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Sex Differences in Outcomes and Harasser Characteristics Associated With Frightening Sexual Harassment Appraisals

Isis H. Settles, NiCole T. Buchanan, Stevie C. Y. Yap, and Zaje A. T. Harrell
Michigan State University

This study examined data from U.S. military personnel (1,764 men; 4,540 women) to determine whether appraisals of sexual harassment as frightening mediate the relationship between perpetrator characteristics (perpetrator sex and rank) and three psychological/job outcomes (psychological distress, role limitations, and work satisfaction), and whether these relationships were stronger for women than men. Results indicated that frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between perpetrator rank and all outcomes for both sexes. However, frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between perpetrator sex and outcomes only for women. As predicted, having a male perpetrator or a higher status perpetrator was more strongly related to frightening appraisals for women than men. However, unexpectedly, the relationship between frightening appraisals and more psychological distress, more role limitations, and less work satisfaction was stronger for men than women. We discuss the results in terms of expectancy norm violations and sexual harassment as a form of dominance.

Keywords: sexual harassment, appraisal, psychological distress, work outcomes, human sex differences

Sexual harassment refers to unwanted gender-based comments or behaviors (Fitzgerald, 1996). It is an important area of research because studies estimate that 50% of women will experience sexual harassment during their working lives (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003). Recent data suggest that men also experience sexual harassment, although at a less prevalent rate than do women (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2004); it is estimated that 15% of men will be sexually harassed during their working lives (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2004). Rates of sexual harassment are even higher in male-dominated environments, such as the U.S. military, where 65–79% of women and more than 35% of men annually report experiencing such behaviors (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2001; Bastian, Lancaster, & Reist, 1996; Department of Defense, 2004; Department of Defense Inspector General, 2005; Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999; Hansen, 2004). For both men and women, sexual harassment is associated with negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress (Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Furthermore, the negative psychological effects of sexual harassment have been found to continue several years after the harassment occurs (Munson et al., 2000). Sexual harassment is also related to negative work outcomes, including lower job commitment and satisfaction, increased work withdrawal, decreased productivity, and intentions to quit (Cogin & Fish, 2009; Langhout et al., 2005; Lapierre, Spector, & Leck, 2005).

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Isis H. Settles, NiCole T. Buchanan, Stevie C. Y. Yap, and Zaje A. T. Harrell, Department of Psychology, Michigan State University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Isis H. Settles, Department of Psychology, 316 Physics Road, Room 252C, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1116. E-mail: settles@msu.edu

Appraisals of sexual harassment have been found to mediate the relationship between the severity of the sexual harassment and outcomes, such that more severe harassment is appraised more negatively, which is then associated with more negative outcomes (Langhout et al., 2005; Malamut & Offermann, 2001; Woods, Buchanan, & Settles, 2009). The present study adds to the extant literature by focusing on frightening appraisals of sexual harassment and comparing relationships by sex. Specifically, we tested a model of moderated mediation; we examined whether the relationships between perpetrator characteristics (i.e., perpetrator sex and rank) and three outcomes (i.e., psychological distress, role limitations, and work satisfaction) are mediated by frightening appraisals, and whether these relationships differ for women and men. We investigated these models using a publicly available archival data set comprising female and male personnel in the U.S. military.

Sexual Harassment Appraisals

A stressor is any event that taxes or depletes an individual's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When confronted with a stressor, such as sexual harassment, stress and coping models suggest that individuals will engage in a two-step process of appraisal that determines the potential threat it poses (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). In primary appraisal, the individual assesses whether the event is a potential threat, meaning that it may create a challenge, loss, or opportunity for harm in the given context. Following primary appraisal, an individual engages in a secondary appraisal to evaluate the resources available to manage the stressor. Thus, primary appraisal shapes the emotional response an individual has to an event, whereas secondary appraisal shapes the behavioral response to the event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wright & Fitzgerald, 2007). Outcomes associated with a stressful encounter depend on both how it is appraised and the subsequent coping response (Peacock & Wong, 1990; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Ansiman, 2009). Because

events that are appraised more negatively during the primary appraisal process are more likely to tax or exceed an individual's available psychological and material resources, primary appraisal responses, specifically emotional responses, were of interest in the present study.

