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Changed Women and Changed Organizations: Consequences of and Coping with Sexual Harassment

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Sexual harassment has been conceptualized as a form of gender-based abuse which has significant effects on victims. This article reviews research on effects of harassment in three complementary areas. Work-related, psychological, and somatic effects of sexual harassment on women workers are reviewed, as are the impacts on the employing organization. The third part of the review deals with women victims' responses to harassment and attempts to cope with harassment. The most frequently used attempts to cope may not be effective under certain circumstances. The available research has significant shortcomings and reveals important gaps. It yields a laundry list of effects and responses, but it does not allow us to specify conditions under which particular effects will occur or the factors that affect choice of response. Compared to other facets of sexual harassment, the topic of outcomes of harassment has generated relatively little interest among researchers. Reasons for the lack of research in this area are discussed.

In the 1944 film "Gaslight" starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer, the husband slowly drives his wife toward insanity by causing the gaslights to flicker all the while claiming that the lights are perfectly fine (Hamilton & Dolkart, 1991). The metaphor of gaslighting communicates the psychological torture inherent in sexual harassment. A woman who is harassed may be unsure at first if what she is experiencing really is harassment, may be unsure what to do about it, and may not receive support from others when she enlists assistance in stopping the harassment. Consider the following scenario.

> When Jane Doe took a job with a major hotel chain, her new boss promised that the job had "unlimited potential" for a bright, ambitious person. Jane, an ambitious young woman, liked almost everything about her job except the frequent sexist joking and sexual innuendos that pervaded the work place. Others went along with the jokes, but Jane complained. In response, her boss pressed her for details of

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her private life, dating behavior, and sexual preferences. He told her that in the "family atmosphere" of the organization, this was normal and expected. When she complained to her boss' boss, she was assured that she did not need to disclose any personal information. Yet, nothing changed in her department. Her increasing discomfort led her to talk to her boyfriend about the behavior that she now labeled sexual harassment. Her boyfriend asked her what she did to encourage her boss to make these comments and urged her to behave in a more professional manner. Jane then went to the human resources department with the intention of lodging a sexual harassment complaint against her boss. The HR specialist told her that she was responsible for handling her boss, and that the organization did not have a sexual harassment policy because it never needed one. In the meantime, her boss' comments took on an increasingly hostile tone and on her next performance appraisal, Jane received a rating of poor for "attitude." Devastated, she decided to seek help from a therapist, who gave her a battery of tests, informed her that she was suffering from a mild case of depression, and was unduly obsessed about her work. He suggested she come in twice a week in order to learn to deal with her feelings about work in a "constructive and empowering way." Still there was no change at work except the frequency and hostility of the comments which were increasingly directed specifically at Jane. She also felt a new sense of isolation. Some workers who formerly were friendly began to treat Jane in a hostile manner. Jane began thinking about quitting her job, but she didn't have another job lined up and the therapy was expensive. She felt depressed about being diagnosed as mildly depressed, a label she had never previously used to describe herself. Her boyfriend complained that she wasn't much fun anymore. Shortly thereafter, in casual conversation with a woman who worked in the same building, Jane discovered the woman had formerly worked for Jane's boss. Her experiences with Jane's boss were amazingly parallel to Jane's own experiences with him. She told Jane she eventually quit the organization. A few days later, when her boss made an unusually crude comment, Jane turned to him and slapped him across the face. He walked out of the room, came back with his supervisor, and together they told Jane she was fired for an unprofessional behavior. As a last resort, Jane went to see an attorney who advertised in the newspaper that he would help people who had been wrongfully terminated. When she told him her story, he told her she probably could not win a sexual harassment case in court: she had hit her boss, and she wasn't sure that witnesses would corroborate her story. He did, however, suggest that she might be able to get her job back if they argued that she hit her boss because she was suffering from PMS.

This report, a composite of real experiences encountered by one of the authors in cases brought to court, represents a worst case scenario of the unfolding of a sexual harassment case and shows how sexual harassment can confront a victim with perceptions that are often invalidated by those around her. The more she seeks validation for her view, the more hostile and rejecting her world becomes, until she feels she is failing in her most important life roles. How different this scenario would be if Jane worked in an organization that was sensitive to sexual harassment, valued its female employees, had a sexual harassment policy and procedures, and enforced them. How different too the scenario might be if Jane's boyfriend and therapist offered constructive suggestions for altering the situation rather than blaming her.

This article focuses on some consequences of sexual harassment of women (see article by Vaux, this issue, for another perspective.) How does sexual harassment affect a female victim and the organization for which she works? How does she attempt to cope with harassment when she is confronted with it? These topics are interconnected because the responses of victims will be influenced by the amount of support and understanding received from significant others and employers. Likewise, the extent of emotional, physical, and psychological damage a woman experiences from harassment also depends on the responsiveness of other people and the organization for which she works.

