

## **Effects of Type of Coping Response, Setting, and Social Context on Reactions to Sexual Harassment**

**Janet Sigal,<sup>1,3</sup> Jane Braden-Maguire,<sup>1</sup> Ivy Patt,<sup>1</sup> Carl Goodrich,<sup>1</sup> and Carrol S. Perrino<sup>2</sup>**

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Male and female undergraduates from a multicultural university (MU) and an historically Black University (HBU) read a scenario in which a student was sexually harassed either by a professor or a workplace supervisor. The student victim's coping response was also varied. Participants rated the victim's behavior as most effective and appropriate when she confronted the harasser directly or reported the harasser's behavior. HBU students judged the harasser as not guilty significantly more often than MU students, but believed that the harasser was less trustworthy than multicultural students did. Women responded significantly more negatively to the blatant sexual harassment scenario than men did. Implications for prevention and interventions are discussed.

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Sexual harassment is a significant problem both in the workplace and in academic settings. Researchers initially focused on the prevalence of sexual harassment. Fitzgerald (1993) suggested that approximately half the population of American women would be targets of sexual harassment in their lifetime, either in school or in the workplace. Classic incidence studies such as the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1981) report and the Gutek (1985) study supported this assumption. Issues of labeling of offensive behaviors as sexual harassment and measurement of sexually harassing behaviors also were examined, both in earlier and recent studies (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999).

In the present study we investigated the effects of type of victim's coping response and type of setting on students' reactions to a sexual harassment scenario. In addition, the present study offers a unique

perspective from which to examine the complex role of racial factors on perceptions of sexual harassment. Direct effects of race on reactions to the harassment scenario were examined, but were augmented by a consideration of the complicating effects of social context. Social context was identified in terms of the racial composition of the two universities that were sampled in this study. Students from a multicultural campus of a New York metropolitan area private university were compared with respondents from an historically Black public university in Maryland. Although the sexual harassment literature has been criticized for focusing primarily on European Americans to the exclusion of various ethnicities (Murrell, 1996), the issue of racial differences in reaction to harassment has been stated in rather simplistic terms. In our study, we will emphasize the importance of the interaction of race and social context in examining reactions to sexual harassment victims' coping responses.

### **Coping Styles**

Previous researchers have examined a variety of coping styles that can be utilized by sexual harassment victims. Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993) suggested that the external or internal nature of

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<sup>1</sup>Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, New Jersey.

<sup>2</sup>Morgan State University, Baltimore Maryland.

<sup>3</sup>To whom correspondence should be addressed at Psychology Department, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, New Jersey 07666; e-mail: janet2822@aol.com.

the coping response is one way to classify these types of responses. A related conceptualization reflects the problem-focused (i.e., external) or emotion-focused (i.e., internal) approach of the victim. A problem-focused approach might include avoiding the harasser, confronting or reporting the aggressor, or seeking social support from friends and colleagues. An emotion-focused approach might involve trivializing the incidents or reconceptualizing the behavior as friendliness or helpfulness. However, another possible classification that is more applicable to the present study is to categorize the coping responses either as active or direct (e.g., confronting the harasser) or as passive or indirect (e.g., ignoring the behavior or seeking social support.)

Although Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993) asserted that there is no absolutely best coping response, sexual harassment consultants and experts often counsel victims to respond directly and assertively by confronting the harasser in person or by letter and stating that the behavior must stop (Bravo & Cassidy, 1992; Petrocelli & Repa, 1994). If this tactic does not work, victims are advised to report the behavior to the harasser's supervisor. However, as Gruber and Smith (1995) found in the workplace, and Rudman, Borgida, and Robertson (1995) found in a university setting, the majority of female sexual harassment victims do not respond assertively either by directly confronting the harasser or reporting the harasser to a supervisor or the organization but instead respond rather passively to the harassment experience.