Sexual harassment can be conceptualized as a type of stressor. Consistent with the model of stress and coping, how sexual harassment is assessed will impact subsequent behaviors to manage the harm, threat, and challenge of the situation. Therefore, primary appraisal processes have an important role in the relationship between negative workplace experiences, such as sexual harassment, and resultant outcomes (e.g., Bunk & Magley, 2013; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997). In sexual harassment research, importance has been placed on emotional responses as indicators of primary appraisal processes (Langhout et al., 2005; Malamut & Offermann, 2001; Wright & Fitzgerald, 2007). Appraisals of sexual harassment have been found to mediate the relationship that sexual harassment severity has with coping responses, psychological outcomes, and job outcomes (Langhout et al., 2005; Malamut & Offermann, 2001; Settles, Harrell, Buchanan, & Yap, 2011; Woods et al., 2009).

Severity is determined by a number of situational factors, including the frequency, persistence, duration, and type of sexual harassment (Langhout et al., 2005; Malamut & Offermann, 2001). In addition, factors related to the type of perpetrator, such as having a higher status harasser, have also been theorized to increase the severity of the sexual harassment (Langhout et al., 2005; Malamut & Offermann, 2001). In the present study, we examined perpetrator status and perpetrator sex as indicators of sexual harassment severity. Abundant research has shown that men are most frequently the perpetrators of sexual harassment toward both female and male targets (Huerta, Cortina, Pang, Torges, & Magley, 2006; Ménard, Nagayama Hall, Phung, Erian, & Martin, 2003; O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009; Rospenda, Richman, & Nawyn, 1998; Stockdale, Visio, & Batra, 1999; Waldo, Berdahl, & Fitzgerald, 1998). Male perpetrators also tend to see themselves as having greater status than their targets (Berdahl, 2007). This is consistent with assertions by researchers that sexual harassment is a means of controlling and dominating others (Berdahl, 2007; Morgan & Gruber, 2005). Thus, sexual harassment perpetrated by men may be more common than harassment by women or mixed-sex groups, and it may also be appraised more negatively (i.e., as more frightening) because it is more likely to involve dominance and aggression.

Furthermore, studies have found that individuals with low organizational status, especially within male-dominated organizations, are more likely to experience sexual harassment (e.g., Buchanan, Settles, & Woods, 2008; Firestone & Harris, 1999; Fitzgerald et al., 1999; Gruber, 1998, 2003) and individuals with higher organizational status are less likely to be targets of sexual harassment (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Settles, Buchanan, & Colar, 2012). In addition, when the perpetrator has higher status and power, individuals perceive their sexual harassment as being more severe (e.g., Cortina, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 2002; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000). Given this research, we proposed that having a male perpetrator or a higher status perpetrator would be related to negative outcomes because the sexual harassment is appraised as more frightening.

Dimensionality of Sexual Harassment Appraisals

One limitation in the extant research on sexual harassment appraisals is that most studies have conceptualized and examined overall, general appraisals on a continuum from low to high negative appraisals of the event. Wright and Fitzgerald (2007) suggest that distinguishing different types of emotional responses to sexual harassment is important because they reflect how the sexual harassment behavior is perceived by the target, and they precede behavioral responses, such as formal reporting. There are some recent studies that have examined specific types of emotional responses, but are limited in that they used samples composed of only men or only women. For example, Glomb and Espelage (2005) found that when men perceived the behaviors in a vignette to represent sexual harassment, they appraised it as fear and anger inducing. Wright and Fitzgerald (2007) found that characteristics of the individual and the harassment differentially predicted women's harassment appraisal subtypes (fear, demoralization, anxious arousal, and self-blame). For example, comparing fear and demoralization, they found that women were more likely to join a class action lawsuit if they perceived their harassment to be demoralizing rather than causing feelings of fear (Wright & Fitzgerald, 2009), theorizing that anger (which they did not assess) rather than fear might motivate a desire to litigate. Furthermore, anxious arousal and fear appraisals were associated with the intensity of the sexual harassment, whereas demoralization and self-blame were not. Given such differences, a multidimensional conceptualization of sexual harassment appraisals that examines specific types of emotions may be more appropriate than looking at overall appraisals that combine multiple emotional responses into a single assessment.

In the present study, we focused on appraisals of sexual harassment as frightening (a disturbing, fear-inducing experience). Although our choice of appraisal type was constrained by our use of an existing data set, research on emotions and sexual harassment suggests that frightening appraisals are important predictors of sexual harassment outcomes. Fear is an intense emotion and is associated with high levels of arousal (Russell, 1980). Fear is thought to occur in response to possible danger and in response to behaviors that deviate from accepted norms (Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001). Thus, frightening appraisals may suggest that sexual harassment is perceived as more negative and challenging during the primary appraisal process. As a result, managing fearful appraisals requires significant coping resources (Hasting & Stead, 2004). Past research suggests that fear is a common response to sexual harassment experiences (Glomb & Espelage, 2005; Wright & Fitzgerald, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, research has also found that frightening appraisals of sexual harassment more strongly mediate the relationship between sexual harassment and psychological well-being than bothersome harassment appraisals, a less intense response (Settles et al., 2011). Other research has found that fear appraisals mediate the relationship between workplace sexual harassment/violence and affective commitment and turnover intentions (Barling et al., 2001), and between incivility and absenteeism and turnover (Porath & Pearson, 2012). Thus, focusing on frightening appraisals may be especially important for understanding when negative outcomes will result from sexual harassment experiences.