Sexual harassment has been conceptualized as part of a spectrum of gender-based abuses that all involve exploitation and physical or sexualized violence (Hamilton, Alagna, King, & Lloyd, 1987; Russell, 1984), and the sexual victimization literature has served as a model for responses to harassment (Koss, 1990; Quina & Carlson, 1989). The parallels between sexual harassment and childhood sexual abuse, particularly incest, are many (Hamilton et al., 1987; Salisbury, Ginorio, Remick, & Stringer, 1986). Like the victim of incest, the sexually harassed woman is economically if not emotionally dependent on the aggressor. The abuse is humiliating so there is motivation to keep it a secret. It often continues for a long time and is experienced as an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust. Finally, retraumatization by the legal system is likely if redress from responsible authorities is sought. Sexual harassment differs from other forms of sexual victimization primarily in its direct impact on economic status and career well-being, which are only affected indirectly by other forms of victimization (Salisbury et al., 1986).

Empirical documentation of the psychological impact of harassment is difficult to obtain because the symptomatology is multiply determined. In addition to the impact of the sexual harassment itself, the aftereffects are influenced by disappointment in the way others react; the stress of harassment-induced life changes such as moves, loss of income, and disrupted work history; the triggering of unresolved issues from previous victimizations sustained by the woman; and finally, the trauma of litigation. Measuring the impact of harassment involves outcomes within three domains, which include somatic health, psychological health, and work variables including attendance, morale, performance, and impact on career track. In short, there is no single impact of sexual harassment. Instead, there are many different impacts depending on the domain examined and point in the process where the assessments are made.

It is unfortunate that there is a catch-22 quality inherent in research on the psychological and somatic reactions to sexual harassment. To show that harassment is harmful to the victim requires the demonstration that it has caused physical and emotional distress. Yet, evidence of breakdown in the victim undermines her credibility and competence as a person and

as an employee (Gutek, forthcoming; Hamilton, & Dolkart, 1991; Jensvold, 1991). Clinicians who evaluate victims of sexual harassment need to be aware that they are evaluating someone undergoing multiple abnormal stressors (Brown, 1991). They must also be mindful of the ways in mental health practitioners become tools of the harasser or institution including forced psychotherapy and illegal forced fitness-for-duty examinations (Jensvold, 1991).

EFFECTS ON THE HARASSED WOMAN

Carefully controlled studies of effects of harassment have not been done. Information about impacts comes primarily from self-reported effects included in prevalence studies, convenience samples, specialized populations such as victims who have filed complaints or visited a counseling center, and anecdotal accounts of harassment. Thus, a review of outcomes yields a list of possible effects but does not allow conclusions about their prevalence or the conditions under which any particular effect will occur.

Work Outcomes

Nearly 1 in 10 women reported that they left their jobs as a result of sexual harassment in the original U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1981) study and in three separate studies of employed people in Los Angeles (Gutek, Nakamura, Gahart, Handschumacher, & Russell, 1980; Gutek, 1985). During a recent 2-year period, over 36,0000 federal employees quit their jobs, were transferred or reassigned, or were fired because of sexual harassment (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1987). Among 88 cases filed with the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, almost half had been fired and another quarter had quit out of fear or frustration (Coles, 1986). Some of the women who are fired or quit their jobs are unable to find or unwilling to take another job in the same field or occupation. Thus, sexual harassment can derail a career or lead or force a woman into an occupation which pays less well and/or offers fewer opportunities for advancement.

Among other negative work-related outcomes that have been reported is deterioration of interpersonal relationships at work (Bandy, 1989; Culbertson, Rosenfeld, Booth-Kewley, & Magnusson, 1992; DiTomaso, 1989; Gutek, 1985). Harassment can constrain the potential for forming friendships or work alliances with male co-workers (Schneider, 1982). As a result of harassment university students report that they dropped courses and changed majors, academic departments and programs, and career intentions (Adams, Kottke, & Padgitt, 1983; Benson & Thomson, 1982; Fitzgerald, Schullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold, Ormerod, & Weitzman, 1990; Lott, Reilly, & Howard, 1982). Lowered self-esteem and decreased feelings of competence may follow the realization that

rewards may have been based on sexual attraction rather than ability (McCormack, 1985).

Sexual harassment also affects women's satisfaction with the job and commitment to the organization (Culbertson et al., 1992). Among women who were harassed in Los Angeles county, 38% said the harassment affected the way they thought about their jobs (Gutek, 1985). O'Farrell and Harlan (1982) reported that harassment had a strong negative impact on a woman's satisfaction with co-workers and supervisors in their study of women in blue collar jobs. It was less strongly related to satisfaction with promotions and satisfaction with work content. Negative affect such as anger or disgust at being harassed has been associated with loss of motivation, distraction, and dreading work (Jensen & Gutek, 1982). General hostility toward women which seems especially prevalent in some blue collar jobs is often expressed in a sexually harassing manner (Caruthers & Crull, 1984; DiTomaso, 1989; Wolshok, 1981).

