses the relationship between workers' demographic characteristics (sex, education, age, marital status, pay grade, and job type) and their likelihood of having been harassed in the previous 24 months. The principal finding is that women are much more likely to report having been harassed than are men, controlling for other factors.<sup>10</sup> To illustrate the magnitude of this effect, the estimated probability of a "typical" female worker reporting that she has received unwanted sexual attention is 0.51, whereas the estimated probability of a male counterpart is only 0.22.<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, other important influences are age and marital status. Those who are 16–24 years old are most likely to report having been harassed, and those 55 years of age and over are least likely to report having been harassed. Generally speaking, younger workers receive more unwanted sexual attention. Other things being equal, single and divorced workers report a higher level of unwanted sexual attention. The other worker characteristics (education, pay grade, and job type) also demonstrate noteworthy influence. It appears that, relative to their less educated counterparts, those with some college education and above are more likely to report having been harassed. Those at higher pay grades are also associated with an elevated likelihood. Finally, trainees and those in blue-collar positions reported higher levels of unwanted sexual attention than did those in other jobs, controlling for other factors.

Most of these findings are consistent with the conventional wisdom about sexual harassment. Who is most likely to receive unwanted and uninvited sexual attention in the federal workplace? A young, single or divorced woman in a low-status job. Despite the increased levels of training and the attention that has been focused on sexual harassment in recent decades, all too predictable patterns remain. However, the picture of harassment in the federal workforce reveals some nuanced causal patterns. Controlling for other factors, highly educated and well-paid workers are more likely to relay that they have received "unwanted and uninvited" sexual attention. Likely these reports are a function of heightened sensitivity to these types of behaviors. Gauging the relative importance of the explanatory factors in model 1.A, difference of chi-square (log-likelihood ratio) tests indicate that sex is the most important influence on the likelihood of receipt of unwanted sexual attention, followed in order by age, marital status, education, job type, and pay grade.

Does the level of sexual harassment vary markedly across agencies? For example, scandals in recent years