One major reason why victims do not respond directly in sexual harassment situations is that they fear retaliation by the harasser. In many cases the victim is in a low power position in an organization; it could jeopardize her position and possibility for advancement if she adopted an assertive coping response to the harassing behavior. In fact, Stockdale (1998) determined that sexual harassment victims in the federal government experienced negative outcomes if they responded to the harassment behavior in a direct confrontational manner. Coles (1986) also found that many female state government and private corporate employees who had instituted a sexual harassment complaint to the state either were fired or quit their jobs.

The pattern of findings from the preceding studies appear to present a paradox. If victims respond assertively, their response should effectively reduce or ameliorate the negative consequences of being a target of sexual harassment behaviors. However, stud-

ies have shown that assertive responses potentially produce negative employment-related effects. Therefore, considerable uncertainty exists about the nature of advice that should be given to sexual harassment victims.

One factor that may affect a victim's positive adjustment and resolution of the aversive sexual harassment situation relates to observers' perceptions of the victim's chosen coping response. If the victim experiences social support for a selected coping style, and this support could be translated into more generalized sympathy for the victim and disapproval of the harasser, some of the adverse consequences of the harassment situation may be alleviated. Marin and Guadagno (1999) conducted one of the few studies to examine observers' perceptions of a sexual harassment victim based on her coping response. Participants read a scenario in which a female student either acknowledged that a professor had sexually harassed her or did not perceive the behavior as sexually harassing. Whether or not the victim reported the professor to the university was also varied. The authors found that if the victim had stated that the behavior was sexually harassing and reported the behavior, participants viewed her positively as more assertive but also rated her more negatively in terms of her femininity and trustworthiness.

In the present study, we expanded the types of coping responses, made our scenario more blatantly harassing than that used in the Marin and Guadagno experiment, and examined the perceived effectiveness and appropriateness of the victim's coping response. We predicted that direct and active coping responses (represented by confronting the harasser or reporting the harasser to a supervisor) would be seen as more effective than indirect or passive responses (represented by ignoring the behavior or talking it over with a friend.)

### **Race and Contextual Factors in Perceptions of Sexual Harassment**

Murrell (1996) noted that few studies in the sexual harassment research area have included Women of Color. Studies that have involved diverse samples have produced inconsistent results related to incidence among Black women as opposed to White women (e.g., Gruber & Bjorn, 1986; Wyatt & Riederle, 1995).

We examined the effects of race of respondents on reactions to a sexual harassment scenario in a more

complex manner than previous studies did. In addition to the direct effects of the race of the perceiver, social context effects defined in terms of the racial composition of the universities sampled in the present investigation, were examined. Participants from two different college campuses were included in the study. One setting consisted of a truly multicultural university (MU) composed of European American, African American, Latino/a-American, and Asian American students. The other setting, an historically Black university (HBU), is composed of African American students as well as Black students from other countries. The students at the campuses are similar in socioeconomic status. However, participants at the first sample attend a private, suburban university in the New York metropolitan area, whereas the HBU is a public university in Maryland, a state that borders the South. It is difficult to disentangle race effects from a number of other factors including motivation to attend multicultural as opposed to single-race universities, the possible empowering effects of attending an HBU, and differing socialization experiences at each university. As a result, explaining differences between respondents at the different campuses is speculative. However, based on the work of Shelton and Chavous (1999), who suggested that stereotypes may lead to "trivializing" sexual harassment experiences of Women of Color, one possible prediction is that the HBU students will see the accused harasser as less guilty of sexual harassment than will the multicultural students.

In terms of racial differences in reactions to various strategies designed to cope with sexual harassment, Moore and Webb (1998) found that some African American women in the U.S. Navy who were targets of sexual harassment responded in a direct confrontational manner. Although these women were in a specialized profession, the reasoning behind their preference for direct coping strategies might apply to minority women in general. Because minority women often perceive racism and sexism as intertwined (Murrell, 1996), passive reactions to either discrimination or sexual harassment could lead to more victimization. Therefore, we hypothesized that Black participants overall (in our two samples combined) would show a greater preference for more direct coping styles than would other respondents.