The impact of sexual harassment on women's job performance is less clear. According to Martin (1978; 1980), the exclusion of policewomen from informal social interaction networks which results from sexual harassment denies them the feedback that is necessary for successful job performance. But Gruber and Bjorn (1982) found that women autoworkers reported that sexual harassment had relatively little effect on their work behavior or sense of competence. Sexual harassment may not affect the diligence or effort a woman puts into her work, but lack of access to information and support from others in the work environment may well have an indirect effect on her work performance (see DiTomaso, 1989; Collinson & Collinson, 1989).

Sexual harassment and sex discrimination appear to go together. Women who report a lot of sexual harassment in their organization also tend to believe the organization is discriminatory in its treatment of women (DiTomaso, 1989; Ragins & Scandura, 1992). A study in Finland (Högbacka, Kandolin, Haavio-Mannila, & Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1987) also showed that women who had encountered sexual harassment in their work group were more likely than other women to experience sex discrimination. Harassment and discrimination were not related for men.

Psychological and Somatic Outcomes

Beyond work outcomes, sexual harassment has been associated with a variety of negative effects on the victim. For example, Gruber and Bjorn (1982) found that in their sample of 138 women in mostly unskilled jobs in the auto industry, sexual harassment negatively affected self-esteem and life satisfaction. It was unrelated to family/home satisfaction, political efficacy, or personal control. Benson and Thomson (1982) found that sexual harassment was associated with a low sense of self-confidence, and

Gutek (1985) found that sexual harassment sometimes affected the woman's relationship with other men.

Depending on the severity of the abuse, between 21 and 82% of women indicated that their emotional or physical condition worsened as a result of harassment (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981). In a sample of 92 women who had requested assistance for sexual harassment, virtually all reported debilitating stress reactions affecting work performance and attitudes, psychological health, and physical health (Crull, 1982). The physical symptoms frequently reported by victims include gastrointestinal disturbances, jaw tightness and teeth grinding, nervousness, binge-eating, headaches, inability to sleep, tiredness, nausea, loss of appetite, weight loss, and crying spells (Crull, 1982; Gutek, 1985; Lindsey, 1977; Loy & Stewart, 1984; Safran, 1976; Salisbury et al., 1986). Among the emotional reactions reported by victims of sexual harassment were anger, fear, depression, anxiety, irritability, loss of self-esteem, feelings of humiliation and alienation, and a sense of helplessness and vulnerability (Gutek, 1985; Safran, 1976; Silverman, 1976–77; Tong, 1984; Working Women's Institute, 1978).

Many writers have speculated that gender-based abuse is related to the high rates of depression among women compared to men (Hamilton et al., 1987; McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo, 1990). More recently similarities have been noted between the symptoms seen in the aftermath of sexual harassment and the symptoms characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as defined in the American Psychiatric Association's (1987) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (Hamilton & Dolkart, 1991; Jensvold, 1991; Koss, 1990). The PTSD diagnosis conceptualizes the symptoms seen in the aftermath of severe stressors as normal responses to abnormal conditions (APA, 1987). Considerable evidence suggests that PTSD can and does develop in persons with no history of psychopathology prior to the stressor.

Four criteria are required to qualify for the PTSD diagnosis: exposure to a stressor outside the realm of normal human experience, re-experiencing of the trauma, heightened arousal, and avoidance of people and interests that remind the victim of the trauma. The hallmark of PTSD is intrusive re-experiencing of the trauma, which may not occur until months or years following the trauma when recollections are triggered by some actual or symbolic reminder of the trauma. Recollections are in the form of daytime memories or nightmares and are accompanied by intense psychological distress. One victim of sexual harassment described her re-experiences as follows, "Memories of my intimate experiences with him continued to plague me. At unexpected moments, particularly when I was alone in my car, I would suddenly feel him there with me. His fingertips would draw my face toward his, and I would again feel his kiss, catching me unaware and sending a jolt of anxiety through my body" (Anonymous,

1991, p. 506). As this excerpt illustrates, re-experiencing is more than a visual phenomenon; physical reactions associated with the trauma re-occur as well. To reduce the distress of re-experiencing, trauma victims often go to great lengths to avoid reminders of the trauma.

A recent survey of 3020 women provides prevalence data for sexual harassment in a nationally representative sample of women of whom 2720 had been employed at some point in their lives (Kilpatrick, June 30, 1992). Data were collected by a random-digit-dial telephone survey. Measurement included standard questions to assess both major depression and PTSD as defined by the DSM-III-R. The findings are provocative and are presented here to apprise readers of the most recent research. However, the study has not yet been published and the material that follows is taken from brief oral testimony before congress that precluded examination of methodology and data analysis (Kilpatrick, June 30, 1992) and a conference presentation (Saunders, October 23, 1992).