Sex Differences in Sexual Harassment Appraisal Processes

Another limitation of the existing research on sexual harassment appraisals is that only a few studies have examined sex differences in how harassment is appraised or sex differences in how sexual harassment antecedents and consequences are related to appraisals. The research that exists finds that, compared with men, women have more negative appraisals of sexual harassment, rating harassment vignettes as more anxiety producing (Berdahl, Magley, & Waldo, 1996) and personal harassment experiences as more bothersome (de Haas, Timmerman, & Höing, 2009). Only one study examined sex differences in the relationship between appraisal and outcomes: de Haas and colleagues (2009) found no differences in the mental and physical health of male and female police officers who reported sexual harassment that they perceived to be bothersome. However, this study examined only bothersome appraisals; thus, sex differences might emerge in the relationship between other sexual harassment appraisals (e.g., frightening appraisals) and outcomes.

In the present study, we predicted that having a male or higher status perpetrator would be appraised as more frightening for women than men, and that harassment appraised as frightening would be related to more negative outcomes for women than men. In our past analysis of sexual harassment in the military (Settles et al., 2011), we found that higher status perpetrators were associated with more frightening appraisals for both women and men, controlling for sexual harassment frequency. However, we did not test whether this relationship differed for men and women. Given that other studies have not examined sex differences related to frightening appraisals, we based our predictions on theories of power, status, and vulnerability. An individual's relative social status influences the appraisal process (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and women, particularly in highly masculine environments such as the U.S. military, occupy a lower social status (i.e., rank) with less social power relative to men (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Those with less social status and relative power often perceive themselves as having less ability to change or stop negative experiences (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Thacker & Ferris, 1991), which is particularly salient when they appraise sexual harassment as frightening. Feelings of fear and helplessness are then associated with greater distress and worsened psychological outcomes (Bargai, Ben-Shakhar, & Shalev, 2007; Miller & Seligman, 1975). Furthermore, sex differences in physical strength leave women more vulnerable to sexual victimization, particularly from men. Social, physical, and sexual vulnerability exacerbate the harmful effects of frightening sexual experiences, leaving women more vulnerable to negative outcomes. Consistent with this theory, there is evidence that, compared with men, women experience higher rates of posttraumatic stress from interpersonal trauma (Flett, Kazantzis, Long, MacDonald, & Millar, 2004; Lilly & Valdez, 2012). Together, these literatures suggest that the impact of having higher status or male perpetrators will be more strongly related to feeling afraid for women than men, and outcomes will be worse for women than men who appraise the sexual harassment as frightening.

The Current Study

Past research has found that frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between three subtypes of sexual harassment and psychological distress for women and men (Settles et al., 2011). We build on this research by examining whether frightening sexual harassment appraisals mediate the relationship between perpetrator characteristics (sex and rank) and three different outcomes, and whether these patterns differ for men and women. The three outcomes we examined were psychological distress, role limitations (i.e., how much emotional and physical health problems impair one's ability to perform work-related tasks), and work satisfaction. We selected our outcomes using two criteria. First, we chose those outcomes that have, in past research, been shown to be associated with sexual harassment. Second, we wanted to examine a range of outcomes to determine the extent to which our results impact different "types" of consequences. Our three outcomes met these criteria in that studies have found them to be related to experiences of sexual harassment (e.g., Langhout et al., 2005; Lapierre et al., 2005; Willness et al., 2007), and because they tap multiple areas: psychological consequences, role performance, and satisfaction with work.

The current study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, rather than examining general appraisal assessments, we focused on frightening appraisals, as we believe that the more severe emotional response of fear will best predict sexual harassment outcomes. We tested whether frightening appraisals mediate the relationship between perpetrator characteristics and negative outcomes. Second, we tested whether the relationships proposed in our model differ for women and men. Third, we examined these relationships in a large sample of women and men in the U.S. military. The advantages of this sample are that the context is male-dominated and hypermasculine (Burke, 2004; Hillman, 1999), meaning that sexual harassment is more likely to occur, and using a large sample allowed us to have a sufficient subsample of sexually harassed men.