**Table 1 Binary Logit Models of Sexual Harassment**

Independent variable	Model 1.A		Model 1.B		Model 1.C		Model 1.D	
	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value
Female	1.29**	20.24	1.30**	20.18	1.31**	20.28	1.31**	17.98
High school	.251	.80	.184	.59	.171	.54	.210	.60
High school plus	.457	1.48	.381	1.22	.364	1.16	.304	.88
Some college	.772**	2.52	.713**	2.32	.695*	2.25	.630*	1.85
College	.756**	2.42	.695*	2.21	.683*	2.16	.541	1.56
College plus	.889**	2.75	.830**	2.56	.799**	2.45	.709*	1.97
Advanced degree	.711*	2.23	.657*	2.05	.666*	2.07	.508	1.43
25-34 years old	-.318*	-1.81	-.332*	-1.87	-.308*	-1.74	-.418*	-1.99
35-44 years old	-.327*	-1.86	-.355*	-1.99	-.289	-1.64	-.391*	-1.86
45-54 years old	-.704**	-3.93	-.736**	-4.05	-.668**	-3.70	-.854**	-4.00
55 plus years old	-1.31**	-6.66	-1.35**	-6.75	-1.28**	-6.45	-1.37**	-5.92
Single	.405**	5.54	.392**	5.29	.404**	5.48	.458**	5.48
Divorced	.511**	6.61	.507**	6.50	.517**	6.63	.580**	6.57
Widowed	.114	.55	.089	.42	.096	.46	.095	.40
Pay grade 5-10	.120	.94	.178	1.37	.127	.98	.252*	1.65
Pay grade 11-12	.142	.98	.218	1.47	.145	.99	.252	1.48
Pay grade 13-15	.255	1.62	.338*	2.08	.236	1.47	.481**	2.60
Pay grade 15 plus	.726*	2.02	.834*	2.31	.684*	1.89	.883*	2.12
Blue collar	-.225	-.83	-.252	-.92	-.306	-1.11	-.428	-1.33
Clerical	-.685**	-2.62	-.695**	-2.64	-.690**	-2.61	-.906**	-2.90
Professional	-.832**	-3.17	-.859**	-3.24	-.869**	-3.27	-1.02**	-3.28
Administrative	-.654**	-2.47	-.690**	-2.59	-.640**	-2.39	-.874**	-2.79
Other job	-.871**	-2.82	-.892**	-2.87	-.883**	-2.83	-1.06**	-2.87
Male supervisor					-.140*	-2.04		
More men					.044	.31		
Equal men					-.170	-1.16		
More women					-.281*	-1.86		
All women					-.305	-.86		
Employee training							-.178	-.74
Supervisor training							-.286*	-2.02
Full training							-.417**	-3.49
Agriculture			-.187	-1.02				
Commerce			.189	.99				
Air Force			.136	.75				
Army			.232	1.29				
Navy			.171	.88				
Other Department of Defense			.151	.84				
Education			.075	.38				
Energy			-.046	-.26				
Environmental Protection Agency			.227	1.19				
General Services Administration			.303	1.64				
Health and Human Services			-.142	-.72				
Housing and Urban Development			.294	1.51				
Interior			.298*	1.68				
Justice			.129	.73				
Labor			.113	.59				
NASA			.023	.13				
Office of Personnel Management			.270	1.36				
Small Business Administration			-.044	-.23				
State			.219	1.06				
Transportation			.161	.88				
Treasury			.338*	1.93				
Veterans Affairs			.318*	1.78				
(constant)	-1.19**	-2.82	-1.29**	-2.95	-.937*	-2.10	-.501	-1.00
LR chi-square (d.f.) =	863.4** (23)		882.1** (45)		876.9** (28)		730.2** (26)	
N =	6,496		6,464		6,434		5,010	

\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$  (1-tailed)

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$  (1-tailed)

**Note:** For purposes of estimation and statistical comparison in the various models, the reference categories are male, less than high school, 16-24 years old, married, pay grade 1-4, trainee, other agency, female supervisor, all men, and no training.

suggest the possibility that workers (female workers in particular) in defense agencies may be located in an especially hostile environment. To assess whether the likelihood of harassment varies from agency to agency, we estimated a model that introduces the series of dichotomous variables for agency location into the baseline specification outlined previously (see model 1.B). The results do *not* reveal a tremendous amount of agency-to-agency variation, controlling for other factors. Providing an overall evaluative summary, a difference of chi-square (log-likelihood ratio) test between a “full” model with agency dummies (model 1.B) and a “restricted” baseline model without (model 1.A) does *not* reveal that the set of agency dummies provides significant explanatory leverage. Although there is some evidence to suggest that the likelihood of harassment is slightly lower in such departments as Agriculture and Health and Human Services and slightly elevated in such departments as the Treasury and Veterans Affairs, our overarching conclusion reflects a null finding—agency context is not a principal determinant of harassment likelihood. Perhaps of greatest interest, there is no evidence to support the conclusion that defense agencies are outliers.

The third model of table 1 (model 1.C) builds on the baseline specification and introduces several indicators of immediate work environment—specifically, a dichotomous variable for a male supervisor and a series of dichotomous variables for the ratio of men to women in the daily work setting. Taken as a set, these workplace variables do not demonstrate dramatic influence, other things held constant. If anything, workers are a bit less likely to report having been harassed if they have a male supervisor. Although the coefficients gauging male-to-female ratio are consistent with the conclusion that work settings with proportionally larger numbers of women are associated with less harassment, these variables demonstrate marginal impact.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, table 1 presents the results of a fourth model (model 1.D) that introduces measures on the nature of agency sexual harassment training—specifically, measures of what types of employees, if any, within the agency receive training.<sup>13</sup> The coefficient estimates support the conclusion that training reduces the likelihood that agency workers will receive unwanted sexual attention, other things being equal. As proponents of training would hope, “full training” (that is, training of both employees and supervisors) appears to be the most effective option. For example, relative to that of her counterpart in an agency without training, the estimated probability of a typical female worker reporting unwanted sexual attention in an agency with full training is 0.10 lower.<sup>14</sup>