Women suffering from PTSD and depression were more likely to have been sexually harassed than women who have never experienced PTSD or depression, suggesting that sexual harassment may contribute to depression and PTSD. Women who were diagnosed as having PTSD or depression reported more of each of seven types of harassment than did employed women in general. For example, 37% of women suffering from PTSD and 31% of women currently suffering from depression reported that they had been told sex stories by a supervisor, compared to 17% of the whole sample of employed women; 16 and 14% of women suffering from PTSD and depression respectively, compared to 7% of women in general, said they were touched sexually by a supervisor; and 17 and 15% of PTSD and depressed women, respectively, compared to 6% of employed women in general, reported that they were kissed or fondled by a supervisor.

Among women who reported that they felt sexually harassed, women suffering from PTSD or depression appeared to have more negative beliefs about the effects of sexual harassment than other women who reported that they felt sexually harassed. For example, among the 488 women in the survey who felt sexually harassed, 57% of women in general, but 62% of women suffering from PTSD and 65% of women suffering depression thought their career would be hurt if they complained about the harassment. In addition, although 35% of the harassed women said the harassment interfered with their job, 43% of women with PTSD and 45% of depressed women said that sexual harassment interferes with their job. In general, the harassed women suffering from PTSD and depression were as likely as women in general to tell their boss to stop the offensive behavior, 74% of women in general, and 77 and 69% of women diagnosed as having PTSD and depression, respectively, said they told their bosses to stop the offensive behavior. Women suffering from PTSD were less

likely, however, than other harassed women to file a formal complaint: 6% of women with PTSD, 13% of depressed women, and 12% of employed women who were harassed filed a formal complaint about the harassment.

More definitive consideration of these results must await publication of a comprehensive report of the project. If the initial results hold, they suggest researchers might pay more attention to the role of sexual harassment in a variety of psychological and somatic problems encountered by women. Sexual harassment might well contribute to both PTSD and depression in women.

EFFECTS ON THE ORGANIZATION

Although relatively little research has addressed the effects of harassment on women victims, even less has focused on the effects on the organization. In general, the scant literature available is highly speculative and anecdotal. According to one form of logic, sexual harassment has no effects on the organization, at least no negative effects. If it were counterproductive or hurt the organization's effectiveness, it would have been sanctioned a long time ago. One perspective that views sexual harassment as relatively benign is the natural/biological view in which sexual harassment is seen as an expression of natural, biological attraction between men and women (Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982). In fact, many managers and workers think the seriousness and frequency of sexual harassment is overrated. For example, among readers of *Harvard Business Review* responding to a questionnaire about sexual harassment (Collins and Blodgett, 1981), two-thirds of the men and about half of the women agreed or partly agreed with the statement: "The amount of sexual harassment at work is greatly exaggerated." In a systematic sample of employed people in Los Angeles county, less than 5% of either sex said sexual harassment was a major problem at their workplace (Gutek, 1985). Other studies yield much higher figures. A recent study involving a stratified random sample of Navy enlisted personnel and officers found that over 60% of women and over 30% of men said sexual harassment is a problem in the Navy (Culbertson et al., 1992). Among a random sample of adults in Connecticut, 56% of men and 72% of women indicated that sexual harassment was either a "serious" or "very serious" problem (Loy & Stewart, 1984).

Rather than being benign, sexual harassment has no doubt had negative effects on organizations all along, but these effects were invisible because sexual harassment itself was invisible, unnamed, and unreported. In its assessment of the magnitude of sexual harassment in the Federal workforce, the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1981) sought to assign a dollar figure to sexual harassment, estimating the cost of absenteeism, medical costs, and turnover attributable to harassment. Since, as noted

above, about 10% of women have quit a job because of sexual harassment, turnover costs alone are substantial. The direct costs in absenteeism, medical expenses and indirect costs in the form of loss of motivation, distraction at work, and loss of commitment to the organization are also likely to be substantial, given the magnitude of harassment. Unfortunately, solid research on these effects is lacking.

Today, most large corporations do have sexual harassment policies and procedures for dealing with allegations of harassment. According to a recent report (Bureau of National Affairs, 1987), 97% of the companies in their study had sexual harassment policies, but the majority of these policies were established well after 1980, the year the EEOC published guidelines on sexual harassment. Indeed when the *Harvard Business Review* conducted its survey in 1981 (Collins & Blodgett, 1981), only 29% of respondents said they worked in companies where top executives had issued statements to employees disapproving of sexual conduct. Even where policies are in place today, the procedures which support the policies leave much to be desired, e.g., they advise victims to seek help from a supervisor when the supervisor is the harasser in up to half of incidents of harassment (Gutek, 1985). Research on the effectiveness of various types of procedures for handling sexual harassment is yet to be conducted (but see Rowe, 1981).