Based on the literature, we made the following two predictions:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Frightening appraisals of sexual harassment will mediate the relationship between perpetrator characteristics (i.e., perpetrator sex and perpetrator rank) and psychological and work outcomes (i.e., psychological distress, role limitations, and work satisfaction) for both women and men.
>
> *Hypothesis 2:* Sex will moderate the pathways in the mediated model (between the two perpetrator characteristics and frightening appraisals, and the relationships between frightening appraisals and the three outcomes). Specifically, we predicted that the moderated relationships would be stronger for women than men.

Method

Procedure and Participants

Participants were 6,304 men and women who completed the 2002 Department of Defense's "Status of the Armed Forces Surveys: Workplace and Gender Relations" (for survey procedures, see Lipari & Lancaster, 2004; Willis, Mohamed, & Lipari, 2002). This is a survey administered by the Data Recognition Corporation

for the Defense Manpower Data Center, which is the human resources arm of the Department of Defense (i.e., the U.S. Armed Forces). Limited parts of this survey are available for public access, and in some cases, the only available variables have been recoded for the public access data set. Individuals included our study were men (n = 1,764, 28% of sample) and women (n = 4,540, 72% of sample) who endorsed having had any sexual harassment experiences in the past year as assessed by an adaptation of the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (described below). In the public-access data set, participants were placed into one of three racial/ethnic groups: Hispanic (n = 881, 14.0%), non-Hispanic White (n = 4067, 64.5%), and non-Hispanic Black/African American (n = 1356, 21.5%). Participants in our sample represented 19.4% of men (full sample n = 9,098) and 51.7% of women (full sample n = 8,776) coded as Hispanic, non-Hispanic White, or non-Hispanic Black/African American in the full sample.

Measures

For all scales, items were coded and averaged such that higher scores indicate higher levels of the construct.

Participant sex. Participants self-reported their sex: 0 (female) or 1 (male).

Frightening appraisals of sexual harassment. Participants who reported having experienced any of 16 unwanted or uninvited, unprofessional, gender-related behaviors at work in the past 12 months (Sexual Experiences Questionnaire—Department of Defense; Fitzgerald et al., 1999) were defined as having experienced sexual harassment. Individuals were asked to consider the "one situation" in the past year that had the greatest effect on them—the most *significant sexual harassment experience* in the past 12 months (Mazzeo, Bergman, Buchanan, Drasgow, & Fitzgerald, 2001). Participants then indicated how much they perceived the "one situation" to be frightening and threatening using a scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). To create our measure, we averaged ratings of frightening and threatening (r = .76, $p < .001$; α = .86).

Perpetrator sex. The survey asked participants to report the "gender of the person(s) involved" in the significant ("one situation") sexual harassment experience. Participants indicating that the sex of their perpetrator was unknown (1.5% total for both women and men) were excluded from relevant analyses. Responses were categorized as 0 (female or mixed sex perpetrators) or 1 (male perpetrators). Men reported that 52.2% of their harassers for the significant sexual harassment experience were men, and 47.8% were women or involved both men and women. For women, 86.2% of harassers were men, and 13.8% were women or involved both men and women. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, 5992) = 770.40$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .36$.

Perpetrator rank. Participants reported on the status of the person(s) involved in the significant sexual harassment experience. Responses were categorized by the perpetrators' status relative to the participant: 0 (equal or lower rank) or 1 (higher rank). If participants indicated that their perpetrator was their supervisor or someone of higher rank/grade, they were coded as higher rank. If the participant indicated that their perpetrator was a coworker or subordinate, they were coded as equal or lower rank. In terms of rank, 54.3% of men had a perpetrator of equal or lower rank, and 45.7% of men had a perpetrator of higher rank. In contrast, 32.1% of women had a perpetrator of equal or lower rank, and 67.9% of women had a perpetrator of higher rank. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, 5532) = 224.19$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .20$.

Psychological distress. Participants' level of distress was assessed with the Distress subscale of the Rand Corporation's Short Form Health Survey (Ware & Sherbourne, 1992). The Distress subscale consists of five items to which participants indicated how often in the past 4 weeks they had experienced various symptoms (e.g., "Been a very nervous person"). Responses were measured on a scale that ranged from 1 (*little or none of the time*) to 4 (*all or most of the time*). Appropriate items were reverse coded and a mean of all items was computed. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .84.