### Context or Setting of Harassing Behavior

Our final variable consisted of a manipulation of the setting of the harassment. A student was either

harassed in an academic or a business setting. Because many respondents are full-time students, or only work part-time, we assumed that they would be able to identify with the student in the academic setting more closely than with the student in the work setting. In a different research area, Konopaske, Elkins, and Phillips (2002) found that female participants showed a bias in favor of female plaintiffs in a sex discrimination case. The authors explained these results by proposing that women identified more with the plaintiff and felt more threatened by sex discrimination than men did. In a similar manner, students might feel more threatened by academic than workplace sexual harassment. Therefore, we hypothesized that students would see sexual harassment as a more serious offense in the academic setting than in the workplace.

### Overview of the Present Study

We investigated undergraduate students' perception of a blatant, *quid pro quo*, authority figure sexual harassment scenario. "*Quid pro quo*" or sexual coercion refers to the harasser's attempt to pressure the victim into granting sexual favors in order to avoid a negative consequence such as being fired or failing a course. We used this clearcut sexual harassment scenario in order to be able to test more directly the perceived effectiveness of differing coping responses. Two separate samples of students participated in the study. A multicultural sample from a medium-size New York metropolitan university and a Black sample from an historically Black university read a scenario in which the student target of the sexually harassing behaviors utilized one of four different active or passive coping responses. In addition, the setting was either a university or a workplace setting, with a student victim.

For all samples, we predicted that direct and active coping responses (confronting and reporting) would be seen as more effective than indirect or passive responses (ignoring or talking with a friend). We predicted that HBU students would view the harasser as guilty less often than would students from the multicultural university. In addition, we expected Black students overall to prefer more direct coping responses than other students. It was also hypothesized that students would see sexual harassment as a more serious offense in the academic setting than in the workplace, because they could identify more with the victim in the academic setting. Finally, we predicted that female students would respond more negatively

to the scenario than would male students, as reflected in an increased number of guilty judgments and more severe penalties. The target of the harassment in all versions of the scenario was a female student.

## METHOD

### Participants

#### *Multicultural University (MU) Sample*

One hundred and twenty undergraduates (82 women and 38 men) were recruited from several introductory and advanced psychology courses at a medium-sized New York metropolitan area university. Forty-eight were freshmen, 28 were sophomores, 25 were juniors, and 16 were seniors. The sample consisted of European Americans (38%), African Americans (24%), Latino/a-Americans (13%), Asian Americans (11%), and 10% classified as other ethnicity. The remaining 2.5% of the MU sample did not respond to the ethnicity question. Thirty-four percent of the MU student sample indicated that they had personally experienced sexual harassment, and 55% reported that they knew someone who had been harassed.

#### *Historically Black University (HBU) Sample*

One hundred and thirty undergraduates (56 men and 74 women) were recruited from various psychology courses at an historically Black university in Maryland. Of the HBU respondents, 2.5% were not identified as to gender. Nine were freshmen, 24 were sophomores, 58 were juniors, and 36 were seniors. The HBU sample was almost entirely African American (92%), with some European Americans (3%), Latino/a-Americans (less than 1%), and some students classified as others (3%). Thirty-five percent of the HBU sample had personally experienced sexual harassment, and 56% knew someone who had been harassed.

### Design, Materials, and Measures

The authors composed a scenario in which a male supervisor engaged in a series of sexually harassing behaviors directed toward a female undergraduate student. The behaviors escalated over a period of time and finally resulted in a quid pro quo threat against

the student. The accused harasser at first requested daily meetings with the student, then began touching the student, made suggestive comments, hugged her, and finally invited her to dinner and a weekend away. When the student began missing meetings with her supervisor, he threatened her with direct negative consequences.