Another area where there is very little evidence is in the response of organizations to charges of harassment. The temptation to ignore the complaint or put it off until later is great (Gutek, 1985; Biaggio, Watts, & Brownell, 1990). Many managers and administrators are uncomfortable dealing with sensitive issues like harassment, and even well-meaning ones may handle the situation badly. Finally, finding instances of sexual harassment in the organization is disconcerting and embarrassing. "It must be recognized that harassment charges are embarrassing to institutions, and administrators may wish to suppress reports even though such suppression potentially places institutions in greater legal jeopardy than a direct response to complaints" (Biaggio et al., 1990, p. 216).

Workers who allege harassment are whistleblowers (Miceli & Near, 1988; Near & Miceli, 1987) and, as the carrier of bad news, may be blamed for "causing trouble." The effects on any workplace caught in the throes of an investigation into an allegation of sexual harassment or divided by a court case of harassment may be more visible to management than the effects of harassment itself. This is especially likely if harassment victims do not report the harassment. While there are anecdotal reports of managers' resentment at having to deal with sexual harassment allegations and male employees' fears that they will be unjustly accused, the topic has not been addressed in research.

VICTIMS' RESPONSES TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

When a sample of employees is surveyed about what they would do if they were harassed, most say they would tell the person to stop (Dunwoody-Miller & Gutek, 1985). In a Finnish study, 53% of both sexes said they would "have a talk" with the harasser (Högbacka et al., 1987). In addition, many men and women believe women should be able to handle sexual harassment themselves (Benson & Thomson, 1982; Gutek, 1985, chapt. 4; Sheppard, 1988; Collins and Blodgett, 1981). In a random sample survey of Los Angeles county workers, 79% of the women who had received at least one sexual overture from a man at work reported that they were confident they could handle future overtures (Gutek, 1985). Thus, the majority of people apparently believe that sexual harassment is something that can and should be handled individually, i.e., by the person who is harassed.

A review of the literature on responses to harassment suggests that they fit into a two-by-two table: One axis consists of individual attempts to cope with harassment and coping responses involving another party such as a supervisor, therapist, physician, spouse, co-worker, or an outside agency or institution, e.g., the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a law firm, or a state agency. The second axis consists of indirect (e.g., ignoring, avoiding, evading) versus direct (e.g., confronting) responses. As will be noted below, individual, indirect coping responses (e.g., ignore the incident, avoid the perpetrator) are more common than responses that fit into the other three quadrants.

Individual Responses to Harassment

Real victims do not usually tell the harasser to stop. Their initial attempts to manage the initiator are rarely direct; typically, harassers are more powerful, physically and organizationally, than the victims, and sometimes the perpetrator's intentions are unclear. The first or the first several harassing events are often ignored (Benson & Thomson, 1982; Dunwoody-Miller and Gutek, 1985; McKinnon, 1979; Lindsey, 1977; Loy & Stewart, 1984). In their study of women automobile assembly workers, Gruber and Bjorn (1982) found that 23% of women said they ignored the harassment and 22% responded "mildly" (by telling the man, "I've heard all that before," or "I'm not your type." [p. 286]). A woman may be especially likely to ignore the behavior or respond mildly if she can ascribe the man's behavior to some extenuating circumstance (e.g., "It had to do with the pair of pants I was wearing. He thought they were nice." [Gutek, 1985, p. 79] "At the time he had been feeling lonely. He had left his wife." [Gutek, 1985, p. 86]). She may also interpret or reinterpret the situation so that the incident is not defined as sexual harassment (Rabinowitz, 1990). Interpreting the situation as "horseplay" or "laughing

it off" is common (e.g., Gutek, 1985; Ragins & Scandura, 1992). "There were a lot of men where I worked. A lot of horseplaying." "It was not really serious. He is a very young man and I think he was just joking or playing around." (Gutek, 1985, p. 83). Gruber and Bjorn (1982) also found that making light of the harassment was a fairly common response (reported by 10% of the women autoworkers they studied.)

Sometimes the woman tries to avoid the man, an indirect strategy reported by 51% of women officers and 68% of enlisted women in a recent U.S. Navy study (Culbertson et al., 1992; see also Loy & Stewart, 1984, Table 3). Benson and Thomson (1982) found that female students try to avoid taking classes from male professors known to harass students. Given the differential in power (Zalk, 1990), it certainly seems easier for students to avoid a potential harasser than to confront him. The ultimate step in avoiding the harasser is to quit the job, a common response of women who confront serious harassment (Loy & Stewart, 1984).

Direct strategies (confronting the harasser) are less often used but are reported to be effective. Rowe (1981), for example, found the following direct response to be quite effective: Write a letter to the harasser, describing explicitly what is objectionable and outline a proper working relationship. Hand deliver the letter to the harasser and wait while he reads it. A letter has several advantages over a verbal request that the harassment cease. A written response shows that the victim felt strongly enough about the matter to write the letter, and allows the woman to deliberate in choice of words. Perhaps most importantly, the letter serves as a record that the victim confronted the perpetrator, copies of which can be sent to various administrators in the organization and can be shown in a court of law, should the harassment continue or should the perpetrator retaliate.