## Binary Logit Model of Accusation as a Sexual Harasser

Table 2 reports the results of a baseline logit model of whether a worker has been accused of being a harasser within the previous 24 months.<sup>15</sup> Again, the independent variables gauge workers’ demographic characteristics: sex, education, age, marital status, pay grade, and job type. The emergent picture is largely consistent with received wisdom. The results indicate that, other things being equal, men are more likely to have been accused of harassment. Another significant finding is that, relative to married individuals, those who are divorced and widowed are more likely to have been accused of harassment. Interestingly, single people do *not* differ from married individuals in terms of their likelihood of having been accused, controlling for other factors. Some significant differences also exist between workers in different age categories. For example, relative to those who are 55 years of age and older, those who are either 16–24 years old or 35–44 years old are significantly more likely to have been accused. The sets of variables associated with education, pay grade, and job type do not emerge as significant predictors.<sup>16</sup> Again, perhaps

**Table 2 Binary Logit Model of Accusation as a Sexual Harasser**

Independent variable	Coefficient	t-value
Female	-1.18**	-4.26
High school	.529	.49
High school plus	-.568	-.51
Some college	-.019	-.02
College	-.294	-.27
College plus	.078	.07
Advanced degree	-.070	-.06
25–34 years old	-1.18	-1.45
35–44 years old	-.532	-.68
45–54 years old	-.920	-1.16
55 plus years old	-1.44*	-1.67
Single	-.097	-.27
Divorced	.731**	2.46
Widowed	1.45*	2.31
Pay grade 5–10	-.390	-.68
Pay grade 11–12	.444	.72
Pay grade 13–15	.462	.70
Pay grade 15 plus	1.23	1.24
Blue collar	.660	.84
Clerical	.257	.33
Professional	.516	.68
Administrative	.366	.48
(constant)	-3.72**	-2.55
LR chi-square (d.f.) =	56.5** (22)	
N =	6,380	

\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$  (1-tailed)  
\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$  (1-tailed)  
**Note:** For purposes of estimation and statistical comparison, the reference categories are male, less than high school, 16–24 years old, married, pay grade 1–4, and trainee/other job.  
Since no trainees were accused of being a harasser, we combined those workers in the “other job” category with “trainees” to form the suppressed reference category.

the most important overarching finding is that very few federal workers (only 1.2 percent) reported that they had been accused of sexual harassment.

### Ordered Logit Models of Perception of Effectiveness of Agency Sexual Harassment Training

Finally, we provide some initial examination of influences on federal workers' perceptions of whether their agency's sexual harassment training "helps to reduce or prevent sexual harassment." Table 3 presents the estimates from an ordered logit model in which the perception of effectiveness of agency training (measured on an ordinal, four-point scale) is regressed on the series of dichotomous variables that gauge worker characteristics (see model 3.A).<sup>17</sup> On average, men and older workers perceive agency training as being more effective than do women and younger workers, other things being equal. There appears to be some tendency for those with more education, at rela-

tively high pay grades, and who are divorced to perceive agency training as less effective. Although there appears to be some tendency for those most likely to be harassed (for instance, women and younger and divorced workers) to perceive the effects of training less positively, this generalization does not extend to single workers.