Role limitations. The extent to which participants experienced limitations performing their work role was assessed using seven items composing the Role Limitations subscales of the Rand Corporation's Short Form Health Survey (Ware & Sherbourne, 1992). Participants indicated how often, in the past 4 weeks, they "had . . . problems with your work or other daily activities as a result of your physical health" (e.g., "Accomplished less than you would like") or "had . . . problems with your work or other daily activities as a result of emotional problems" (e.g., "Didn't do work or other activities as carefully as usual"). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (*little or none of the time*) to 4 (*all or most of the time*). A mean of all items was calculated. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .84.

Work satisfaction. Work satisfaction comprised six items that were modified from the 1995 version of the Status of the Armed Forces Survey Form B—Gender Issues (Edwards, Elig, Edwards, & Riemer, 1997). Items tapped participants' feelings and overall satisfaction with their work (e.g., "Your work provides you with a sense of pride"; "You like the kind of work you do"). Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A mean of all items was computed. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .91.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses to examine whether there were sex differences in our study variables (frightening appraisal, psychological distress, role limitations, and work satisfaction) were conducted with a multivariate analysis of variance. Results indicated that the overall multivariate analysis of variance was significant, Wilks's $\Lambda = 0.97$, $F(4, 5956) = 42.41$, $p < .001$. Results indicated that the multivariate effect of participant sex was driven by significantly more negative responses for frightening appraisals, $F(1, 5961) = 166.79$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.41$, psychological distress, $F(1, 5961) = 6.06$, $p = .01$, Cohen's $d = 0.07$, and work satisfaction, $F(1, 5961) = 6.42$, $p = .01$, Cohen's $d = -0.07$, for women (frightening appraisals: $M = 0.55$, $SD = 1.00$; psychological distress: $M = 1.91$, $SD = 0.66$; work satisfaction: $M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.01$) compared with men (frightening appraisals: $M = 0.21$, $SD = 0.61$; psychological distress: $M = 1.86$, $SD = 0.64$; work satisfaction: $M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.98$). Men and women did not differ in their reported role limitations (men: $M = 1.34$, $SD = 0.48$; women: $M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.49$), $F(1, 5961) = 1.70$, $p = .19$,

Cohen's $d = 0.04$. Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics are presented separately for women and men in Table 1.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 proposed that frightening appraisals would mediate the relationship between perpetrator sex, perpetrator rank, and negative outcomes. To test this prediction, we conducted a path analysis in Mplus 5.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2007). In this mediational model, perpetrator sex and perpetrator rank were the predictors, frightening appraisal was the mediator, and psychological distress, role limitations, and work satisfaction were the outcomes. Results can be seen in Table 2. Frightening appraisals significantly mediated the relationship between perpetrator sex and all three outcomes for women. For men, frightening appraisals did not mediate the relationship between perpetrator sex and any of the outcomes. For both women and men, frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between perpetrator rank and all three outcomes. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported for women; for men, Hypothesis 1 was supported for perpetrator rank but not perpetrator sex.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the pathways specified in the mediational model (the relationships between the two perpetrator characteristics and frightening appraisals, and the relationships between frightening appraisals and the three outcomes) would be stronger for women than men. We evaluated whether there were sex differences in our estimates using structural equation modeling in Mplus 5.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2007). In particular, we specified a multigroup path model in which parameters were freely estimated across men and women and compared the fit of this model with a nested model in which congruent paths were constrained to equality across men and women. Chi-square difference tests yielded a significant decrement in fit when these constraints were included ($\chi^2_{diff} = 117.38 - 80.46 = 36.92$; $df_{diff} = 5$; $\chi^2_{diff} > 11.07$, $p < .05$), suggesting that model parameters were significantly different across women and men (see Kline, 2011). We probed further to determine which paths differed significantly by comparing the fit of the unconstrained model with a series of models in which each path in the model was individually constrained to equality across men and women and assessed whether these constraints led to a significant decrement in model fit. Indeed, each path constraint was associated with a significant decrement in model fit compared with the unconstrained model, suggesting that there were significant differences among men and women in all associations between variables represented in this model (see Table 3).

Results are shown in Figure 1. Having a male perpetrator was related to more frightening sexual harassment appraisals for women but not men, and this sex difference was significant. Having a higher ranking perpetrator was related to more frightening appraisals for both sexes, but this relationship was stronger for women than men. The pattern of relationships between frightening appraisals and outcomes was similar for all three outcomes. Specifically, sexual harassment appraised as more frightening was related to more psychological distress, more role limitations, and less work satisfaction; these relationships were significantly stronger for men than women, opposite our prediction. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported for perpetrator characteristics, as these were more strongly related to frightening appraisals for women than men. However, Hypothesis 2 was not supported for the three outcomes, as frightening appraisals were more strongly related to greater psychological distress, more role limitations, and less work satisfaction for men than women.