Other forms of direct response include hitting or insulting the harasser, tactics that are not commonly tried. In their study of automobile workers, Gruber and Bjorn (1982) found that 15% of women auto workers verbally "attacked" the harasser and 7% physically attacked or stopped the harasser.

Coping Responses Involving Others

Individual responses to harassment are considerably more common than responses involving a third party or another institution, perhaps because most of the options involving other people are also direct (i.e., confrontational). When they could not avoid the harasser, Benson and Thomson (1982) found that students reported the following kind of indirect strategy involving others: bringing a friend along whenever they were forced to interact with the harasser.

Direct responses involving others are used by a minority of women victims and the more formal forms of protest (filing a grievance or lawsuit)

are less common than simply reporting the harassment to someone in authority (Grauerholz, 1989). In a survey of workers in Finland, only 20% of women (and 5% of men) said they would report harassment to a supervisor if they were harassed. In the random sample survey of workers in Los Angeles, 18% of women who were harassed actually did report the harassment to someone in authority (Gutek, 1985). Comparable figures for a random sample of Navy personnel were 24% for enlisted women and 12% for women officers (Culbertson, et al., 1992). Gruber and Bjorn (1982) found that 7% of the harassed automobile workers they studied reported the matter to someone in authority (See also Loy & Stewart, 1984, Table 3).

Only 5% of women victims responding to the 1987 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board study either filed a formal complaint or requested an investigation. In the 1989 Navy study, among those women who were harassed, 12% of enlisted women and 5% of female officers filed a grievance. The Women's Legal Defense Fund (1991) concluded that in the civilian work force between 1 and 7% of women who are harassed file a formal complaint or seek legal help. Available evidence suggests that less than half are decided in favor of the woman alleging harassment (Terpstra & Baker, 1988; 1992). According to the first U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board study of the federal workforce (1981), only 2% of the people harassed took official action; half that number won their cases. The court cases discussed in the media constitute a very small percentage of cases of sexual harassment.

In general, harassment victims do not make official complaints either to their organization or to another agency for several reasons: they feel that making a complaint will not accomplish anything, they are concerned about retaliation for complaining (Culbertson et al., 1992; Gutek, 1985), and often they do not want to hurt the harasser and they fear that complaining might negatively affect his job and/or family (Gutek, 1985). Women who blame themselves for the harassment are especially concerned about protecting the "the person who bothered" her (Jensen & Gutek, 1982). Some women also report that they were too embarrassed or afraid to report the harassment (Culbertson et al., 1992). In the U.S. Navy study, the most common negative reaction reported by women who did complain about harassment was "I was humiliated in front of others" (reported by 33% of enlisted women and 34% of officers).

The Effectiveness of Different Coping Strategies

The available research suggests that the indirect strategies of coping with harassment by reinterpreting, ignoring, and avoiding are very common, but not particularly effective. Quitting a job or leaving school may be effective in stopping the immediate harassment of that person, but it has other consequences for the person who leaves, and it is unlikely to

stop the harasser from harassing other women (Rabinowitz, 1990). If they are not particularly effective, why then are the indirect responses so commonly tried? Gruber and Bjorn (1982) suggested three reasons why individual, indirect methods may be so common. First, indirect methods such as reinterpreting the situation or avoiding the harasser may allow a woman to "manage" the situation without disrupting the work setting or her relationship with other people at work (Benson & Thomson, 1982; Collins & Blodgett, 1981; Gutek, 1985; Sheppard, 1989).

Second, women may perceive the direct methods as riskier and less certain in their outcomes than the indirect methods. Avoiding the perpetrator may seem safer than confronting him or filing a complaint against him. Although there is some evidence that fear of retaliation is a realistic fear (Coles, 1986), there is no evidence that direct methods of coping with harassment are necessarily riskier than indirect methods, particularly if riskiness is equated with effectiveness of stopping the harassment. While they appear to be more effective in stopping the harassment than indirect methods of coping with sexual harassment, it is possible to make a case that direct attempts at dealing with harassment may be problematic for women as a group. By forcing the perpetrator and/or the organization to deal with the issue, the woman making the complaint may be viewed as disrupting the workplace and she may well engender hostile reactions (DiTomaso, 1989; Biaggio, et al., 1990). Unfortunately, the topic of riskiness of various types of responses to harassment has not been studied.

Third, Gruber and Bjorn (1982) suggested that some harassment is ambiguous because it combines a degree of sexual interest with offensive behavior. "This ambiguity may reduce a woman's ability to respond in an assertive or direct manner." (p. 276; see also Gutek, 1985, chap. 4). Along similar lines, in a scenario study, Williams and Cyr (1992) found that male (but not female) students rated the perpetrator's behavior as less harassing if the women target had made a prior commitment to a friendly relationship with the harasser.