We also estimated a follow-up model (model 3.B) that introduces an independent variable that is a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent received unwanted sexual attention in the previous 24 months. As one would expect, the harassment dummy exerts a powerful influence on the perceived effectiveness of training. Those who report having been harassed rather recently do not believe that agency training is effective. Controlling for harassment, the direct influence of sex disappears, indicating that the influence of sex on the perceived effectiveness of agency training is principally indirect. Women are more likely to be harassed and, subsequently, are more likely to perceive agency training as ineffective. However, once respondents' recent experiences with harassment are taken into account, women's perceptions of training effectiveness do not differ markedly from those of men. Somewhat surprisingly, the previously noted influences of education, pay grade, and age remain intact. For example, regardless of their recent personal experiences with harassment, older workers report more favorably on the effectiveness of training. Finally, other things being equal (including the harassment indicator), single workers are most likely to perceive agency training in a positive light.

### Discussion

Our analyses have shed some light on basic questions pertaining to the environment of sexual harassment in the federal government workplace. Who is most likely to be harassed? Worker characteristics are the principal influence on the likelihood that a worker will receive unwanted sexual attention. All too predictably, young, single or divorced females in low-status jobs are most likely to receive this type of attention. Broadly speaking, power in the workplace (and the lack thereof) still matters. This profile at the federal level is roughly comparable to its state-level counterpart (Kelly 1995). For example, our results regarding the role of marriage in the federal workforce are consistent with Kelly's (1995, 200) state-level conclusions: "Although being married did not at all preclude the possibility of being harassed, not being married clearly raised the probability of experiencing more severe sexual harassment. Apparently, marriage still connotes that a woman 'belongs to' someone else and, therefore, adds some additional protection from harassment by the men with whom women work."

Perhaps a function of heightened sensitivity to unwanted attention, highly educated and well-paid workers are also

**Table 3 Ordered Logit Models of Perception of Effectiveness of Agency Sexual Harassment Training**

Independent variable	Model 3.A		Model 3.B	
	Coefficient	t-value	Coefficient	t-value
Sexually harassed			-.748**	-12.03
Female	-.216**	-3.60	-.028	-.45
High school	-.449*	-1.66	-.471*	-1.69
High school plus	-.524*	-1.97	-.512*	-1.87
Some college	-.713**	-2.72	-.671**	-2.48
College	-.694**	-2.58	-.646**	-2.33
College plus	-.918**	-3.29	-.881**	-3.07
Advanced degree	-.757**	-2.75	-.745**	-2.64
25-34 years old	.344*	1.89	.211	1.12
35-44 years old	.543**	2.98	.419*	2.23
45-54 years old	.946**	5.12	.778**	4.07
55 plus years old	1.12**	5.67	.881**	4.33
Single	.114	1.52	.173*	2.28
Divorced	-.128	-1.62	-.051	-.64
Widowed	-.018	-.08	.066	.30
Pay grade 5-10	-.311**	-2.39	-.311**	-2.34
Pay grade 11-12	-.491**	-3.40	-.467**	-3.16
Pay grade 13-15	-.720**	-4.63	-.684**	-4.30
Pay grade 15 plus	-.546	-1.64	-.442	-1.31
Blue collar	-.212	-.81	-.290	-1.06
Clerical	.033	.13	-.095	-.36
Professional	-.132	-.52	-.283	-1.07
Administrative	.078	.31	-.058	-.22
Other job	-.073	-.24	-.258	-.84
_cut 1	-3.75		-4.19	
_cut 2	-1.51		-1.92	
_cut 3	.754		.406	

LR chi-square (d.f.) = 217.8\*\* (23)                      362.0\*\* (24)  
 N = 4,866    4,745

\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$  (1-tailed)

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$  (1-tailed)

**Note:** For purposes of estimation and statistical comparison in the models, the reference categories are male, less than high school, 16-24 years old, married, pay grade 1-4, trainee, and not sexually harassed.

more likely to report its receipt, other things being equal. Those responsible for designing training responses to sexual harassment need to be cognizant of the types of workers most likely to be targets and structure training programs accordingly. Such restructuring represents a departure from traditional training approaches that tend to follow a relatively standard script that emphasizes avoidance of litigation.