Discussion

The present research sought to determine whether frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between perpetrator characteristics and three psychological and work outcomes, and whether these relationships were moderated by sex. We focused specifically on frightening appraisals rather than using an overall, general appraisal assessment, expecting that these strong, fear-based appraisals would best predict sexual harassment outcomes. We hypothesized a pattern of moderated mediation, and found partial support for both predictions, as well as some unexpected findings. The current study sheds light on important issues related to sex differences in sexual harassment in the workplace and the role of appraisals in that process, as described below.

Our first prediction was that frightening appraisals would mediate the relationship between perpetrator characteristics and outcomes for both women and men. This prediction was more strongly supported for women than men. Frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between perpetrator rank and the three outcomes for women and men; however, the relationship between

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for All Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean (Men)	*SD* (Men)
1. Frightening appraisals		−.03	.21*	.21*	.22*	−.14*	0.21	0.61
2. Perpetrator sex	.05		.03	−.02	−.01	−.02	—	—
3. Perpetrator rank	.19*	.06		.15*	.13*	−.18*	—	—
4. Psychological distress	.20*	−.02	.09		.52***	−.34**	1.86	0.64
5. Role limitations	.18*	−.05	.06	.50***		−.24*	1.34	0.48
6. Work satisfaction	−.11*	−.00	−.09	−.35**	−.24*		3.48	0.98
Mean (women)	0.55	—	—	1.91	1.36	3.41		
SD (women)	1.00	—	—	0.66	0.49	1.01		

Note. Correlations for women are presented below the diagonal, and correlations for men are presented above the diagonal. Perpetrator sex: 0 = female or mixed sex, 1 = male. Perpetrator rank: 0 = equal or lower rank, 1 = higher rank.
* Significant correlations with small effect sizes (0.10 to 0.29). ** Significant correlations with medium effect sizes (0.30 to 0.49). *** Significant correlations with large effect sizes (0.50 or above). Correlations less than .10 are not marked, although correlations of .04 are significant at $p < .01$, and correlations between .05 and .10 are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 2
Indirect Effects and 95% Confidence Intervals for Mediational Analyses

	Frightening appraisal			
	Women		Men	
Pathway	Estimate	95% CI	Estimate	95% CI
Perpetrator sex → psychological distress	.02*	[.001, .04]	−.01	[−.03, .01]
Perpetrator sex → role limitations	.01**	[.001, .03]	−.01	[−.02, .01]
Perpetrator sex → work satisfaction	−.02*	[−.03, −.001]	.01	[−.01, .03]
Perpetrator rank → psychological distress	.06**	[.04, .09]	.06**	[.03, .08]
Perpetrator rank → role limitations	.04**	[.03, .06]	.04**	[.03, .06]
Perpetrator rank → work satisfaction	−.05**	[−.08, −.03]	−.06**	[−.09, −.03]

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

perpetrator sex and the outcomes was mediated by frightening appraisals for women but not men. Generally, these results suggest that having a male perpetrator is associated with more psychological distress, more role limitations, and less work satisfaction because it is related to appraising the harassment as more frightening, but only for women. Similarly, having a higher rank perpetrator is associated with worse outcomes because men and women appraise this harassment as more frightening. These results offer support to the assertion of Wright and Fitzgerald (2007) that emotional responses to harassment are important factors that partially determine the outcomes of harassment. Examination of the path analysis indicates that frightening appraisals did not mediate the relationship between perpetrator sex and outcomes for men because, for them, there was no association between perpetrator sex and frightening appraisal. Perhaps having a male perpetrator was not sufficient to make men feel frightened by their harassment. However, our results suggest that the rank of one's perpetrator is a critical factor in frightening harassment appraisals and subsequent poor outcomes, consistent with other sexual harassment research on status and power (e.g., Cortina et al., 2002; O'Connell & Korabik, 2000).

Our second prediction was that the mediated relationships would be moderated by sex, such that the relationships between perpetrator characteristics and frightening appraisals and between frightening appraisals and outcomes would be stronger for women than men. We found partial support for this prediction. First, we observed the predicted sex differences in the relationship between perpetrator characteristics and frightening appraisals, such that these relationships were stronger for women than men. Thus, having a male perpetrator and having a higher ranking perpetrator were more strongly related to appraising harassment as frightening for women than men. These results suggest that sexual harassment in the military may result in high intensity fear responses, and that these relationships may be heightened for women because of their lower social status and social power (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993; Thacker & Ferris, 1991).