A 2 (context of the harassing situation)  $\times$  4 (type of coping response)  $\times$  2 (type of university sample) between-subjects factorial design was used. Participants read either an academic scenario in which a professor threatened the student with failing an independent study (i.e., the quid pro quo threat) or a workplace scenario in which a supervisor in an advertising agency threatened to fire a student employee (i.e., quid pro quo). In addition, the student victim responded to the harassing behaviors with one of the following four coping responses: ignoring the behavior, talking it over with a friend, deciding to report the behavior to the department head, or confronting the harasser and threatening to quit. Finally, participants were selected from a multicultural or a predominantly Black university. All scenarios were identical with the exception of the manipulations. Within each of the two samples, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions. After participants read the scenario, they completed several questions related to their perceptions of the scenario, the victim, and the accused harasser.

*Guilt and punishment measures.* Respondents were asked to judge whether the harasser was guilty or not guilty of sexual harassment. If the harasser was judged guilty, students indicated which of the following punishment options they would assign to the harasser: verbal warning, letter of censure, forced psychological treatment (lenient penalties); suspension or termination (severe penalties).

*Perceptions of victim's coping style.* Participants' perceptions of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the victim's coping style were assessed on two 7-point Likert-type scales in which higher numbers represent more favorable impressions.

*General evaluations of the victim and harasser.* Students rated the victim and harasser on key qualities of likability, trustworthiness, and dominance on 7-point Likert-type scales. Higher numbers on the trustworthy scales represent more positive evaluations, whereas lower numbers on the likability and dominance scales indicate more positive impressions.

*Respondent preferences for coping styles.* Students were asked to choose the coping style they would use if they were victims of sexual harassment.

*Manipulation checks and demographic questionnaire.* Manipulation check questions related to the type of coping style and the setting (academic vs. business) were completed by students. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire that included two questions about participants' own experiences with sexual harassment. One question asked if participants knew anyone personally who had been sexually harassed, and the other question asked if participants had themselves experienced sexual harassment.

### Procedure

Participants were tested in small groups. After signing an informed consent form, they read the scenario and completed the dependent measures based on the scenario. These measures were followed by the demographic questionnaire and a debriefing form.

## RESULTS

### Manipulation Check

All data analyzed in the study were obtained from participants who correctly answered the manipulation check questions related to the setting (academic vs. business) and the type of coping response of the victim. A small percentage of participants failed the checks; they were primarily from the HBU sample and were eliminated from the analyses.

### Guilty–Not-Guilty Judgments

In both samples, 95% of the participants judged the professor guilty of sexual harassment. However, there was a significant difference in the number of not guilty judgments between the MU and HBU participants,  $\chi^2(1, N = 253) = 6.71, p < .01$ . In support of the hypothesis, HBU participants judged the harasser not to be guilty significantly more often than the MU sample.

A significant gender effect also was obtained,  $\chi^2(1, N = 253) = 6.16, p < .01$ . As predicted, women were more likely than men to find the harasser guilty. In addition, students who knew someone who was harassed found the professor guilty of sexual harassment more often than those who did not know someone,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.27, p < .04$ . However, there was no significant difference in judgments between those who had and those who had not personally experienced sexual harassment.

In partial support of our hypothesis the harasser was found to be significantly more likely to have committed sexual harassment in the academic setting ( $M = 1.73, SD = 1.35$ ) than in the workplace setting ( $M = 2.15, SD = 1.83$ ); lower numbers represent a higher likelihood of sexual harassment. The ANOVA produced a significant effect for type of setting,  $F(3, 23) = 4.11, p < .04$ .

### Recommended Penalties for Harassment Behavior

As predicted, there was a significant gender difference in recommended punishment for the harasser,  $\chi^2(4, N = 253) = 12.83, p < .01$ . In general, women selected more severe penalties than did men. As might be expected, more severe penalties were selected by those participants who knew someone who had been sexually harassed than by those who did not,  $\chi^2(4, N = 253) = 9.56, p < .01$ . There was no significant effect of students' personal experience of being sexually harassed on their choice of punishment options.