Contextual factors demonstrate lesser influence. Controlling for other factors, the likelihood of worker harassment does not vary markedly from agency to agency. Furthermore, the effects of various aspects of day-to-day work environment (for instance, sex of supervisor and male-to-female ratio in daily work setting) are not dramatic. However, we find that the type of sexual harassment training in the agency exerts a noteworthy influence on the likelihood of harassment. Our empirical evidence supports the conclusion that an inclusive approach (that is, the training of all workers) is the most effective. That workers at lower organizational levels experience more sexual harassment than do those at supervisory and management levels reinforces the point that training needs to take place at all levels and encompass all types of workers.

Who is most likely to be accused of harassment? A divorced, 40-year-old male fits the profile of the federal worker most likely to be accused. Obviously, the structure and mission of training should take this into account. However, we suspect that most persons who subject coworkers to uninvited sexual attention are never accused of sexual harassment and thus would not be captured by the MSPB measure. The sheer magnitude of the level of harassment suggests that a narrow segment of the workforce is not the problem—although some segments, no doubt, contribute much more than their proportional share. For example, we doubt that the 1 percent or so of workers who report having been accused of harassment are responsible for all of the harassment. Again, this conclusion points to the importance of widespread training.

Unfortunately, despite the federal government's extensive education and training efforts to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual harassment continues to cloud the work experience of many federal employees. What factors influence workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of agency sexual harassment training? As one would suspect, there is a marked tendency for those who are most likely to receive unwanted sexual attention to perceive that training programs are not effective. For example, young female workers are less inclined to perceive agency training as being effective. Furthermore, those who report they actually have received unwanted sexual attention in recent months perceive training programs as being less effective.

Both our conclusions and those of the 1995 MSPB re-

port underscore the need to continue to work on and research the problem. Again, the percentage of federal workers reporting they have been sexually harassed has remained nearly the same in each of the MSPB's studies over the past 20 years (MSPB 1995). The results of these cross-sectional surveys point to a dilemma in evaluating sexual harassment training over time. Do reports of increased levels of sexual harassment stem from an increase in harassment or from a heightened sense of awareness of the problem and an increased willingness on the part of victims to report occurrences (MSPB 1995)? Viewed from the latter perspective, the fact that the rate of sexual harassment reports has not decreased can be perceived as a sign of training effectiveness and progress toward a less gendered workplace environment. Perhaps researchers should view favorably an increase in the amount of reported harassment as an indicator that the workforce has been educated as to what constitutes sexual harassment and is now reporting it (MSPB 1995).

This caveat notwithstanding, our focused look at the most recent cross-section of data raises concerns and leads us to believe that a reevaluation of training programs is clearly in order. A one-size-fits-all training approach may no longer be tenable, if it ever was. We believe that our delineation of the relative importance of the factors that structure the likelihood that a federal worker will receive unwanted sexual attention and those factors that structure workers' perception of the effectiveness of agency training should be taken into account in such a reconsideration.

In summary, this article has attempted to raise our understanding of sexual harassment and the training response. Efforts to revise training programs would benefit from recognition of our major findings. To review, these include: (1) single or divorced, young females in low-status jobs are those workers most likely to be harassed; (2) however, even among highly educated and well-paid workers, women are more likely than men to be harassed; (3) a divorced, 40-year-old male fits the profile of the federal worker most likely to be accused of harassment; (4) men and older workers perceive agency training as more effective than do women and younger workers; and (5) training of both employees and supervisors appears to be the most effective option.

The public sector's investment in training continues unabated. Although the severity of occurrences of sexual harassment may have decreased, their number shows no signs of diminishing. When one takes into account the likelihood of underreporting of such occurrences (DuBois et al. 1999), the pervasiveness of the problem becomes even more pronounced. This situation calls for a reassessment of the efficacy of existing training programs and for new and creative ways of thinking about sexual harassment training. This article provides a step toward meeting this challenge.