Table 3
Comparisons of Individual Parameter Constraints Across Women and Men

Parameter	χ^2	χ^2_{diff}
Overall model without constraints	80.457	
Path constraints		
Perpetrator sex—frightening appraisals	87.832	7.375
Perpetrator rank—frightening appraisals	88.421	7.964
Frightening appraisals—psychological distress	90.051	9.594
Frightening appraisals—role limitations	96.498	16.041
Frightening appraisals—work satisfaction	88.254	7.797

Note. All chi-square difference tests were significant, $p < .05$, $df_{diff} = 5$; $\chi^2_{diff} > 3.84$.

Second, the relationships between frightening appraisals and psychological distress, role limitations, and work satisfaction were stronger for men than women. Although we had predicted sex differences in these relationships, the results were in the opposite direction from our prediction. A limitation of our current analysis is that we did not have measures of secondary appraisal, which is the stage at which an individual determines the resources available to meet the harm, threat, or challenge related to a stressful encounter. According to stress and coping theory (Folkman et al., 1986), outcomes associated with a stressful event depend not only on how it is appraised (primary appraisal) but also on individuals' assessment of their available resources to cope with the stressor (secondary appraisal). Thus, the stronger relationship between sexual harassment appraisals and outcomes for men than women may indicate that men feel less able to cope with their sexual harassment than women.

Alternatively, the observed sex difference may be explained, in part, by expectancy violation theory (Burgoon, 1993), which suggests that having one's expectations be unmet or violated within a given context may result in a negative psychological reaction. There are three ways that we believe expectancy violation theory can be applied to our findings. First, compared with women, men are less often targeted for sexual harassment (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2001), and thus may be more likely to assume that they will not be harassed. Furthermore, in the military, there are strict expectations regarding behavior and displays of respect (Burke, 2004) that might further reduce men's expectation that they will be harassed. Thus, men's frightening experiences of sexual harassment may represent a particularly strong violation of their expectancies, which could result in correspondingly strong negative reactions. In contrast, women may be more familiar with and anticipate harassing behaviors, especially in a male-dominated environment, and thus may not experience as strong a violation of their expectancies.

Second, most sexual harassment of both women and men is perpetrated by male harassers (Waldo et al., 1998). This was true in the present study as well. Thus, men's sexual harassment, when

Figure 1. Perpetrator characteristics and outcomes mediated by frightening appraisals. Coefficients are unstandardized. Coefficients for women appear before the slash; those for men appear after the slash. * $p < .05$. Bolded coefficients are significantly different at $p < .05$. Perpetrator rank: 1 = higher versus 0 = equal or lower; perpetrator sex: 1 = male versus 0 = female or mixed sex.

it is done by other men, may violate their expectancies regarding heterosexuality norms in addition to violating their general expectation of being safe from harassment. For women, a male perpetrator fits rather than contravenes heterosexuality norms. Third, sexual harassment may be perceived as a "feminizing" experience, as it is viewed as a problem faced by women rather than men. In a video scenario study, Howard (1984) found that both male and female victims of sexual assault were viewed as more feminine, and this was associated with greater blame being placed on them for their victimization. Thus, men who are harassed may feel that their masculinity has been challenged or that they are not viewed as "real" men.

These results, in which frightening sexual harassment experiences had a greater impact on men compared with women, are consistent with a small but growing body of literature. Johnson, Mitchell, Bean, Richeson, and Shelton (2010) found support for their assertion that devalued group members (e.g., women) may develop resilience to some of the effects of group-related mistreatment (e.g., sexism) because of greater familiarity with such experiences. They propose that familiarity leads to more practice engaging in self-regulation following such events, particularly when the mistreatment is blatant (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Consistent with our findings regarding women in the military, past negative gender-related experiences may allow women to build up coping resources that buffer them from some of the negative consequences of current sexual harassment. Continued research should focus on whether, when, and why higher status (vs. lower status) group members are more negatively affected by mistreatment typically directed at lower status group members.

An alternative, yet compatible explanation is that military men who are being harassed are targeted because they are perceived to be vulnerable in some way, perhaps because of their perceived homosexual orientation, their violation of masculinity norms, or some aspect of their personality. Such a possibility is consistent with the notion of sexual harassment being a means of coercing individuals into behavior that is consistent with social gender norms rather than reflecting sexual interest or desire (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). If sexually harassed men are targeted because of some vulnerability, they may be especially negatively impacted by mistreatment that they appraise as frightening because it makes their vulnerable status more salient. Power may play a role in the effects we observed, as the male harassment victim who is targeted for his vulnerability may feel that his harasser is more powerful or that he is powerless to respond, retaliate, or report his mistreatment.