Contingencies in Response to Harassment

Although the individual, indirect responses to sexual harassment are common, it makes sense to ask whether some women or some situations encourage women to respond directly or to involve other people or institutions. For example, a victim of harassment might more readily employ a direct response to harassment if she has a supportive supervisor and works in an organization having a sexual harassment counselor or prominently displayed posters forbidding sexual harassment. Unfortunately, few of the circumstances under which women victims use different kinds of coping responses are known and data suggest only one tentative conclusion. Women who were more severely harassed tended to respond in a more assertive and direct manner than those who were not severely

harassed (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Loy & Stewart, 1984). Victims are more likely to ignore the harassment, joke about it, or evade the harasser when the harassment is mild. A recent scenario study showed that student respondents thought the victim would be more likely to report the incident if she had not previously been friendly toward the perpetrator (Williams & Cyr, 1992), but, as noted above, existing research of inexperienced raters shows that their reactions are not always consistent with the behaviors of real victims.

Characteristics of the woman victim might also affect how she responds to harassment. Gruber and Bjorn (1986) tested three hypotheses about coping with sexual harassment. They found support for the hypothesis that women with less organizational power would respond less actively and directly than women with some organizational power. (They defined power as having high job skills, having high job status, and/or not being at a lower organizational level than the harasser). They also found some support for a second hypothesis, namely that women with fewer personal resources (i.e., those having low self-esteem, low personal control, strong sense of being trapped in their job) would respond in an indirect manner more often than women with more personal resources. Similar findings were reported by Jensen and Gutek (1982) who found that women who tended to exhibit behavioral self-blame (i.e., felt their own behavior contributed to the harassment) were less likely than other women victims to discuss the harassment with others or report it to others. They also found that women who had traditional sex-role attitudes were less likely than other women to report the harassment to someone. Finally, Gruber and Bjorn (1986) found no support for their third hypothesis that black women, representing people who have low "sociocultural power," would respond less assertively than white women (see also Culbertson et al., 1992, for consistent findings.)

It should be noted that both Gruber and Bjorn's (1986) and Jensen and Gutek's (1982) studies were cross-sectional and thus, it is not possible to draw definitive causal relationships from the data. Although it is appealing to assume that failing to report the harassment led to lower self-esteem and/or behavioral self-blame, it is also possible that low self-esteem and/or self-blame prevented victims from directly dealing with the harassment in some manner.

Stages of Response to Harassment

Another approach to the study of responses to harassment, illustrated by the scenario described at the beginning of the paper, is a stage model. Most harassment is not a one-time occurrence, but unfolds over time. How a woman responds probably depends on the progression of the harassment. Has she already tried ignoring, evading, or joking? Is the harassment continuing, escalating, becoming more hostile or threatening?

The progressive reactions to harassment observed among women in psychotherapy document a sequence of changes in the victim's central beliefs about herself, her co-workers, and the work world (Salisbury et al., 1986). Four stages of response can be identified.

(1) Confusion/Self-Blame. The sexual harassment was a series of events. After each incident, the victim believed that the harassment was going to level off or eventually stop. When the harasser's behavior escalated, which it did in virtually all of the cases studied, the victim felt out of control and helpless.

(2) Fear/Anxiety. Subsequent to the harasser's continuing behavior, the victim felt trapped and became "paranoid." She feared potential retaliation at work, the future of her career, and potential financial ruin. Outside of work, she feared being called on the phone in the early morning, having her home watched, or being followed in a car. Concentration, motivation, work performance, and attendance were adversely affected and self-esteem declined.

(3) Depression/Anger. Once the woman recognized that she was a legitimate victim who was not to blame for her harassment, anxiety often shifted to anger. Often this shift occurred when she decided to leave her job or was fired. This anger about being treated unfairly was a prime motive to file charges. While filing charges may have represented a positive step by the victim to take control of her destiny, it often led to a decided deterioration in the work situation.

(4) Disillusionment. The organizational response to sexual harassment was often hurtful and disappointing. By speaking up, the women encountered a whole new set of institutional abuses. Often, the woman eventually realized that she had been naive about getting help in the system. She then questioned her expectations about fairness, loyalty, and justice. These ingenuous beliefs gradually become replaced by the insight that justice doesn't always prevail.

DISCUSSION

This review on the clinical and empirical literature on the outcomes of sexual harassment shows that the topic has received very little attention, especially in comparison to the abundance of research that has been devoted to the definition of harassment and to the frequency of its occurrence (Gutek & Dunwoody, 1988). What is available tends to be anecdotal, case studies, or nonrepresentative self-reports. Relatively little has made its way into journals but has been confined to conference presentations, books, and book chapters. Furthermore, the body of studies fails to do justice to the complexity of the outcome questions. Thus the literature allows us to list categories of outcomes, but does not allow us to draw conclusions about the frequency of different outcomes or the conditions leading to the various outcomes. The review suggests that

sexual harassment is hardly benign—either for the individual or the organization. It raises three questions: why is there so little research, what kind of research is needed, and what are the pros and cons of researching outcomes?