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## Notes

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1. The sexual harassment rates of the 1980 MSPB study are 42 percent for women and 15 percent for men (MSPB 1981, 3). The rates of the 1987 MSPB are 42 percent for women and 14 percent for men (MSPB 1988, 2).
2. Between these two extremes, "unwanted sexual attention" also occurs in any of the following situations (outlined in question 20 of the 1994 MSPB survey): stalking; uninvited and unwanted pressure for sexual favors; uninvited and unwanted letters, telephone calls, or materials of a sexual nature; and uninvited and unwanted pressure for dates (MSPB 1995, 61).
3. This question was not included in the 1980 and 1987 surveys. The distinction between "unwanted sexual attention" and "sexual harassment" is noteworthy. Indeed, the language of the three studies is somewhat inconsistent and potentially confusing to respondents. For example, in attempting to capture the frequency and type of sexual harassment in the workplace, the following language is included in one or more of the three survey instruments: "sexual harassment," "uninvited behaviors and actions," "uninvited and unwanted sexual attention," "unwanted sexual attention," "uninvited sexual attention," and "being sexually bothered or sexually bothering others."
4. These are the most recent and comprehensive data on sexual harassment collected by the MSPB. Our literature search did not uncover any research derived from these data.
5. Given the nature of some of our later models and tests, we focus on reports of "uninvited and unwanted sexual attention" in workers' current agency.
6. With a dichotomous dependent variable, a binary logit model is preferable to a linear regression model (that is, a linear probability model). Linear probability models suffer from heteroscedasticity, inefficient estimates, biased standard errors (and thus incorrect test statistics), non-normally distributed errors, and the possibility of nonsensical probability predictions that are negative or greater than one. Binary logit models avoid these problems. Although most researchers use the linear regression model when they have an ordinal dependent variable, the ordered logit model is a preferable alternative. Whereas the linear regression model makes the implicit assumption that intervals between adjacent categories of the dependent variable are equal, the ordered logit model—which is designed explicitly for ordinal outcomes—does not make this assumption and avoids the (potential) bias that is its by-product (McKelvey and Zavoina 1975; Winship and Mare 1984; Long 1997).
7. Obviously, we could only consider those characteristics measured in the survey. For example, there were no questions on race or ethnicity.
8. These variables are based on question 11 of the MSPB survey and reflect the *respondent's* report of agency training.
9. For purposes of our data analysis and write-up of results from the 1994 MSPB survey, we equate "sexual harassment" with receipt of "uninvited and unwanted sexual attention during the last 24 months from someone where you work(ed) in the Federal Government" (question 20 of the 1994 MSPB survey).
10. We also estimated robust standard errors for each of the models. Without exception, the *t*-values that accompany these robust standard errors are quite similar to the conventional *t*-values reported in tables 1–3. Perhaps most important, reliance on robust standard errors would not change any of our substantive conclusions.
11. This "typical" worker is a married, college-educated 40-year-old with a pay grade of 12 and who is in an administrative position. For some types of workers, the estimated probability of "uninvited and unwanted" sexual attention is extraordinarily high. For example, this estimated probability is a staggering 0.80 for a single, 20-year-old female with some college education and who is in a training program at a pay grade of 5.
12. However, a difference of chi-square (log-likelihood ratio) test reveals that, considered as a set, the variables gauging the ratio of male to female co-workers provide significant explanatory leverage ( $p < 0.01$ ).
13. The smaller *N* for this model reflects the sizable number of respondents who "didn't know" or were "unsure" for whom their agency provides training.
14. It is worth highlighting that these *negative* coefficients emerge despite the likelihood that training also heightens the awareness of and sensitivity to unwanted sexual attention of both employees and supervisors. Furthermore, it is plausible that "full training" efforts may have been focused on agencies with a poor record on this issue. It follows that these likely are conservative estimates of the actual effectiveness of employee training. The typical worker in our illustration is a 40-year-old, married female with a college education and who is in an administrative position at a pay grade of 12.