### Effectiveness and Appropriateness Ratings

Preliminary analyses of the central dependent variables related to the perceived effectiveness and appropriateness of the coping responses utilized by the victim in the scenario indicated that these two measures were highly correlated,  $r = .624, p < .01$ . Therefore, a 4 (type of coping style)  $\times$  2 (type of setting)  $\times$  2 (university sample) MANOVA was conducted. A significant Wilks'  $\lambda$  of .692,  $F(6, 468) = 15.77, p < .001$ , was obtained for type of coping style. Follow-up ANOVAs indicated that both effectiveness ratings,  $F(3, 235) = 23.08, p < .001$ , and appropriateness ratings,  $F(3, 235) = 25.64, p < .001$ , showed significant effects of type of coping style.

In support of the hypothesized preference for active as opposed to passive coping styles hypothesis, Tukey HSD Post hoc tests revealed that reporting and confronting the harasser were rated as significantly more effective than talking to a friend and ignoring the behavior (see Table I). Tukey HSD Post hoc tests showed a similar pattern for appropriateness ratings in that reporting and confronting were rated as significantly more appropriate than talking with a friend and ignoring the harasser's behavior (see Table I).

The MANOVA on effectiveness and appropriateness ratings also revealed a significant coping styles  $\times$  university interaction, Wilks'  $\lambda = .866$ ,

**Table I.** Mean Ratings of Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Coping Styles for Combined Samples

Coping style	Effectiveness			Appropriateness		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Report	5.14	1.89	65	5.94	1.57	65
Confront	4.39	1.80	62	5.52	1.67	63
Talk	3.16	1.97	61	3.75	2.19	61
Ignore	2.81	1.72	63	4.00	2.12	64

$F(6, 468) = 5.81, p < .001$ . Follow-up ANOVAs showed an interesting pattern of differences in preferred coping styles of the MU and HBU samples. The effectiveness,  $F(3, 235) = 6.74, p < .001$ , and appropriateness,  $F(3, 235) = 10.29, p < .001$ , data reflected similar patterns of significant differences between samples on the ratings of talking it over with a friend and ignoring the behavior. In partial support of our hypothesis, HBU participants rated talking it over with a friend as more effective than ignoring the behavior, whereas the MU subjects showed the reverse preference: ignoring the behavior was rated as more effective than talking it over with a friend. A similar pattern emerged with the appropriateness ratings in which the HBU sample rated talking it over with a friend as more appropriate than ignoring the behavior. In contrast, the MU respondents rated ignoring the behavior as more appropriate than talking with a friend (see Table II). Because talking with a friend can be conceptualized as a more direct, active style, these results partially support our hypothesis.

In a further attempt to explore racial differences in perceptions, we examined ratings of African American participants in our MU sample as com-

**Table II.** Mean Ratings of Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Coping Styles for MU and HBU Samples

Coping style	Effectiveness			Appropriateness		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Report						
MU	5.47	1.59	30	6.37	0.96	30
HBU	4.85	2.10	35	5.57	1.88	35
Confront						
MU	4.34	1.80	29	5.72	1.51	29
HBU	4.40	1.82	33	5.46	1.66	33
Talk						
MU	2.57	1.85	30	2.83	2.00	30
HBU	3.68	1.93	31	4.54	2.01	31
Ignore						
MU	3.70	1.80	30	4.87	1.89	30
HBU	1.20	1.17	33	3.12	1.95	33

Note. MU = multicultural university; HBU = historically Black university.

pared with our HBU sample. After obtaining a significant MANOVA Wilks'  $\lambda$  of .840 for the interaction of coping styles  $\times$  university,  $F(6, 262) = 3.99, p < .001$ , we found significant ANOVAs for effectiveness,  $F(3, 132) = 5.61, p < .001$ , and for appropriateness,  $F(3, 132) = 3.27, p < .023$ , of coping styles. African American respondents in the MU sample responded similarly to the entire MU sample in rating talking as less effective and appropriate than ignoring the harassment. Therefore, the significant coping styles  $\times$  university interaction apparently stemmed from the rating responses of Black respondents only at the HBU and not from all Black students in our samples. This result suggests that characterizing differences between ethnic and racial groups on reactions to sexual harassment victims' coping responses is very complex.