Why so Little Research on Outcomes and Reactions?

In general, this review reveals an appalling lack of empirical data on outcomes, especially in comparison to research on other forms of gender-based sexual exploitation. There are several possible explanations for the lack of data on the impact of harassment. The primary one is that the topic is embraced by none of the major funding agencies. It is illegal but is not viewed as a serious crime by justice authorities, and it is a victimization but viewed as a minor one in terms of psychological adjustment by mental health agencies. As a consequence, much more is known about the impacts of rape or child sexual abuse than is known about sexual harassment. Almost all the research on sexual harassment has been done without funding and it suffers for it. Much of the research is opportunistic, uses students, and focuses on issues easy to study without funding (e.g., how students respond to various sexual harassment scenarios.) The data reviewed here suggest that sexual harassment may be a far more significant contributor to women's distress than has been acknowledged; funds for in-depth, controlled studies should be made available.

What Kinds of Research Are Needed?

The widespread prevalence of sexual harassment demands that future research include studies in which victims are followed prospectively in time from the point of victimization and administered standardized measurements across the three domains of outcome: psychological distress, somatic effects, and work-related changes. Also important are the development of measures of responses to harassment, as exemplified by recent work by Fitzgerald and Brock (1992) and studies of the variables that mediate or moderate the impact of harassment. These should include *person variables* (e.g., age, demographic characteristics, pre-existing personality functioning, perception of the meaning of the trauma, and qualities assigned to the self and others post-harassment), *event variables* (e.g., severity, duration, frequency of abuse, degree of personal violation, and whether victimization was shared with others or suffered alone), *organization variables* (e.g., policies in place, response to the harassment, quality and availability of resources to assist victims, and degree of physical and emotional safety ensured post-trauma), and *environment variables* (e.g., immediate response of significant others, quality and continuity of social support, and community and company attitudes and values about harassment, corporate climate).

Samples of women from general populations (e.g., college students,

employed women) as well as specific populations (e.g., victims who have filed law suits, victims who have sought help from counseling centers) should be followed over time to gain a better understanding of the development of work outcomes as well as somatic and psychological outcomes. The inclusion of the mediating and moderator variables discussed above will elucidate the conditions under which sexual harassment leads to the various outcomes that have been identified in this review. In doing so, the research may suggest strategies for minimizing negative outcomes for victims of harassment. While minimizing negative outcomes is less desirable than eliminating sexual harassment altogether, it helps.

Finally, an understanding of the true costs of sexual harassment borne by organizations and their employees, as well as the more visible costs of dealing with charges of harassment, investigations, and lawsuits, may encourage organizations to provide a more supportive environment for female employees who encounter harassment.

The Pros and Cons of Focusing on Outcomes

A focus on outcomes suggests a linear sequence in which some stimulus (sexual harassment in this case) necessarily leads to one or more outcomes. Undoubtedly there are women who are sexually harassed by a legal or standardly accepted lay definition of harassment but who may experience few or none of the outcomes discussed in this chapter. Does the failure to exhibit outcomes negate the person's experience of harassment, i.e., will the presence of outcomes be taken as a necessary condition for the existence of harassment? Will a woman be able to successfully allege harassment if she keeps her job, receives a positive performance evaluation, or gets a raise? Will she be able to successfully charge harassment if she does not need a therapist, has no physical symptoms, and sleeps and eats well? Will it be necessary to show adverse impacts including somatic and psychological effects in order to have one's charge of harassment taken seriously? In the formal complaint process, a reliance on the existence of negative outcomes as proof of the allegation of harassment has contributed to the retraumatization of harassment victims. Women who allege harassment may be required by their own attorneys or counselors in their companies to undergo fitness-for-duty examinations or psychotherapy (Jensvold, 1991). One problem with a reliance on negative effects as an indicator of harassment is that they contribute to a common stereotype of woman, namely, the "sick woman" syndrome. Sexual harassment made her sick.

Unfortunately, the charge that the woman has been psychically or physically damaged by the harassment leaves open an alternate interpretation of her "sickness," namely that she has always been emotionally or physically fragile or damaged. Thus, by coming forth and complaining about harassment or filing a sexual harassment lawsuit, a woman runs the risk

of being portrayed either as a person made sick by harassment or worse, a person who has always had physical and/or psychological problems (Gutek, forthcoming-a). Prospective studies and archival research may be possible in settings such as the military to allow comparison of pre-and post-trauma psychological status and health care utilization. Sustained research on the conditions under which any particular effect occurs should provide valuable information in court cases and alleviate the double bind now faced by many women who take their cases to court.

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