15. Because only 78 of the 6,380 respondents (1.2 percent) reported they had been accused of being a harasser, this dependent variable is quite skewed and is associated with restricted variance. There are likely some respondents who had been accused of harassment but failed to indicate so on the survey. However, those selected to take part in the survey were guaranteed strict confidentiality and were encouraged to be “frank and honest” in their responses. In terms of concerns about (potential) biases in our multivariate results due to underreporting, we do not have any indication or reason to suspect that certain types of respondents among the universe of those accused of harassment were more inclined to underreport. Furthermore, our findings pertaining to the influences on the likelihood of having been accused do have face validity.
16. A difference of chi-square (log-likelihood ratio) test confirms this conclusion for each of the associated sets of variables.
17. Long (1997) provides an accessible introduction to ordered logit. The markedly smaller *N* for these models reflect the sizable number of respondents who “didn’t know” or were “unsure” as to whether training helps to reduce or prevent sexual harassment in their organization.

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## Appendix Statistical Summary of Variables

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
16-24 years old	7,292	.026		0	1
25-34 years old	7,292	.201		0	1
35-44 years old	7,292	.318		0	1
45-54 years old	7,292	.323		0	1
55 plus years old	7,292	.132		0	1
Accused harasser	7,602	.012		0	1
Administrative	7,171	.240		0	1
Advanced degree	6,886	.156		0	1
Agriculture	7,803	.052		0	1
Air Force	7,803	.050		0	1
All men	7,202	.054		0	1
All women	7,202	.007		0	1
Army	7,803	.050		0	1
Blue collar	7,171	.128		0	1
Clerical	7,171	.283		0	1
College	6,886	.212		0	1
College plus	6,886	.087		0	1
Commerce	7,803	.038		0	1
Divorced	7,178	.159		0	1
Education	7,803	.033		0	1
Effectiveness of training	5,785	1.91	.789	0	3
Employee training	6,080	.024		0	1
Energy	7,803	.055		0	1
Environmental Protection Agency	7,803	.036		0	1
Equal men	7,202	.301		0	1
Female	7,819	.545		0	1
Full training	6,080	.768		0	1
General Services Administration	7,803	.045		0	1
Health and Human Services	7,803	.038		0	1
High school	6,886	.096		0	1
High school plus	6,886	.133		0	1
Housing and Urban Development	7,803	.036		0	1
Interior	7,803	.050		0	1
Justice	7,803	.050		0	1
Labor	7,803	.037		0	1
Less than high school	6,886	.014		0	1
Male supervisor	7,136	.739		0	1
Married	7,178	.621		0	1
More men	7,202	.391		0	1
More women	7,202	.246		0	1
NASA	7,803	.046		0	1
Navy	7,803	.039		0	1
No training	6,080	.066		0	1
Office of Personnel Management	7,803	.032		0	1
Other agency	7,803	.051		0	1
Other Department of Defense	7,803	.049		0	1
Other job	7,171	.032		0	1
Pay grade 1-4	7,776	.058		0	1
Pay grade 5-10	7,776	.460		0	1
Pay grade 11-12	7,776	.275		0	1
Pay grade 13-15	7,776	.199		0	1
Pay grade 15 plus	7,776	.007		0	1
Professional	7,171	.305		0	1
Small Business Administration	7,803	.039		0	1
Sexually harassed	7,738	.331		0	1
Single	7,178	.200		0	1
Some college	6,886	.302		0	1
State	7,803	.029		0	1
Supervisor training	6,080	.138		0	1
Trainee	7,171	.012		0	1
Transportation	7,803	.045		0	1
Treasury	7,803	.051		0	1
Veterans Affairs	7,803	.048		0	1
Widowed	7,178	.020		0	1