Despite the similar high ratings of reporting to a supervisor and confronting the harasser directly reported above, when asked what type of coping response they would have used if they had been in a similar coercive sexual harassment situation, 81% of the participants in MU and the HBU samples replied that they would have reported the behavior to a supervisor, and only 9.5% of the participants said they would have confronted the harasser directly. Approximately 6% said they would have talked with a friend, and 3.2% said they would have ignored the behavior.

### Ratings of the Harasser and Victim

The Likert-type ratings of the likability and dominance of the victim revealed a significant correlation,  $r = .43, p < .01$ . Therefore, a MANOVA was performed, which produced a significant Wilks'  $\lambda$  of .384,  $F(2, 234) = 188.06, p < .001$ , for university, and a significant Wilks'  $\lambda$  of .906,  $F(6, 468) = 3.96, p < .001$ , for the coping  $\times$  university interaction. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed significant differences between responses of the two samples on ratings of how likable the victim was,  $F(1, 235) = 269.43, p < .001$ , and how dominant she appeared to respondents,  $F(1, 235) = 64.39, p < .001$ . The HBU sample rated her as significantly more likable ( $M = 2.64, SD = 1.12$ ) than did the MU sample ( $M = 5.28, SD = 1.19$ ); lower ratings represent more positive impressions. However, the reverse occurred with the dominance ratings. MU students perceived the victim as more dominant ( $M = 3.43, SD = 1.31$ ) than did the HBU students ( $M = 4.78, SD = 1.48$ ). There were no significant effects of the victim's coping style on liking for the victim or her trustworthiness ratings.

There also was a significant difference in perceived trustworthiness of the harasser between the HBU and MU students,  $F(1, 236) = 195.15, p < .01$ . HBU students rated him to be less trustworthy ( $M = 2.19, SD = 1.56$ ) than did the MU students ( $M = 5.11, SD = 2.29$ ). Along the same lines, HBU students rated the professor as significantly less likable ( $M = 4.95, SD = 1.70$ ) than did the MU students ( $M = 2.48, SD = 1.41$ ),  $F(1, 244) = 155.57, p < .001$ . This scale was also reversed so that higher numbers represent more negative ratings.

Finally, in support of our setting hypothesis, the harasser was thought to be less trustworthy in the academic setting ( $M = 3.06, SD = 2.30$ ) than in the workplace setting ( $M = 4.16, SD = 2.44$ ),  $F(1, 236) = 66.47, p < .001$ .

## DISCUSSION

The prediction that direct and active coping responses would be seen as more effective than indirect or passive responses was confirmed for both samples. For both MU and HBU samples, post hoc tests revealed that reporting and confronting the harasser were rated as significantly more effective than talking to a friend and ignoring the behavior.

The above pattern of results seem to conflict with the findings of previous studies that indicated that victims of sexual harassment, whether in academic or employment settings, do not report harassment (for example, Gruber & Smith, 1995). Although our results suggest that students rate active and direct coping styles as more appropriate and effective, and students indicated that they would report the harassment in a similar situation, it is not necessarily the case that these preferences would be acted upon if the students themselves became victims of sexual harassment. Numerous studies have revealed the dichotomy between attitudes and behavior (e.g., Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995; DeBono & Snyder, 1995).

However, it is possible that these results represent a change in participants' impressions of and attitudes toward sexual harassment victims. Negative impressions of a sexual harassment victim did not occur when she used active coping responses either in an academic or workplace setting. These findings directly conflict with those of Marin and Guadagno (1999) who found that a victim who reported academic harassing behavior was perceived as "less feminine and likable" and "less trustworthy" than a victim who did not report. There are a number of variations in procedure in their study and ours that may have