We note three things about these results. First, some of these effects were small; nevertheless, they are meaningful and have practical significance because of the relatively high rates of harassment in certain contexts (e.g., the military) and because of the lasting negative impact of sexual harassment (Munson et al., 2000). Second, the emergent pattern in the current analyses revealed that men are more negatively impacted than women when they perceive their sexual harassment to be frightening. However, in all three interactions, the difference was in degree rather than in kind. That is, for both women and men, more frightening appraisals were associated with more negative psychological and work outcomes; the difference was that these relationships were stronger for men than for women. Third, despite the observed sex differences, women were targeted with more sexual harassment overall. Although over half of the women in the full sample of U.S. military personnel reported experiencing sexual harassment in the past 12 months, only one fifth of men in the overall sample did so. In addition, preliminary analyses indicated that women appraised sexual harassment as more frightening than men, and this effect size was moderate (Cohen's $d = 0.41$). This difference is consistent with the limited existing research comparing sexual harassment experiences of women and men (e.g., Magley, Waldo, Drasgow, & Fitzgerald, 1999; Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001). Thus, although the greater impact of frightening sexual harassment appraisals on men's versus women's outcomes is important, the men in this study represent a fairly small subsample of the overall population they comprise.

Limitations and Future Directions

Because the data used in the present study were correlational, we could not determine the causal direction of the relationships we observed. Several additional limitations are due to the fact that the present study was based on an analysis of preexisting data such that we were constrained by the measures included in survey. It would be useful to look at additional types of sexual harassment appraisals besides frightening ones. For example, Wright and Fitzgerald (2007) assessed demoralization, which could not be measured with the present data but might be relevant in understanding the relationship between harassment experiences and subsequent psychological and workplace outcomes. Other studies have also found that men sometimes view sexual harassment as flattering and an indication of sexual attraction (Berdahl et al., 1996); these types of appraisals would also be relevant for future research in this area.

In addition, we theorized that men who are vulnerable in some way, such as by being homosexual, may be especially likely to be targeted with sexual harassment (Konik & Cortina, 2008). However, the present data did not permit us to know the sexual

orientation of the harassment target or perpetrator. With the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," it may soon be possible for researchers to assess the role of sexual orientation in military harassment experiences, which should be beneficial to understanding sexual harassment, particularly in hypermasculine, male-dominated environments. Other characteristics reflecting one's vulnerable status, such as nonnormative gender role behaviors, also cannot be assessed with the present data. In addition, other factors may be protective against experiencing sexual harassment, such as length of time in the armed services or area of deployment. Future research should explore the characteristics that lead women and men to be targets of sexual harassment, which will also provide researchers with a greater understanding of what motivates perpetrators to engage in this type of mistreatment.

The present sample of military personnel permitted us to examine sexual harassment experiences for those in a very unique context. The military is numerically male-dominated and also dominated by hypermasculine cultural norms. Because of the hierarchical structure, there is a strong adherence to following such norms (Burke, 2004; Hillman, 1999). In other environments with different norms for behavior, sexual harassment processes and outcomes may differ. In particular, the unexpected sex difference we observed, in which men were more negatively impacted by sexual harassment they appraised as frightening than women, may not be present. Alternatively, this pattern may be similar in other contexts, but men may be less likely to have sexual harassment experiences that they appraise as frightening than do men in the military. Future studies in different types of contexts will shed light on whether the results we observed generalize to other environments or are unique to this sample or this context.

Conclusion

In sum, the results of our study add to the body of literature indicating the importance of sexual harassment appraisals as mediators in the relationship between harassment severity and outcomes. We found that frightening appraisals mediated the relationship between perpetrator rank and outcomes for both sexes and between perpetrator sex and outcomes only for women. Sexual harassment perpetrated by men and higher rank individuals was appraised as more frightening for women than men. However, our results for men were unexpected; we had predicted that women would be more negatively impacted by sexual harassment they appraised as frightening, but our results indicated the opposite pattern. Although we have offered several explanations for these counterhypothesized results, more research should be conducted to examine whether this effect is specific to the military context or applies more broadly. Taken together, our study results illustrate the negative impact that sexual harassment has for both women and men, emphasizing the importance of organizations like the U.S. military to continue working to reduce its prevalence.

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