contributed to the clearly different findings. Although the Marin and Guadagno sexual harassment scenario included some touching of the victim by the professor and a veiled threat (that is, that the student might not be happy with her grade if she refused to go to his office), the scenario in the present study described a more blatant form of harassment and more coercive pressures. At the height of the harassment, the professor constantly touched the victim, asked her to go away with him, and told her that she would fail the course if she did not comply with his demands. As a result, the harasser in our study received very negative ratings on trustworthiness. In this setting, it would have been difficult for our respondents to rate a victim who reported the harassment as "untrustworthy." Furthermore, our dependent measures focused on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the coping mechanisms and also asked participants to indicate what they would do in a similar situation. By focusing on the consequences of the behavior as our major dependent measure, in contrast to Marin and Guadagno's measures of perceptions of the victim, participants could more objectively evaluate the victim's behavior.

A final distinction between the current study and Marin and Guadagno's experiment is related to the type of people who participated in the studies. The present study was conducted in Northeast and Midatlantic states and consisted of multicultural and Black students, whereas Marin and Guadagno's research utilized primarily White participants in the Southeast. Further research should be conducted using identical scenarios and measures in different areas of the United States, and involving various types of samples, in order to examine regional and minority differences in attitudes towards sexual harassment. Regardless of the above variations in the two studies, our findings bring into question the issue of whether women who respond assertively in contradistinction to traditional gender-role expectations will be evaluated negatively in harassment situations.

Our second hypothesis was confirmed in that the HBU students rated the harasser as not guilty significantly more frequently than did the MU students. This result is striking because the harassment scenario was so blatant. One possible explanation for these results stems from Murrell's suggestion that for many African Americans, racism and sexism are intertwined, and that racism is often seen as a more important issue than sexism (Murrell, 1996). Although the possible tendency of Black respondents to "trivialize" sexual harassment was proposed within the context

of a Black male harasser and a Black female victim (Shelton & Chavous, 1999), Black participants may tend to generalize this “trivializing” response to other sexual harassment incidents. In order to test this interpretation further, the study should be replicated by varying the race of the harasser and victim to enable more specific comparisons with the Shelton and Chavous experiment. Although there was a significant difference that supported the second hypothesis, it should be emphasized that the majority of students at the MU and HBU campuses judged the harasser to be guilty of sexual harassment. In addition, HBU students perceived the harasser as less trustworthy and likable than did MU students, which suggests that the not guilty judgments were not characteristic of the HBU sample. It must be emphasized, however, that these more negative ratings of the harasser by HBU students may reflect either a more negative attitude toward people in general, or a more negative view of men who behave in a sexually harassing manner. Because our study did not include a vignette in which harassment did not occur, we cannot distinguish between these two interpretations.

Our third hypothesis generally was supported, and our comparisons also produced some intriguing results that were not predicted. Although MU and HBU students did not differ in their ratings of the most active coping responses of reporting and confronting, HBU participants perceived the more active response of talking over the situation with a friend as more effective and appropriate than the most passive response of ignoring the harassing behavior. These results in general support the contention that Black participants may prefer a more active coping style than White participants in sexual harassment incidents, but further analysis indicated that the effect was restricted to the Black participants in the HBU sample. Black participants in the MU sample were indistinguishable from other MU participants.

Although the MU sample was from a private, suburban university and the HBU sample from a public urban university, data from other sources suggest that the students in the two settings have relatively comparable socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, an alternative interpretation of these differences could be that Black students who choose to attend a single-race university are qualitatively different from Black students who chose to attend a multicultural university. Although the MU campus is truly multicultural, and there is no recent history of racial conflicts on campus, other studies have demonstrated that racial conflict and minority issues are salient for

students in a predominantly White university (e.g., Fisher & Hartmann, 1995). In light of these findings, it is possible that students who attend an HBU do so to avoid racism and consequently find an HBU easy to adjust to, supportive, and empowering. Therefore, empowerment of students could account for the greater preference for more direct active coping styles such as talking with a friend among HBU students as compared with MU Black students. Although this explanation is plausible, it should be emphasized that, in general, the coping styles manipulation was strong enough to overcome any effects of gender, race, or social context of campus effects. Consideration of the results related to hypotheses two and three again point to the importance of conducting studies with diverse racial and ethnic samples. In addition, social context issues and geographical diversity would also be preferable in this type of research.

The fourth hypothesis, that academic sexual harassment would be seen as more serious than workplace harassment, generally was confirmed in terms of the likelihood that the harasser committed sexual harassment measure. Participants saw the harasser as less trustworthy when he was a professor than when he was a workplace supervisor. These results may be explained in terms of respondents' greater familiarity with academic as opposed to workplace settings.

Our fifth hypothesis about gender differences was strongly supported. Women rated the harasser as guilty significantly more often than men, and they recommended more severe penalties for the accused harasser than did men. One interpretation of these results is that women identify more strongly with the female victim and feel more threatened by sexual harassment in general than men do. Therefore, women respond in ways consistent with their feelings in a manner similar to the female respondents in the Konopaske, Elkins, and Phillips (2002) sex discrimination study.

These strong gender findings are somewhat surprising because Blumenthal (1998), in a recent meta-analytic review, suggested that gender differences in reactions to sexual harassment are small. In addition, Gutek (1995) indicated that these differences may disappear when the sexually harassing behavior is blatant and severe, which certainly was the case in this study. However, DeSouza, Pryor, and Hutz (1998) also found that women recommended a harsher punishment for an accused harasser than did men. These results support the importance of expanding measures in sexual harassment studies beyond the traditional guilty-not-guilty judgments to include penalties.

## Implications

Experts (e.g., Rowe, 1996) suggest that a multifaceted approach to eliminating academic sexual harassment is necessary for effective programs. Although establishing and disseminating a zero tolerance of university sexual harassment policy is a necessary first step, followed by specific procedures if an incident occurs, administrators agree that these policies generally have not eliminated or greatly reduced academic sexual harassment (West, Reynolds, & Jackson, 1994). One of the ways in which a policy statement could be expanded is to include specific categories of what is and what is not harassment and to establish clearly stated penalties that will be administered if a faculty or staff member crosses the line into sexual harassment. It should also be emphasized that the tremendous economic, social, and psychological costs of sexual harassment mean that no member of the university community is indispensable.

One of the most significant aspects of a sexual harassment model described by Fitzgerald, Hulin, and Drasgow (1995) is the emphasis on an organizational climate that either supports or does not condone sexual harassment. Part of the effect of the climate can be produced by the policy procedures already discussed, as well as training workshops for faculty, students, and staff (Blakely, Blakely, & Moorman, 1998). The findings from our study suggest that the concept of climate can be expanded to encompass encouraging victims to respond directly by reporting sexual harassment incidents. Administration officials should promise to investigate complaints vigorously and to protect the victim from the negative consequences that Fitzgerald et al. suggested stem from reporting the harassment. It should be made clear to students that their peers understand and encourage their adoption of direct reporting. Volunteer faculty members could create a supportive "resource network" as described by West, Reynolds, and Jackson (1994). The university also could set up conflict mediation procedures at lower levels of sexual harassment to prevent further escalation of these behaviors. At every point in the process, both the victim's and the faculty member's rights must be protected.

The current study is limited in terms of the regional nature of our samples. In addition, our major comparisons were between Black students and other participants. Expanding the categories of minority students, obtaining more equal numbers of male and female participants, and varying the race of the characters in the scenario would enhance the gen-

eralizability of our results. Finally, these results are restricted to the university setting and may not generalize to the workplace. Future studies should utilize identical materials to investigate regional, ethnic, racial, gender, and individual differences in reactions to sexual harassment.

In conclusion, we have shown that students appear to respond positively to victims who report incidents of sexual harassment. Therefore, instead of focusing totally on policy, training of faculty and staff, and counseling of victims, efforts should be made to produce a campus climate that is hostile toward sexual harassment but also is sympathetic towards victims. Encouraging victims to respond directly and effectively, providing support for victims, and preventing negative consequences of direct reporting should enhance prevention and intervention programs in university settings.

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